LISTENING INTO THE DISTANCE

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For my teachers.
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Abstract

While it is easy to find music meaningful, this rather commonplace experience is difficult to think about philosophically and our actual experience of music seems counter to many explanations. This dissertation is guided by the perennial question of how music, as a non-semantic and non-representational art, is meaningful. At once, music feels meaningful yet lacks objectifiable meaning. I approach the liminal, yet striking case of musical meaning through challenging certain assumptions about sense and the distance between sensing as perception and sense as meaning. I rely on the resources of Chinese philosophy, a deeply aesthetic tradition that never adopted the assumptions in question, in particular that of an essential gap between body and world. Drawing on ideas about music and the senses in Chinese philosophy, as well as contemporary approaches to perception, I examine three central features of listening in depth: intimacy, skill, and receptivity. These features of listening are brought together with an account of musical spacetime, in order to argue that listening to music is a unified activity of direct, meaningful sensing. From this conclusion, the possibility that listening to music is a kind of thinking is explored, along with the distinct implication that music is a philosophical practice. Finally, while the influence of music on classical Chinese thought has been acknowledged, there is almost no literature that examines Chinese philosophy of music in depth. By attending to the specifically philosophical importance of music, novel understandings of the tradition are revealed, as is the eminence of aesthetics in Chinese philosophy.
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INTRODUCTION

*The Philosophical Crux*

How can music, an art without content that seems only to convey itself, be so meaningful? The traditional framing of the question of how music is meaningful has tended to assume an essential separation of worlds, between sense as sensation, as perception, and as meaning, thus leading to the puzzle: how can an array of non-linguistic sounds be meaningful? But these assumptions of discontinuity need not be accepted as the inevitable starting points for thinking about music, or for that matter, meaning. In asking the question “How is music meaningful?” I am not asking, “*What is musical meaning?*” The question of music as meaningful (not necessarily full of meaning) is given priority instead of the search for some entity called meaning in music because I wish to avoid the trap of objectifying meaning and the seductive but senseless tendency to inquire into music from within the trap. In refusing to find a separate, non-embodied, abstract, and purely conceptual definition of meaning that functions in music, I seek to avoid breaking meaningfulness into pieces such as reference, sense, or metaphor that may be grasped as “the meaning.” Accordingly, I will not be working with a metaphysics of discontinuity or an object-theory of meaning and will instead treat the activity of music and its meaningfulness as primary.

In my investigation of music, meaning will be understood as meaningfulness, or experiencing meaningfully (which I will describe as “listening”). Music itself inspires this approach. The difficulties encountered in explaining how music is meaningful may indicate that taking language to be the primary model of meaning is inappropriate to music; for example, in the conflict between the metaphysics of linguistic meaning and the living experience of music. My guiding question—how is music meaningful?—has several aspects. First, assuming that we do experience music meaningfully,
is it possible to describe how this happens? Is music itself (independent of experience) meaningful? Does meaningfulness originate in the body of the composer, musician, or audience? Or does it happen in the intersubjective space between these three (and of course, with newer technologies of reproduction and controlled listening, in the space-time of reproductions?). Second, if it is the case that music is meaningful without discursive interpretation, what does this tell us about the supposed distances between the senses, perception, and meaning?

It is not just difficult sentences or obscure utterances that we work to get the meaning of. We also get or fail to get the meaning of a variety of communicative gestures: a furrow, a sigh, a smell of perfume, a pat on the arm, the stroke of a calligraphic brush, or the plucking of a guqin. In each case, we cannot account for the sound, sight, smell, and touch becoming meaningful according to “the meaning” as a some thing that was grasped. The experience of understanding in each case is a matter of sensing, as both perceiving and meaningfulness, in an activity of listening.

In order to explain the unified activity of listening to music as meaningful, three central features of listening are identified and given an account:

1. Intimacy: sensing that is available in and immediately to the sensor, and that is understood intransitively.

2. Skill: sensing that occurs via the skilled, embodied activity of the sensor, i.e., the sensor is not a passive spectator but a more or less adept participant.

3. Receptivity: waiting for meaning in a way that is both anticipatory and “empty,” i.e., the sensor engages in a “fasting” of the self, an ethico-epistemological quieting that allows for accurate sensing.

While these features may seem incompatible, I hope to show that the apparent discordance rests on an account of sensing that is challenged by the example of music. There is a bias towards vision in philosophy of perception that neglects the unique phenomena of hearing and sound, and I wish to indicate some further areas of research in this area, including extending the idea of “listening” to all
sensing and even to thinking. Listening is therefore not limited to the audience, but is a skilled activity also involving the composers, musicians, and all who make music.

Through an understanding of sensing as it occurs in music, and as this is relevant to other aesthetic experiences, my project is loyal to the originally rich meaning of “aesthetic,” from the Greek *aisthetikós* as “sense perception, sensitive, and perceptive” and from the Chinese *ganjüexue* 感覺學, a word for aesthetics meaning the study of “feeling, perception, and sensation.” In using listening rather than vision to address the distance between sensing as perceiving and sense as meaning, this work is also a shift from seeing as a metaphor for philosophical wisdom to listening. But this is not a simple switch of terms; rather the move is toward understanding how all senses listen and to considering thinking as analogous to that primary form of listening. The essential receptivity of listening provides an openness through which the external and “beyond” comes within as what was distant is made near. Listening as thinking creates a *musical* nearness and is not the collapse of distance into sameness that problematizes attempts to encounter what is Other. Consequently, the philosophical practice of listening raises the question of whether aesthetics may succeed in matters of cross-cultural philosophy where traditional, more metaphysical approaches have failed.
Preface

Chinese philosophers were not prone to a deep mistrust of the senses, or to a suspicion that they necessarily lead away from the purity of ideas. To be sure, they were concerned with the dangers of sensory excess and distortion, through both decadence and deprivation, but these potential problems were handled without an essential conflict between the senses, world, and truth. One of the consequences of this orientation was that philosophical questions called “metaphysical” in other traditions were addressed in a more phenomenological and aesthetic fashion, with a priority on the experiential and aesthetic aspects of embodiment in any speculation about the nature of things. It was not epistemological heresy to consider music to be a way of knowing reality.

Despite the post-Cartesian atmosphere of much contemporary Western philosophy, the remaining philosophical strain between mind and body, and between passive experience, raw sensation and active thinking, is difficult to theorize away; perhaps because of the limits of language habituated by the metaphysical assumptions of separation or, as music indicates, because of the limits of language itself. The legacy of the way the idea of “beyond” in the meta of metaphysics has been conceived, and an limited understanding of perception, still function in Western philosophy of music. In contrast, because Chinese philosophers were less philosophically skeptical about the senses and body, arts such as music were developed as serious philosophical practices. Making music (yue 楽) served as a central method of self-cultivation and evaluative standard for sagacity, while providing a guiding ethical, social and philosophical model. Unsurprisingly, there was robust debate about the nature and uses of music within and across the major schools of Chinese philosophy.

During the Wei-Jin period in China, Ruan Ji and Xi Kang, two members of an exceptionally musical group of philosophers post-humously known as the Seven Worthies of the Bamboo Grove,
authored some of Chinese philosophy’s most famous treatises about music. Ruan Ji, in his *Essay on Music*, followed the early conceptions of music described in the *Yueji* (the Book of Music originally found in the Book of Rites), in which the proper moral use of music was prioritized and the presence of sentiments in music was assumed. Music was thought to unify people while ritual differentiated their roles, with music acting on the inner human while ritual acted on the outer. There was an accepted correlation between a musician’s inner feelings and a listener’s response, which was transacted through the sincerity and virtuosity (aesthetic and ethical) of both parties in the activity of making music. The question of whether music itself bears and transmits feelings, or whether they only exist in the musician or listener, was famously contested by Xi Kang in his essay “Sound Has Neither Sorrow nor Joy” (*sheng wu ai le lun* 聲無哀樂論). Presaging a central debate in contemporary Western philosophy of music, he took the more unusual stance in Chinese history by arguing that there are no intrinsic sentiments in music itself.

This debate can also be read as a conversation about the relationship between Ru 儒 (Confucian) and Daoist philosophies, and so highlights much about these respective philosophies from within their views about music. It was common for Ru philosophers to attest to hearing someone’s virtue through their music, for instance when Zigong reported, “By viewing his ceremonies we know his administration. By hearing his music, we know his de (德).”¹ This belief also supported Confucius’ emphasis on sincerity and appropriate feelings, and the distinction between hollow, perfunctory ritual and genuine ritual propriety. Without the proper feelings, one’s actions may be correct but lack morality, just as music is lacking when played with technical correctness but in a wooden or unfeeling way. Virtue develops as a kind of virtuosity, and for

¹ 子貢曰見其禮而知其政聞其樂而知其德。*Mengzi*, 2A2.
Confucius, music was an irreplaceable method of cultivating the relational self: one cannot become fully human (仁 ren) without playing music.

For Confucius, music and ritual were equally important to cultivating the self and social relations and he never failed to draw out their relationship, for instance in his often quoted proclamation:

In referring time and again to observing ritual propriety (禮 li), how could I just be talking about gifts of jade and silk? And in referring time and again to making music (樂 yue), how could I just be talking about bells and drums?\(^2\)

In this case the relationship between music and politics is metaphorical and real, keeping in mind that these two terms need not be opposed. Like a musical score, a ritual has a more or less fixed form, and the form is a condition for the possibility of interpretation and variance in how the ritual is conducted. The most important contingency in the performance of both music and ritual is the degree of affective virtuosity and skill. The tendency for ritual to become rigid and unfeeling, Confucius and others recognized, could be counterbalanced by music. As a relatively more yin 阴 activity, the feeling and spontaneity brought by music prevented ossified ritual, while ritual complemented music by reigning in its tendency towards boundary dissolution and excessive feelings. Moreover, since making music well meant achieving appropriate relations and harmony (和) within the music itself as well as between the performers and with the audience, and because this activity could thereby produce appropriate meaning (義 yi) and beauty (美 mei), Confucius took music to be of the utmost cultural and political importance.

\(^2\) *Analects*, 17.11.
Daoists also attended to the relationship between virtue (德 de) and music, with Zhuangzi commenting that “De is the cultivation of completed harmony.” For Zhuangzi though, music (and listening) function as practices of emptying the self, “fasting” the self as he calls it, in order to roam beyond the boundaries of conventional thought with its epistemological and linguistic fixations. Just as logical distinctions may be “evened out” on the “whetstone of 天 tian” or transformed on the silent “pivot of 道樞 dao,” they can be smoothed through musical notes towards oneness and then paradoxically emptied into a meaningful silence without objectifiable meaning. The idea of roaming free and spontaneously in the Zhuangzi is thus enacted metaphorically yet actually; through music one can travel without moving. The practice of listening honed through music extends into our lineage in the “great emptiness (太虛 tai xu)” by serving as a transformative process in which one learns to listen to increasingly “silent” music in order to quiet the self and finally hear the music of the heavens. In accordance with this, I will suggest that music operates as a “wu-form” for Zhuangzi, and as a kind of phenomenological reduction that reveals the nature of a relative, situated self. This is not a phenomenological reduction in the Husserlian ideal sense, but rather one similar to Merleau-Ponty’s claim in Phenomenology of Perception that art enacts a phenomenological reduction when it allows the ties to the world to become apparent. Such an activity is possible because the relationship between persons and world is ontologically prior to the separation of subject and object; a basis that is also the root possibility for listening to one another.  

The suggestion that music can function in this way also offers an opportunity to think about sense via the Chinese philosophical concept 无 wu, interpreted variously as “without,” “nothing,”

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3 For example, in Being and Time, Heidegger writes, “Listening to…is the existential being-open of Da-sein as being-with for the other.” Martin Heidegger, Being and Time, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 153.
“not have,” and “indeterminacy.” For Chinese philosophers, I will argue, music demonstrated how the supposedly “empty” space between perceiving and meaning is indeterminate rather than void. For example, the somewhat puzzling love of “flavorless” or even “silent” music in ancient China can be explained according to music’s capacity to enact a sensory return to an ideal and balanced state of emotions (qing 情) and heartmind (xin 心)—a state of harmony, oneness, emptied of fixed meaning and habituated thinking and feeling. The idea of wu is too often subjected to interpretation through a reified conception of emptiness or “nothing,” thus ignoring the lack of substance metaphysics in Chinese philosophy that precludes assigning absolute ontological status to “something” and “nothing.” There are relationships to be drawn between wu and ideas such as “possibility,” “contingency,” “spontaneity,” “natality,” and “wonder” that evoke both an aesthetic order generally, as well as operate creatively in the emergence of the particulars and patterns of the world. Since wu is not absolute nothingness, it contributes to ziran 自然, or “spontaneously so,” in a dynamic that Zhuangzi often pointed out. Perhaps comparably, we have Merleau-Ponty’s idea of indeterminacy as a positive phenomenon from which all quality arises. The way music is structured with a necessary degree of indeterminacy (apparent in the way musical meaning operates according to structures of aural and emotional expectation) leads into the background conditions of meaning.

For the early Chinese, the correspondence between nature and human culture, including the arts, was not simple analogy since their view of nature was thoroughly aesthetic. This enabled the belief that music embodies the same configuration as the cosmos, observable in fundamental patterns such as harmony. This idea was also supported by an interesting lack of opposition between metaphorical and literal meaning in classical Chinese language. A number of philosophers have suggested that the difference between sound and music is based on metaphorical transference.
Melody, for example, cannot be understood without reference to ideas like “high” and “low” or “sharp” and “flat.” A tone arouses both “vertical” and “horizontal” expectations, while harmony arouses vertical expectations and melody arouses horizontal. For these thinkers, it is a mistake to ascribe these terms to the sounds themselves and the difference between hearing a sound and a tone, or the difference between a succession of beats and a rhythm, therefore lies in the experience of hearing and not in the sound structure.

But it is not necessary to accept that music is wholly subjective just because its meaning seems metaphorical. For example, Wittgenstein claimed that while it is common to say that music “conveys” feelings such as joy and melancholy, and this seems to imply that music is an instrument for producing such feelings that exist only in the listener, such an account is mistaken. Instead, as he puts it, “Music conveys to us itself” and is able to do this meaningfully because of the inseparable and constitutive relationship between sensing and meaning. This leads him to also declare, “Meaning is a physiognomy.” When we see emotion, we see it in a face, just as we hear meaning in a sentence or melody. We do not see facial contortions and then infer that someone is sad or happy, nor do we hear a melody and then infer it is melancholy or triumphant. As Wittgenstein notices, this is an intransitive understanding of meaning in which the way that something is cannot be separated from it. There is an immediate, spontaneous bedrock of meaning inseparable from feeling.

Perhaps controversially, according to this conception of music’s meaningfulness, it is directly given while at the same time carrying context, culture, and forms of life. Like that “magic word” of phenomenology—givenness—intransitivity resists skeptical dilemmas about meaning (including

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5 For example, Nietzsche points out, “there is art in every good sentence...A misunderstanding about its tempo, for example—and the sentence itself is misunderstood.” Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1966), §246, 182.
nihilism). The directness of music’s meaningfulness also helps establish the importance of listening because of the asymmetry between what we can listen to and what we can say. The ability to understand more than we can say shows how crucial it is to perceive the feeling of any meaning that is understood. This idea, pervasive among both Ru and Daoist thinkers, anchors my account of listening to music and can also be heard at the beginning of the *Book of Songs*, where we find a description of the transformation from words and sounds to music, and then dance, in a passage away from the impersonal abstractions of language to the more affective expressions of a unique voice and body.

The feelings move inwardly and are embodied in words. When words are insufficient for them, recourse is had to sighs and exclamations. When sighs and exclamations are insufficient for them, recourse is had to the prolonged utterances of song. When those prolonged utterances of song are insufficient for them, unconsciously the hands begin to move and the feet to dance.⁶

If we consider the perennial question of musical meaning without jettisoning our linguistic biases, then the way music seems meaningful without definite meanings or messages, and expressive without expressing identifiable things, remains puzzling. But freed from the reign of linguistic models of meaning, music appears more as Mendelssohn described: musical meaning, rather than too ambiguous, may be too definite for language. Or put more polemically by Nietzsche, “Compared with music all communication by words is shameless…words depersonalize, words make the uncommon common.”⁷

Drawing on Mendelssohn’s suggestion, I undertake the question of musical meaning by showing how music’s lack of semantic, representational, or otherwise objectifiable content leads to

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⁶ *Book of Songs*, 34.
our experience of music as meaningful—yet without being full of meaning. Music is meaningful because it is meaningless. Is this a paradox? If not a logical paradox sustained by contradiction, then perhaps a paradox of nihilism in which the absence of meaning is a kind of meaning? Or is this just a linguistic sleight of hand in which “meaning” is used in different senses that do not actually conflict?

Indeed, one explanation for the queer fact that music is perceived as meaningful while lacking the kind of meaning attributed to words and language is that musical and linguistic meaning differ in kind. If true, this would also help explain the challenge of describing music in language. How could we say what can’t be said in language? But before dissolving the paradoxical suggestion that music is meaningful by being meaningless into a fundamental difference between music and language, there is the exceptional case of singing as a reminder of the vocal-auditory origins of human communication and the sonic, perhaps even musical, roots of language. In not subsuming musical meaning to a linguistic model, the musical nature of language becomes more audible (as do new possibilities for linguistic meaning). Thus, while music lacks the kind of objectifiable meaning we usually associate with language, it is neither wholly different nor incompatible with linguistic meaning. After all, the way something is said often conveys more than what is said.

The words, Mendelssohn wrote, remain ambiguous, but we both understand the song. The agreed upon features of language, the supposed bases of mutual understanding such as grammar and vocabulary, display the vagueness of being general. Music, on the other hand, can say the same thing to different people by conveying itself and only itself in its utter particularity. There are at least two important consequences. First, lacking any content other than itself, music says the same thing to everyone in a manner unique to each person. We should not assume that the general nature of language makes it more amenable to each individual’s understanding and interpretation. Rather we
might consider how the directly conveyed particularity of music makes it feel so deeply personal. Therefore, and second, music offers an experience of one’s unique subjectivity from a third person or other perspective – but without the vagueness that often comes with the generality of language. All of this is possible because music is empty of meaning.

Together with music’s emptiness, the intimacy, skill, and receptivity of listening contribute to our experience of music’s meaningfulness. In addition, music’s unique spatiotemporalities further facilitate a “fidelity of sense”: sensing as perceiving and sense as meaningfulness are true to one another, not by correspondence, but through resonance across the distances between the senses of sense. Similar to the way that music’s lack of meaning engenders its meaningfulness, the characteristics of musical spacetime offer an aestheticized experience in which, for example, objective forms of time are lost in favor of timeliness and rhythm. For all of these factors – music’s emptiness, spatiotemorality, and the ways we listen—the supposed distance between sensing as perceiving and sense as meaning is the space of music’s meaningfulness. Through music, sensing and meaning have a fidelity or being true in which sense in its many senses is near with itself.

*Only in music can no falsehood be done.*

- Yue Ji 樂記 (Book of Music)
MUSICAL SPACETIME

Music has been called the most temporal of the arts and even the art of time itself. The same is not said of music and space. Music scores have time signatures, but no spatial designations aside from the graphics of musical notation. Acoustics depend on the space in which music is played, but this space is architectural and, unlike time, is assumed to be external to the music itself. Spatial terms such as “higher” and “lower” are used to describe the pitches of music, yet they are taken to be metaphorical or phenomenal, rather than actual, spatial relations. These examples illustrate just a sample of the ways that time holds sway over space in our conception of music.

The rejection of any spatiality internal to music depends primarily on the definition of space as physically extended and dimensional. Following this definition of space, music occurs in space, but there is no space in music. In non-musical contexts, space is rendered tangible and literal by its identification with extension, whereas time is allegedly understood only through abstraction, metaphor, and often through spatialization. The rendering of time into spatial terms in order to measure it again reflects the idea that space is extended (hence directly measurable) while time is not. In music, the reverse is commonly thought to be true: time itself is supposedly presented while space is only metaphorically there.\(^1\)

Metaphorical or not, how is spatiality in music experienced? One way to describe it is as intensive and directional, in contrast to extended and dimensional. Usually, extension can be

\(^1\) For example, Susanne Langer describes music as primarily temporal and secondarily spatial. She writes, “Music makes time audible and its form and continuity sensible.” Feeling and Form (New York: Scribner, 1953), 110. For Roger Scruton, space requires a distinction between place and occupant that time does not. Sounds fail this spatial requirement, therefore music presents us with the nature of time but not space: “time lifted from the tangle of causes and presented in all its mystifying simplicity, as the impossible but necessary condition under which our existence is granted…There is no real space of sounds; but there is a phenomenal space of tones.” Although tonal space is modeled on the phenomenal space of everyday perception, Scruton argues that we cannot advance from this phenomenal space of tones to an objective spatial order. The Aesthetics of Music (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 74.
measured quantitatively, spatially, and divided without changing in nature, whereas intensity cannot be measured spatially, and cannot be divided without changing in nature. For example, mass is extensive and hardness is intensive: a 10-gram diamond divided in two results in two 5-gram diamonds of the same hardness. Dividing a diamond does not make it softer because, as intensive, hardness is independent of quantity and can only be changed through fundamentally altering the substance.\(^2\) Intensity can be ordered—I can say one sound is louder than another—but not numerically expressed without translation into extensive quantities.

Space and time have been distinguished according to the differences between extension and intensity, most notably by Henri Bergson. The clock, as a familiar example of translating intensive time into extended space in order to measure it, stands as an everyday testament to the intensive-extensive split. To suggest, then, that musical spatiality is sensed as intensive and directional is to say it has characteristics that are usually associated with time. Does this peculiar asymmetry between the temporalization of space within music and spatialization of time outside music further the claim that music is temporal but not spatial? Perhaps, but only if we assume that space must be extensive. Should we not first ask why space is excluded from being intensive and directional?

The interpretation of time in spatial terms has been critiqued from many corners of philosophy (Bergson, Heidegger, Whitehead, and Dogen, to name a handful) on the grounds that it obscures the true character of time as duration, event, and becoming. The spatialization of time eliminates time because space is assumed to be static, and static time is no time at all. Clocktime obscures lived, experiential time by treating each moment as the same. What happens when space is subjected to an analogous analysis? Is it true that time is heterogenous—no two moments are the

same—while space is homogenous? What is the spatial equivalent to the temporal distinction between measurable clocktime and immeasurable change, or quantified time and lived time? While today there is philosophical attention paid to embodied, phenomenological space, in contrast to objectively measurable space, space is still widely defined as extended and dimensional.

Music has been used as an example to demonstrate the inadequacy of applying spatial concepts to time, but without the recognition that music also challenges the concepts of space—as static, homogenous, dimensional, and extended—assumed in such a critique. (Bergson makes these assumptions in his critique of the spatialization of time.) Once we detach space from these assumptions and consider, for example, whether space can be intensive, we open up the possibility that sound and music are spatial. This is not easy, given the historical force behind defining space according to the physical, external, and extensive world.

By way of illustration, we can consider P.F. Strawson’s compelling thought experiment on the nature of sound and space in his essay “Sounds.” In seeking to test the possibilities and implications of a no-space world, Strawson turned to sound as the best candidate for imagining such a world. Strawson is guided to this experiment by the question of whether we could have objective knowledge within a conceptual scheme where material objects are not the basic particulars. In order to assess how much our knowledge of objective particulars requires material bodies, Strawson devises a world without such bodies, that is, a world without space. Which senses must be removed in order to eliminate space, as the form of outer sense, he asks? Since sight and touch provide us with spatial characteristics and relations, they are not candidates. While sound seems to provide spatial information, for example by coming from the left or above, such perceptions are actually tactual and kinaesthetic sense experiences. It is not purely sonic. An exclusively auditory experience,

Strawson claims, would have no spatial concepts. Sounds have no “intrinsic spatial characteristics,” making a purely auditory concept of space is impossible.\(^4\)

In this no-space sonic world, Strawson allows that we could distinguish qualitatively different sounds, but could we *reidentify* these sounds? With this question, we are pushed back towards what the space of material bodies provides: the continued existence of a particular when it is not being perceived. In other words, for there to be reidentifiable sounds, there must be places where these sounds exist, but where I am not now located. The idea of place and the spatial system of objects that accompanies it cannot be made sense of in auditory terms, however Strawson poses the possibility of an analogy to space that would provide for unheard sounds. Put another way, he seeks a sonic analogy for *distance*: nearer to and further away from. Only distance will establish a systematic relationship between sounds in a dimension other than temporal.

For this sonic analogy of space, Strawson proposes the “master-sound”: a sound of a distinctive timbre and constant loudness that is heard continuously, with varying pitch. The pitch-range of the master-sound provides the auditory analogue of position and a dimension for unperceived sounds. A sound’s location is the pitch of the master-sound that is cotemporaneous with it. This way, the master-sound serves a background for all other sounds and means for ordering sounds in relation to each other according to the pitch-range of the master-sound. Strawson’s analysis of his own experiment is mixed. On the one hand, the master-sound does seem to provide for non-spatial auditory experiences in which we recognize and distinguish sounds qualitatively, but, on the other hand, there will never be certainty as to the particular or numerical identity of those sounds. Moreover, the master-sound analogue of space fails to establish distance between auditory elements because it cannot present their relations simultaneously. These relations are only

perceivable as the pitch of the master-sound changes. Whereas multiple visual elements can be seen simultaneously, and therefore perceived immediately as having spatial relations, auditory elements cannot be heard at the same time as being at a certain auditory distance from each other. Distance can only be perceived through change (time). The simultaneous existence of perceived and unperceived sounds therefore cannot be established.

In defining his criteria for reidentifiability and distance in terms of simultaneity, Strawson demonstrates his debt to Kant. This was already apparent when he eliminated outer sense in order to generate a no-space world. Tying the possibility of reidentifiable sounds to the simultaneous existence of unheard sounds further indicates certain of Kant’s ideas about space and time. In the Second Analogy of the Transcendental Analytic in *The Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant contrasts perceiving a house with a river in order to illustrate the difference between succession and simultaneity. When viewing an object such as a house, I can start from the top and end at the bottom, or follow any other perceptual trajectory whether left to right, diagonally, and so forth. I can even reverse directions. Apprehension of the house does not have a necessary starting point or determinate order because the house is present simultaneously. In contrast, when viewing an event such as a river flowing, the order of perceptions succeeding one another is necessary and cannot be reversed. In spatial perception, simultaneity allows me to move freely and return to preceding perceptual locations. As Kant describes it, this is because perceptions of objects that exist simultaneously succeed one another *reciprocally*. Simultaneity is still a temporal concept, but it indicates the existence of things in one and the same time. In the temporal perception of events, such as listening to music, I cannot go back in time to hear the phrase that has ended. This account

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of simultaneity and succession, and their respective relationships to objects and events, and space and time, leads to the failure of the master-sound to provide simultaneity, and thus space.

I have taken this route through Strawson’s thought experiment for two central purposes. First, to show how strongly certain suppositions about space influence philosophical ideas about sound, and therefore about music. Second, the places where Strawson’s experiment does not work arguably serve less to uphold the assumption that sound is non-spatial, and more to indicate how sound (and music) challenge the aforementioned suppositions about space. As Strawson himself notices, the analogy of the master-sound is not a decisive failure as much as it is incomplete. After all, he asks, what possible test could we devise for reinterpreting the idea of unperceived sounds, and thus something like space in sound? This rather large question he leaves us with implicates other, perhaps even more difficult, questions. Can we ever, even outside the sound world, be certain about reidentifying particulars? Does what is not perceived continue to exist? Are unheard sounds really sounds?

More tamely, we should at least ask: if we did not have a prior concept of literal space, as Strawson calls it, could we grasp the ways in which the master-sound is or is not a spatial analogue? In the presence of the master-sound, a listener hears various sounds accompanied by a background tone with changing pitch. Strawson’s criteria for a spatial analogue include the assumptions that space requires place, place requires objects from which it is distinct, and distance requires a stable background. So, it is not just on the issue of simultaneity that the master-sound fails to establish spatiality. The definition of space at work in the experiment ruled out, by design, a genuine sonic or musical spatiality.

To be precise, in raising the possibility of real musical spatiality, I am not interested in establishing the sonic equivalent of material space with its ordering of physical objects. Strawson’s
investigation may show there is no such sonic equivalent, or that any sonic analogue is weak, but it
does not prove that sound is non-spatial. This may be clearer if we consider that he first eliminates
the physical, external conception of space in creating a no-space, purely auditory world, but then
when searching for a spatial analogue, he presumes that it must be comparable with the very
conception of space that he earlier ruled to be impossible in sound. Now this is because his primary
goal is to answer whether knowledge of objective particulars requires material bodies and the
physical space they occupy. But the question seems to have been already answered at the start with
the assumption that physical, extended, and simultaneous space provides the standards for
reidentification of particulars. Once this is established, any non-material conception of space will fail
to meet the conditions of material space. Again we might respond that the reidentification of
particulars will never be absolutely certain. But more to the point here, there may be other ways to
establish simultaneity in sound that Strawson does not consider.

For example, in the Daoist tradition we find the idea of the “great tone” da yin 大音. The
Laozi describes the great tone as such:

Chapter 41

The great tone is inaudible,
The great image is without form. ⁶

While the great tone itself is not audible, it allows all other sounds to be heard. Although the word
“tone” is used, it should not be confused with tone as a specific frequency. Rather tone in this
context is akin to sonority itself—but soundless. Wang Bi’s commentary on the Laozi helpfully
explains this. He tells us that the great tone cannot be heard because it is not a specific sound, such
as gong, which by nature excludes other sounds such as shang. If the great sound was specified, as a

⁶大音希聲；大象無形；道隱無名。夫唯道，善貸且成.
gong or shang note for example, it could not “encompass the whole multitude [of sounds].” It must remain indeterminate and inaudible in order for particular sounds to be heard; yet without audible sounds, the great tone has nothing through which to resonate, to carry its soundless sonority. The great tone is the space of all possible sounds at once, hence it is none of them individually. Like dao, it cannot be named or assigned fixed meaning, but both dao and the great tone need what can be specified, in name and sound, to come about.”

To get back to the question of sonic space, the great tone provides for simultaneity and the existence of unheard sounds, but does it allow perceptions of objects to reciprocally succeed one another? In other words, is there a conception of distance—of moving in different directions—available in the great tone as the space of sound? The answer, I think, is yes, but distance in sound space differs from distance in the space of the material world. If spatial relations limited to existing between discrete sounds, then we can only hear them in temporal movement, that is, in succession. But there are other ways to conceive of distance. First, because sounds are waves, even a single sound (if such a thing can really be isolated) is moving and generating distances; while these distances are not extensive in material space, they can be understood as intensive. These are the spatial relations internally structuring sound itself, and thus music, even in a moment.

7 分則不能統衆故有聲者非大音也. “Being particular, it cannot encompass the whole multitude [of sounds], therefore that which has sound is not the great tone.” Wang Bi 王弼, Laozi Duode jing zhu 老子道德經注 in Wang Bi ji jiaoshi 王弼集校釋, Vol. 1, ed. Lou Yulie, (Beijing 北京: Zhonghua shu ju 中華書局: Xin hua shu dian Beijing fa xing suo fa xing 新華書店北京發行所發行, 1980), 41.13.

8 This idea of evoking the great tone in sound and music influenced the development of guqin music in its emphasis on barely audible or merely implied tones, and the possibility of “silent music.” One way that silent music is explored is by soundlessly playing the instrument just above the strings, without touching them. As well, in Chinese music and aesthetics, we find the recurring image of the stringless guqin as a symbol of the ideals of silence and silent music in guqin performance. For example, the great recluse poet Tao Yuanming 陶淵明 is famously depicted playing silent music on his stringless zither. In Chinese painting, emptiness and space have been venerated in a similar manner to silent music. See François Jullien’s The Great Image Has No Form, or On the Nonobject Through Painting. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).
In addition, despite the fact that sound and music are events characterized by succession, we can move reciprocally in them. The difference between sound and the material world is that sonic perceptual distance happens either very quickly or through rhythm and repetition. Consider, for example, J.S. Bach’s Prelude and Fugue No. 10 in E minor. As a fugue, its architecture is contrapuntal, relying on multiple “voices” built around a theme and repetition at different pitches. While the voices are polyphonic (interdependent harmonically), they maintain independent rhythms and pitch contours. This establishes a sense of place in the music and allows hearing to move spatially within it. In fact, we can hear different sonic locations at once. Repetition, in turn, allows us to return to a sound or phrase we heard previously, thereby establishing perceptual reciprocity or a kind of simultaneity within succession. In this way, music softens the difference between simultaneity and succession and displays a spatiotemporality more akin to what we find in thinking that in how we perceive the external world of extended objects. Yet, even when we view a supposedly static object in the material world, such as a house, simultaneity does not halt change. To return to viewing something I looked away from is to enact a repetition of perceiving that can never be the same as the original. Repetition, in other words, is always rhythm.

As a result of assuming real space to be extensive, different types of space have been hierarchically ordered such that musical analyses commonly model the inner space of both music and listeners on analogy with three-dimensional outer space. Hearing musical notes as higher or lower, for example, or the dimensionality of chords, is considered a metaphorical transference from the external, objective material world to the internal, subjective phenomenal world. One of the immediate issues with this analogy, however, is that external space is assumed to be static and homogenous, while musical space is clearly not. Given this and other asymmetries between musical

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9 This work can be heard on Track 1 and is from Bach’s *The Well-Tempered Clavier*. 
and material space, why grant explanatory priority to external (dimensional and extended) space rather than considering musical spatiality on its own? For instance, one of the more fascinating features of musical experience, and one arguably produced by music’s spatiotemporality, is the dual sense that we are in the music and the music is in us. The boundaries between inner and outer are blurred—even at times inverted—making a one-directional analogy from external to internal space questionable.

As a result, absorption in music involves unusual combinations of feelings. All at once we may feel what Xunzi means by “music unites” (樂同, yue tong), as well as Nietzsche’s sentiment that, “Music now takes me away from myself, as though I saw myself from a distance.”¹⁰ Musical spatiality, because it is intensive, directional, and durational rather than extensive, dimensional, and discrete like physical space, contributes to feelings of both great distances and no distance at all, and hence to a sense of travelling without moving in music.¹¹ None of this should be taken to mean that music is primarily temporal and merely metaphorically or phenomenally spatial. Instead, the queerness of musical spacetime shows that the philosophical procedures that reveal heterogeneous, immeasurable temporality to be distinct from homogenous, measurable time have not been adequately applied to space.

If there is an apt analogy with which to understand musical spacetime, then, it is the inner spacetime of thinking and feeling. This not only helps to make sense of the appealing suggestion that music sounds the way feelings feel, but also suggests that feelings feel the way music sounds. The often noted relationship between music and the inner life of feeling is based in a shared

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¹¹ An excellent example of this sense of movement in musical space can be heard on Track 2, Howling Calm by Tim Crowe.
spatiotemporality that helps us to experience aesthetic emotions (emotions that arise in the experience of the artwork), but more intriguingly, also indicates the aesthetic character of emotions of the ordinary variety. Perhaps we must understand sad songs in order to understand sad people, and not just vice versa.

This analogy between inner and musical spacetime need not support the belief that these are either wholly subjective or phenomenal spacetimes. Instead, by virtue of being mutual, the aesthetics shared between the spacetime of music and our inner life are more, rather than less, objective by virtue of being reciprocal, and also show us ways that other kinds of space and time have aesthetic qualities as well. For instance, timeliness—as the opportune moment—is an aesthetic sense not measurable according to the clock, yet nonetheless temporal. Another apt example is grace, as Bergson describes, with its curved, continuous lines telegraphing each new direction, giving us the feeling of mastering time (I would also include space) and a “mobile sympathy” for this harmonious movement.12

In keeping with their central focus on the patterns and processes of change, early Chinese philosophers were disinclined to treat space and time as objective and separate categories, rather taking them to be particular, idiosyncratic, and best understood in terms of events, cycles, and movements. Space is as much an event as time. At its most general and formed, spacetime was considered patterned, but never sufficiently enough to constitute an unchanging category. Timeliness, taken to be essential to both great music and sageliness, is a rich example of this principle—nay, operation—of insufficient reason. The right moment is unpredictable, immeasurable and unnecessary, yet perceivable, knowable, and actionable. If conceptions of quantifiable space and time hold, how can timeliness (always insufficiently caused) ever be perceived, let alone known and

acted on? The early Chinese preference for aesthetics is apparent in the focus on timeliness and position, for example, over time and space per se, and thus to the cultivation of virtue as a kind of virtuosity of sense: skilled, keen abilities to sense right moments and appropriate responses. In music, such a person is called a virtuoso. In Chinese philosophy, this person is a sage: one whose character and power (de 德) is such that they embody the timeliness of nature and the harmony of the heavens and earth.

The question of music’s meaningfulness is closely tied to music’s spatiotemporality, both of which are described here in a vocabulary of “distance.” Distance amidst relative positions; distance as intensive and not limited to extension. Musical spacetime provides a basis for our experience of music as meaningful—as profound yet without objectifiable content. There is, after all, no spatiotemporal content of anything. As with meaning, music challenges our conceptions of space and time by offering a unique experience of them.
CHAPTER 1
Resonance and the Fidelity of Listening

“情發於聲”: “Feelings go forth in sound.”
-Yue Ji (Book of Music)

“情發於聲”: “Feelings are released by sound.”
-Xi Kang, Music is Without Grief or Joy

“It has sometimes been said that what music conveys to us are feelings of joyfulness, melancholy, triumph, etc. and what repels us in this account is that it seems to say that music is an instrument for producing in us sequences of feelings...To such an account we are tempted to reply ‘Music conveys to us itself!’...We wish to avoid any form of expression that would seem to refer to an effect produced by an object on a subject.”

Chapter one offers an initial account of listening to music in which this activity is meaningful by virtue of being “intimate”: immediate, intensive, and intransitively sensed. The Chinese idea of ganqing 感應, or “mutual resonance,” anchors this description and serves as the explanatory model for the fidelity of sensing as perceiving and sense as meaningfulness in music, and for the spatiotemporal immediacy of music. Together, these characteristics (fidelity and immediacy) eliminate the need for representation or formal resemblance between music and other forms of meaning, such as emotions, in order for music to be meaningful.

1.1 Are There Emotions in Music?

Although attributing emotions to music is commonplace enough to warrant whole genres ("sad music" and "merry tunes"), the question of whether music truly possesses, or even conveys, human sentiments persists. Addressing the historical links between the aesthetics of music and conceptions of the emotions, Francis Sparshott writes,

> It is at least true that the early history of the concept of emotion is not independent of ideas about music, and that the connection between music and emotion is so intimate and so strong that the attempts (which one often encounters) to represent emotions as irrelevant to music become ludicrous, belonging to that style of thought that supposes we are free to invent the world we live in.²

While this discussion is ancient, it is far from dead or dusty; analysis of the relationship between music and the emotions occupies a lion’s share of current debates in philosophy of music, and has also emerged as a popular topic of neuroscience research.³ But the heavy bias toward explaining music in terms of emotions, however understandable, may overshadow other ways that music is meaningful. In the following pages, a freely invented world is not pursued, but a certain distance between music and human emotion is taken seriously; at a minimum, it is not assumed that music is meaningful only according to its relationship with emotion. To begin, by shifting from the alliance of music and emotions to the intimacy of listening to music meaningfully, we avoid equivocating meaningfulness in music with the experience of music as either expressing, causing, or arousing emotions—and in doing so, will come to consider what music indicates about emotion rather than

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the reverse, or hear how, in Oscar Wilde's words, “Life imitates Art far more than Art imitates Life.”

1.1.1 Xi Kang’s Argument Against Emotions in Music

“How can you contaminate the Great Harmony with happiness and sorrow, and put words to the Empty Name with grief and joy?”

While is no shortage of contemporary treatments of the question of emotions in music, I begin with the ideas of Xi Kang嵇康 (223-262 CE), a rather rogue philosopher-musician from China’s Wei-Jin period, who offered a distinct counterargument to the orthodox Chinese view that music contains and transfers emotions between musicians and listeners. In his essay, “Sound Has Neither Sorrow nor Joy” (sheng wu ai le lun 聲無哀樂論), Xi Kang crafted a series of arguments against the presence of emotions in music. Widespread belief to the contrary, he noted, had led to the misuse of music for political and social agendas, while severing humans from music as a source for “nourishing life” (yangsheng 養生) in accord with harmony (he 和) and naturalness (ziran 自然). Xi Kang is justly famous for his heterodox views about music’s independence from emotions, but the way his arguments also provide an alternate understanding of meaningfulness in music has gone unacknowledged. He not only resists objectified forms of meaning by arguing that music is empty of

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5 焉得染太和于歡慼、綴虛名于哀樂哉?
6 Also pronounced Ji Kang. According to David Knechtges in his translation of Wen Xuan (文選), Xi Kang’s family fled a feud by moving from Guiji會稽 (modern Zhejiang) to the Zhi致 Prefecture of Qiao瞧 (modern Anhui). According to the History of Jin (晉書) they then changed their family name from 奚 Xi to 峻 Ji, the name of a mountain in Anhui that can be pronounced as either Ji or Xi. The new name “was derived from the final syllable of their native place, Guiji, except that they wrote it with 'mountain' in the lower right portion of the character and pronounced Ji as Xi” in order to keep the original pronunciation of their name. I have chosen to use Xi Kang in light of this scholarship and because it is the preferred name in current literature. Xiao Tong, Wen Xuan or Selections of Refined Literature, trans. David Knechtges (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 390.
“images,” “forms,” or “signs” (xiàng 象), he does so in order to show that music is meaningful without being full of meaning.

“Sound Has Neither Sorrow nor Joy” is written as a dialogue between the Host of Dong Ye (東野主人), who serves as the mouthpiece for Xi Kang’s views, and the Guest from Qin (秦客), who defends the mainstream, Confucian view articulated in the Yue Ji (Record of Music). According to this view, music bears and transmits feelings like sorrow and joy, as well as cultural characteristics and individual persona, with an accuracy that listeners can perceive. This lent music status as an important epistemological tool for ascertaining personal character, as well as knowing the cultures of past eras or distant lands. The Guest of Qin summarizes these ideas in his opening remarks to Xi Kang:

I have heard that a previous discussion says, “The music of a well-ordered age is peaceful and joyous, but the songs of a dying state are mournful and longing.” Whether a state is orderly or chaotic depends on the government, but music corresponds to it. Therefore, feelings of grief and longing are expressed in metal and stone; signs of peace and joy take form in pipes and strings. Also, when Confucius heard the Shao music, he knew the virtue of Shun, and when Ji Zha listened to the strings, he knew the airs of the various states. These matters are already established and were not questioned by past scholars. Today, you alone believe that music has neither sorrow nor joy. Why is this?

Xi Kang responds pointedly that the Guest’s anecdotes are symptomatic of longstanding errors regarding name (ming 名) and what is named, such as objects, events, and situations (shí 實). We

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7 David Hall and Roger Ames address this story about Confucius and the way that music, and ritual, can be “sedimented” with human virtue in Thinking Through Confucius, (Albany: SUNY Press, 1987), 279-80. This topic is explored in detail in Chapter 2.
8 All translations are mine unless otherwise noted, and are based on Dai Mingyang’s Collected Annotations and Commentaries on Xi Kang 稽康集校 (Beijing: Renmin Wenxue Chuban She 人民文学出版社, 1962). I have also consulted Robert G. Hendricks’ translations in Philosophy and Argumentation in Third-Century China (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983).
9 故令歷世，瀠於名實.
readily give events names, for instance “grief” when we cry, or “joy” when we sing, yet naming never exhausts phenomena and is never more than relatively accurate (大較). Referencing Analects 17.11, Xi Kang asks, “To say ‘Music, music!’—does this mean nothing more than bells and drums? To say ‘Sorrow, sorrow!’—does this mean nothing more than crying and weeping?” Just as presents of jade or silk themselves do not constitute ritual propriety, and sorrow cannot be reduced to crying, a song does not constitute sadness.

The issue at hand is not just that music cannot be reduced to its instruments, nor grief to crying. The nature and limits of language are also in question. As contributors to what was later deemed 玄學 (Xuanxue) or “Study of the Profound,” Xi Kang and his fellow philosophers of the Bamboo Grove were concerned with the relationship between words and meaning (言意), and the inadequacy of language in matters of the greatest profundity such as dao and ziran (自然 “naturalness” or “spontaneously so”). Against the turbulent political background of the time, they gathered to practice 清談 (Qingtian) or “pure conversation,” using poetry, music, and a style of philosophical discourse that blended freestyle expression and unconventional, yet exacting, argumentation to explore esoteric topics. Of particular interest was the possibility of direct insight or illumination rather than relying on the mediations of inevitably political and ossified language conventions and orthodox teachings such as the Doctrine of Naming (名教). Xi Kang’s criticism, then, is not just that we conflate objects or actions with the words that refer to them, but that we presume no distance between naming and meaning.

10 The analect reads: “To say ‘ritual, ritual!’ Does this refer to nothing more than jade and silk? To say ‘music, music!’ Does this refer to nothing more than bells and drums?” 子曰：「禮云禮云！玉帛云乎哉！樂云樂云！鍾鼓云乎哉！」

11 Xuanxue is also translated as “Dark Learning” and “Study of the Mysterious.” Despite the enticing ring of these two translations, “profound” more accurately captures the interests of the diverse thinkers grouped into Xuanxue, especially regarding their views on language.
In addition to misunderstanding the limits of language, and the ease with which we misuse words, Xi Kang adds that naming music in terms of feelings is problematic because music has no “constant” (常) relation to emotion. Evidence of this can be found in the countless ways of making music and expressing emotions, with equally various cultural customs and divergent understandings of these acts. Certainly music moves people, but for Xi Kang, it is music’s autonomy from emotions that allows the heart to release its store. As he explains, “harmonious sounds have no signs, but a grieved heart has its reasons” (和聲無象，哀心有主), so when a grieved heart is moved by harmonious sounds absent of signs or images (象), only grief is heard. This is analogous, he says, to Zhuangzi’s idea of the pipes of nature (天) blowing through the myriad things in existence, causing each to be itself. If music were laden with signs, each listener’s heart would not be moved in such a personalized manner, nor could music cultivate different people according to their uniqueness.

For Xi Kang, calling a song “sad” because it releases sorrow from my heart is as mistaken as calling someone a “love” or “hate” person based only on my feelings toward them or calling a flavor “like” or “dislike” rather than “sweet” or “bitter.” While emotions are not wholly arbitrary, and there may be reasons to love someone worthy and despise a fool, love and disdain belong to me, and worthiness and foolishness belong to the other. Using names appropriately clarifies these distinctions. Although names should not be confused with what they refer to and words are separable from meaning, Xi Kang does not suggest a metaphysical divide between appearance and reality, nor does he hold a correspondence theory of truth in which language is not a part of the

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12 The concept of image (象) is not limited to the visual, and occurs in discussions about music in early China. In terms of the bodily senses, 象 is multimodal, and importantly, operates transmodally within the concept of the “great image,” also known as “image without form.” This is paralleled in the idea of “music without sound,” which Xi Kang refers to as the “mother and father of the people” (無聲之樂，民之父母也).
world it refers to. Instead, the philosophical mistakes that result from misnaming and an incorrect understanding of language, such as the erroneous attribution of emotions to music, are errors regarding mediation in which we discount the difference between mediated meanings (images, signs, names) and immediate meaningfulness or profundity.

The Guest, on the other hand, is unimpressed by the problems of language and signs, and doubts Xi Kang’s criteria for discriminating between names and phenomena:

With someone worthy, love arises, and with someone stupid, hate begins. It is merely improper to use the same name for each. Grief and joy also arise through causes that make them so. Accordingly, some sounds make me sad, and other sounds make me happy. If grief and joy are indeed caused by sound, then it is even more so that they are really in the sound.

In the dynamic between external influences and emotions, what might be called cause and effect are implicated (at least as tendencies or propensities) in each, albeit non-teleologically. Because something can be identified by its effect or influence, sounds need not have univocal meanings, and despite varying customs of expressing music and emotions, there is popular, if not universal, agreement about which songs are sad or joyful. We may make mistakes, but people’s feelings are nonetheless perceivable. Human error does not preclude the possibility of skilled perception, even

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13 Arguably, no early Chinese philosophers held such views. On the absence of reality-appearance dualism in classical Chinese thought, see David L. Hall and Roger T. Ames, *Thinking from the Han: Self, Truth, and Transcendence in Chinese and Western Culture*, (Albany: SUNY Press, 1998), especially p. 126. See also, Chris Fraser’s “Knowledge and Error in Early Chinese Thought,” for his argument that early Chinese philosophers understood knowledge in terms of competence or ability rather than accuracy of representation, and thus correct language discriminates things in ways that facilitate skilled engagement. Fraser proposes that perceptual and cognitive error rest on the distinction between part and whole, rather than appearance and reality: “Error occurs not when the world has somehow been misrepresented to the agent, but when the agent has discriminated on improper grounds—on the basis of partial but irrelevant or insufficient similarity between the object at hand and models of the kind under consideration.” In *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy* 10 (2011): 127-148.

14 又云：『賢不宜言愛，愚不宜言憎』。然則有『賢』然後『愛』生，有『愚』然後『憎』起，但不當其共名耳。哀樂之作，亦有由然。此為聲使我哀，音使我樂也。苟哀樂由聲，更為有實。

15 Here, the Guest defends the Ruist view of music and the classical Chinese model of mutual causality canonized in the *Yi Jing* or Classic of Changes (易經). The prescient abilities of the sage as well as the military commander are also dependent on this model, as detailed in François Jullien’s *The Propensity of Things: Toward a History of Efficacy in China*, Janet Lloyd, trans., (New York: Urzone, 1995).
across culture and language. Like a skilled observer who understands a person’s feelings by seeing his or her face, an adept listener also has epistemological access to others, such as in the legendary friendship of Bo Ya 伯牙 and Zhong Ziqi 鐘子期. When Bo Ya played his *guqin*, Zhong Ziqi never failed to understand his sentiments and knew exactly what images he conveyed. When Zhong Ziqi died, Bo Ya honored his friend’s perfect understanding by breaking the strings of his *guqin* and never playing again.¹⁶ Invoking this example, the Guest challenges Xi Kang to explain how Zhong Ziqi knew Bo Ya’s thoughts and feelings just from the tones he played. He asks, can we reject the presence of sentiments in music because we have not met a sufficiently skilled listener or because crying and singing abide by different customs from place to place?

Unswayed, Xi Kang retorts that popular stories about perceptual feats, such as that of Bo Ya and Zhong Ziqi, are nothing more than fabrications motivated by political and cultural agendas. Used to establish an elite cadre of “knowing listeners” uniquely qualified to judge the virtues of music, these anecdotes were deployed to censor artistic expression and manipulate political opinion. For Xi Kang, subsuming music to politics is both an aesthetic and ethical error; just as there is no happy or sad music, there is also no morally virtuous or corrupt music. The love of sad (*bei* 悲)

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¹⁶ Bo Ya, an esteemed *qin* player, and Zhong Ziqi, referred to as “one who knows the music” (*zhi* *yin*)，are thought to have lived during the Spring and Autumn period. According to the *Qin Shi* 琴史 (History of the Qin) by Zhu Changwen 朱長文 (1041-1100), “Bo Ya was good at playing the *qin*, and Zhong Ziqi was good at listening. When Bo Ya intended to convey high mountains, Zhong Ziqi said, ‘How lofty, like Mount Tai!’ When Bo Ya intended to convey flowing streams, Zhong Ziqi said, ‘How vast, like a great river into the sea!’ Whatever Bo Ya was thinking as he played, Zhong Ziqi saw clearly in his heart. Bo Ya said, ‘Amazing! When you listen, it is as if our hearts are resonating together.’ When Ziqi died, Bo Ya split apart his *qin*, broke his strings and never played again. Thus, we have the songs *Gao Shan* (High Mountains) and *Liu Shui* (Flowing Water).” Zhu Changwen, *Chʻin shih*, Wen Yuan Ko.

The Chinese expression *zhi* *yin* (知音), “knowing the music,” originated with this story and came to mean a close friendship. The song *Liu Shui* (“Flowing Water”) associated with Bo Ya can be heard on Track 3, played by contemporary *guqin* master Li Xiangting.
music in vogue at the time, especially as played on the guqin, was fueled by its association with virtuous sentiments and thus symptomatic of the corruption of music by morality and politics.\footnote{Ronald Egan gives a thoughtful analysis of the taste for sad (bei 悲) music during the Han and Wei-Jin periods in “The Controversy over Music and ‘Sadness’ and Changing Conceptions of the Qin in Middle Period China.” \textit{Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies}, 57, no. 1 (1997): 5-66.}

To claim further, as the Guest does, that skilled listeners do not rely upon a constant, or at least consistent, relationship between sounds and feelings ignores the common experience of being fooled by someone’s outward expression, such as not perceiving when a smile masks a grieved heart. Accurately perceiving the meaning or emotion of music likewise does not require the stable identity of sound and meaning, just as an adequately skilled perceiver will know a person’s feelings regardless of her countenance. This applies equally to claims about understanding music of the past; but, as Xi Kang argues, the very possibility of detecting the character of previous eras in their music requires constancy between sounds and feelings across time, space, and culture. What other means of historical transmission could there be? And yet, the persistent facts of deception and perceptual error, as well as varying customs of sonic expression, indicate a lack of constancy between sound and emotion that calls into question how music could convey feelings at a distance—whether between people or across eras.\footnote{Although Xi Kang and the Guest are not concerned with the kind of ontological questioning found in contemporary debates about the identity of a musical work, their discussion bears certain similarities. If the meaning of a song can be detected in it, what is the relationship between this meaning and the musical structure of the song? How could the same meaning be passed via music to later generations without maintaining the identity of the sounds and integrity of the formal structure? If the virtues of King Wen are perceivable in music, for instance, how can adding notes or changing the rhythm not alter what is perceived? However, the resolutely non-Platonic understanding of form in Chinese philosophy, along with a correlative understanding of sameness and difference, remain unmet by contemporary Western philosophy of music, and so here the comparison ends.}

Xi Kang and the Guest do agree that feelings accumulate in the heartmind (xin 心) according to external influences; but here they also diverge, with the Guest assuming that these feelings can then be expressed in sound and music, and Xi Kang reasoning that if emotions only come into
existence in the heartmind through contact with external things, then emotions cannot exist independently in sound and music. Using the character (發 fa) to mean “release”—which in other texts is often meant as “transmit,” “produce,” or “express”—he emphasizes that music releases rather than produces emotions.\(^\text{19}\) For Xi Kang, confusing these terms leads to the fundamental error of attributing emotions to music:

> You cannot say that the release of grief and joy by music is like the production of love and hate by worthiness and stupidity. Rather, the effect of harmonious sounds on people's heartminds is akin to the way that wine releases their feelings.\(^\text{20}\)

The primary characteristics of wine, he says, are that it is either sweet or bitter, while drinkers may become angry or delighted, for instance. We do not therefore claim that wine contains delight or anger, instead we attribute these responses to the uninhibiting effects of wine.

The Guest objects to Xi Kang’s distinction between release and production by drawing an analogy to facial and vocal expressions: delight and anger show in our faces just as grief and joy manifest in our sounds. Is a musical instrument really so different from a voice? How can a musician’s sounds not be affected by changes in his or her feelings? Notably, emotions such as joy or sorrow, especially when they are strong, are often expressed in vocal sounds without words—in sighs, laughter, gasps, cries, clucks, moans, and so forth. Even if music does release emotions already present in the listener or musician, why are these feelings not expressible in musical sounds as they are in faces, gestures, and vocalizations? And, since the Guest and Xi Kang agree that feelings build

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\(^{19}\) In the Great Preface to the *Book of Songs*, for example, we find 發 fa used in a statement also repeated in the *Yue Ji*, that feelings “go forth” or are “expressed” in sounds (情發於聲). See *Book of Songs*, Great Preface, sec 2. In this passage, James Legge translates 發 fa as “go forth” and Stephen Owen renders it as “emerge,” but in contrast to Xi Kang’s view, both versions retain the idea that emotions are in the sound.

\(^{20}\) 不請哀樂發於聲音，如愛憎之生於賢愚也。然和聲之感人心，亦猶酒醴之發人請也。
in the heartmind according to external influences, why exclude music as one of the influences that fill the heart with joy or sorrow?

Xi Kang’s response draws on an analogy with language. Even the most skilled listeners are bound by perceptual limits, as exemplified in an encounter with a wholly foreign language. As with learning to understand a language, the emotional attributes we take to be properties of music become perceivable through learning culturally contingent practices of association and repetition. While over time we come to associate certain forms and feelings, and there may be aesthetic patterns at work that encourage these associations, the exceptions—or lack of “constancy” between words and meaning, countenance and feeling, and music and emotion—cannot be trivialized as matters of inept perception. As Xi Kang points out, the same physical features may be shared by people with very different feelings, and vice versa: “The relationship of tones to the heartmind is like that of formal appearance to mind…If the mind is the same but the appearance is different, how can you speak of observing the form and knowing the mind?”

Great perceptual skill cannot change the fact that form does not always match feeling, whether in sound or countenance.

In evaluating Xi Kang’s response, we should notice his claim that the relationship between love and worthiness (and hate and stupidity) differs from the relationship between wine and the emotions that are released when one drinks. In this regard, he suggests that the aesthetic is autonomous from both ethical and emotional qualities, and at the same time implies a closer relation between the latter two. We cannot know whether someone’s tears are from joy or sorrow merely by

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21 Xi Kang remarks, “If a sage unexpectedly found himself in the lands of the Hu barbarians, would he understand their language or not? My opponent must say that he would…One can know a language only through repeated contact and exchange, just as children learn from a teacher and only then know a language.” 聖人卒入胡域，當知其所言不乎？難者必曰：知之...若當關接而知言，此為孺子學言于所師，然後知之。

22 夫聲之于音，猶形之于心也，有形同而情乖、貌殊而心均者...苟心同而形異，則何言乎觀形而知心哉？
their taste, and likewise, we cannot know whether a musician is sad or happy from the sound of their music alone. Here, he distances himself from a Confucian perspective in which the inseparability of ethical and aesthetic (and thus political) considerations supports using the arts in service of cultivating character. To the contrary, for Xi Kang (following Zhuangzi) the independence of the aesthetic facilitates self-cultivation and “nourishing life” (*yangsheng* 養生) by helping return humans to a state of natural equanimity, free from the excesses of the emotions. If the aesthetics of music were emotionally bound, then music would not be able to harmonize the idiosyncratic imbalances of each unique heart.

Although untainted by emotions, music is not without specific qualities. Xi Kang acknowledges that music may be restless or tranquil, for instance, but the common element is harmony unmarked by human sentiments. If restlessness and tranquility come from music, we might ask, as the Guest does, why should a line be drawn at grief and joy? For Xi Kang, the answer is that aesthetic properties such as restlessness and tranquility, unlike emotions such as grief and joy, share in the natural harmony of music as aesthetic patterns that also exist outside the human realm, and thus are not dependent on the human heartmind. The diversity of personal responses to music, as well as its power to bring equanimity to the heart, lies in the way music’s “great harmony” naturally releases what it contacts; the stirring of different hearts by the same harmonious sounds explains why there are so many different responses to the same song. When one person feels joy and another feels sorrow, this is music is “blowing differently through the myriad things” and releasing each person's unique emotions.23

A lack of emotions in music does not rule out its meaningfulness, nor does it imply that responses—including emotional reactions—to music are wholly random, or that music is

23 其音無變于昔，而歡慼竝用，斯非吹萬不同耶?
autonomous from its player. Xi Kang observes that when music intervals are close together, notes are high, and rhythmic changes are many, our bodies become restless, but when sounds are spacious and steady, the notes are low, and the changes are fewer, we become tranquil and serene. Elsewhere, in his “Poetic Essay on the Qin,” (Qin Fu), he writes:

Tones seem to hesitate, and look backward longingly…Or they seem to loiter quietly, going on in an easy rhythm as if in a leisurely environment. Then suddenly they quicken in swift tempo, suggesting a rising wind that scatters the clouds.

Sometimes the chords rise in rich confusion, they resemble someone rushing; they advance evenly together, like horses galloping in line: first they seem to tug in opposite directions, but soon their movements coalesce…Now they rise in noble feeling, then again they falter as if in sadness…They are as if now lamenting, then rejoicing…

If the heart is tranquil and the hands able, the touch of the fingers will respond to one’s thoughts, and the player will be able to express himself through the music.

While perhaps these descriptions are surprising given all Xi Kang has argued against, they offer a concrete opportunity to clarify his ideas about music. First, clearly his rejection of emotions in music is not a dismissal of their metaphorical attribution to music. Second, primary aspects of music such as tempo, rhythm, and timbre have relational patterns with affective qualities such as rising, expansion, faltering, and floating, which encourage hearing music as something else (weather, animals, and feelings included). From the fact that music produces affective, embodied responses

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25 It has been argued that perception of even the most primary qualities of musical sound are shaped by metaphorical transference, especially through the metaphor of musical space. See especially Roger Scruton's, Aesthetics of Music (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) and his essay “Understanding Music,” in The Aesthetic Understanding (London: Carcanet, 1983). See also, Christopher Peacocke’s “The Perception of Music: Sources of Significance,” British Journal of Aesthetics, Vol. 49, Number 3, July 2009, 257-275.
we still cannot conclude that emotions such as grief and joy are intrinsic to music; but for Xi Kang, music is certainly not meaningless.26

So how should his last sentence—“the player will be able to express himself through the music”—be understood? This is the most puzzling bit of the passage given the autonomy Xi Kang grants music. As clues, other possible translations include: “only then will meaning (yi 意) be expressed (ni 擬)” or “only then will the music resemble (擬) the meaning or intention” or “and all is played only as intended.” The idea of expression encourages our desire for content, to seek what music expresses, but expression need not be objectified in this way, especially if we take meaning as meaningfulness. According to Xi Kang’s description, a lack of content contributes to music’s meaningfulness in two ways. First, the absence of signs or other forms of mediation in music are responsible for releasing our emotions. Second, when a musician with a tranquil heartmind (i.e., emptied of emotions) and skilled hands plays music, empty of signs, touch reflects thought and meaningfulness is present. If we must still consider this in terms of expression, it is akin to the way that nature expresses itself.

The naturalization of musical expression is an important element of Xi Kang’s project to liberate music from the vagaries of moral and political judgment, as part of a larger attempt to de-emphasize its connection to Confucian ritual, and to situate music closer to the Zhuangzian ideals of ziran 自然 (naturalness or spontaneity) and emptiness. Contrary to the Confucian idea that music unites people as a function of its capacity for sharing sentiments, Xi Kang’s argument implies that it

26 以此言之，躁靜者，聲之功也；哀樂者，情之主也；不可見聲有躁靜之應，因謂哀樂皆由聲音也。“Speaking from this perspective, restlessness and tranquility are the effect of sounds; grief and joy rule the emotions. We cannot say that grief and joy come from the music just because it has been seen that music produces restlessness and tranquility.”

is music’s lack of sentiments that affords a unity or harmonization of diverse feelings among listeners and musicians alike; and most importantly, the release of accumulated emotions by harmonious sounds facilitates our return to an original state of serenity, such as described of the *guqin* player in van Gulik’s *Lore of the Lute*: “When the heart is harmonious and even, one is affected neither by sorrow nor by joy: one becomes in complete harmony with what is truly from heaven *(tian)* in one’s nature.”

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1.1.2 Arousal and Expression Theories of Music

Bringing the debate between Xi Kang and his Guest into the terrain of contemporary philosophy of music yields notable similarities and telling differences. For example, in arousal theories, broadly speaking, emotions belong to people and not to music, and to call a song sad is really just to say that it tends to arouse sadness in listeners. In explaining why certain reactions are common to particular styles of music, arousal theories sometimes attribute dispositional properties to music; for example, sad music has the dispositional property of arousing sadness akin to the manner in which opium has the dispositional property of putting people to sleep.

One of the persistent challenges to this theory is explaining why otherwise psychologically healthy people listen to music that arouses negative emotions. This was also a concern during Xi Kang’s time due to the literati’s love of sad *(bei)* music. If so-called sad music gives rise to

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genuinely sad feelings, why do people seek out and even enjoy such an experience?29 Several lines of response have been given. Aristotle’s idea of catharsis has been called upon to explain how negative emotional responses are simultaneously a psychologically positive purge of these emotions. As well, Hume’s comments on tragedy have been used to contend that the responses in question are not actually negative because the pleasure we take in the artwork as an aesthetic presentation transforms any negative emotions aroused.30 It has also been suggested that since our emotional responses to music are objectless (we are not sad about some particular thing), we are given an opportunity to feel and explore otherwise difficult emotions within the context of the artwork and without the usual life implications.31

Along similar lines, there is the idea that music evokes moods rather than emotions with intentional objects. But this does not explain why people purposely seek negative or uncomfortable moods. Heidegger’s description of mood (Stimmung) as attunement (Befindlichkeit) offers something of an answer, given his understanding of how moods disclose our existential possibilities and offer access to contemplative states. A fundamental mood or attunement (Grundstimmung), such as angst, joy, or melancholy, is a relation to the whole—which necessarily cannot be an object of reflection—rather than to an intentional object, this or that thing, in the world that we may feel emotions toward. These primordial attunements/moods are prone to evoke the “wonder” (Plato and Aristotle’s thaumazein) at the heart of philosophical passion (pathos). In this understanding of mood, a love of

29 In his “Essay on Music,” Ruan Ji, Xi Kang’s close friend and fellow worthy of the Bamboo Grove, recounts the Emperor Huan’s reaction to music that filled him with misery: “When Emperor Huan heard the lute of the state of Chu, misery afflicted his heart. Leaning against a screen and moved with emotion, he let out a long sigh, saying, “How brilliant! With lute playing like this, after just one song I am fully satisfied.” Is he satisfied by misery? Or something else? Quoted from Reed Andrew Criddel’s, “Rectifying Lasciviousness through Mystical Learning: An Exposition and Translation of Ruan Ji’s Essay on Music,” in Asian Music, Vol. 38, Number 2, Summer/Fall 2007, 60.
sad music may not be so different from the *eros* or *pathos* of the philosopher, which cannot be reduced to psychological terms.

Yet, if what we feel is not truly sadness, but perhaps aestheticized melancholy, existential attunement, or we are generally moved by the music, then just as Xi Kang claimed, we misname music by calling it “sad.” And while his views accord with arousal theories of music by denying the attribution of emotions to music itself and restricting emotional expression to people, in his most radical thesis, Xi Kang insists that music does not cause emotions in the listener. On this point, he is most distinct from any contemporary philosophy of music. Additionally, while arousal theorists are comfortable calling music sad as long as it is clear that this is only a convention of language and that emotions are actually in the listener, Xi Kang insists that naming be more precise. It is incorrect to refer, for instance, to the dormative properties of opium or to wine as having properties of delight and anger, regardless of whether these properties are taken to be dispositional or expressive. To be confused about this is to risk what Xi Kang deemed “errors regarding name and event.”

As for the Guest of Qin, his view is well aligned with strains of contemporary expression theory of music. In dialogue with arousal theorists of music, proponents of the expression view explain music’s expressiveness as a perceived property of the music itself, thereby separating the listener’s reaction from the music’s qualities, and allowing for the possibility that a listener may feel healthy satisfaction or even joy when hearing sad or dark music. On this view, if the expression of the emotions is taken to belong to someone, it is usually the composer or performer instead of the listener. The Guest of Qin holds a strong version of expression theory by assuming that music is capable of directly transferring the feelings of a composer or musician to the audience via the intrinsically emotional qualities of music. Here, the challenge is explaining how this transfer occurs. The issues are thus both functional and interpretive: how does this transfer happen and what
ensures a listener’s perceptual accuracy? Furthermore, musicians and composers may not feel—
either in production or perhaps at all—the emotions that their music expresses. How can a musician
play a song expressing an emotion that has not been experienced firsthand?32

Despite some differences with arousal theory, Xi Kang is by no means an expression theorist,
and many of his major arguments anticipate current criticisms of expression theory. In his insistence
on using names correctly, Xi Kang articulates one of the most persuasive objections to expression
theory; strictly speaking, only sentient agents such as humans have and express emotions. Although
there may be ways to define expression so as to circumvent or mitigate the problem (claiming music
is expressive of emotion, for example), he does point out something important about the “intimacy”
of listening: our feelings seem to be in us. In fact, we may be prone to attribute what we feel to the
music because it is experienced in such an immediate, uninterpreted, and viscerally embodied
manner. That is, sensing musical sounds is so spatiotemporally near to our felt responses as to seem
direct and personal. As a result, we are liable to confuse our feelings with the music itself.

If Xi Kang and arousal theorists are correct that emotions belong to listeners and not to
music, is music entirely subjective? Is calling a dirge “happy” a mistake any more serious than just
getting contingent naming conventions wrong? For Xi Kang, a dirge is neither happy nor sad, and
using either name would be a matter of social practices that rest on a misconception of emotions as
intrinsic to music, along with a tendency to project what we personally feel onto external things.

32 Much of the appeal and power of the blues music of the American South is anchored by a belief that it expresses the
intense, raw emotions of its musicians. Autobiographical authenticity is essential to the esteem accorded the greatest
Blues players, with stories of their suffering and hardship as legendary as their sound, and believed to be embodied in
their music. Blind Willie Johnson (1897–1945), a virtuosic slide guitarist and blues singer, was blinded at age 7 by his
stepmother when she threw lye into his eyes. He remained in poverty throughout his life, performing on street corners
in central Texas towns for money. His last days were spent sleeping on a bed of wet newspapers in the remains of his
house that had burned to the ground. He shortly caught pneumonia and died after being refused medical care at the local
hospital because he was black. His song, “Dark Was the Night, Cold Was the Ground,” was one of 27 musical
recordings on the Golden Record sent into space in 1977 on the Voyager spacecraft, and intended to represent humanity
in an encounter with extraterrestrial life. On Track 4, Blind Willie Johnson performs this song.
And yet, the example of the “happy” dirge seems to allude to something besides just linguistic error or personalizing music. Consider whether actually feel “happiness” or “sadness.” It seems rather that we learn to identify and name joyful or sad feelings by appropriately feeling them on joyful or sad occasions. The reflexive process in which we learn to name emotions appropriately—whether in people or music—does not make such appraisals wholly subjective because music is inextricable from forms of life that depend on non-arbitrary social agreements about the emotional character of things. In addition to the fact that each of us is not the lone, idiosyncratic author of our experiences, there are also other aesthetic and physiological reasons for naming which are not random.

Even in his insistence on music’s autonomy from emotions, Xi Kang recognized qualitative and affective forces in music, especially restlessness and tranquility. These are still names, however, and raise the issue of whether Xi Kang’s argument against naming emotions in music can be extended to mean any application of language to music will be inadequate and inappropriate. Hence, the well-worn warnings and mea culpas about describing music with words, such as the oft repeated: “Writing about music is like dancing about architecture.” And yet, dancing is rather architectural, isn’t it? Is there a critical difference between qualities such as tranquil and restless, and joyful and sad? We slip into a questionable (and linguistic) theory of meaning when we assume that emotion words essentially or objectively refer to feelings and secondarily by extension to other phenomena. Calling “Ode to Joy” from Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony “sad” or his Quasi un Fantasia (posthumously titled “Moonlight Sonata”) “happy” indicates emotional as well as aesthetic and linguistic confusion, but what, aside from social convention, is the basis for getting names right? And is it any less difficult to identify an emotion than the qualities of a song?233

233 The title “Moonlight Sonata” is controversial for the reasons raised by these questions. Music critic Ludwig Rellstab re-named the sonata in 1836, after Beethoven’s death, because it reminded him of moonlight reflected off Lake Lucerne.
1.1.3 Resemblance theory

In resemblance theories of music, we find a contemporary variation on the idea of music’s expressiveness that offers a potential negotiation between the ideas of Xi Kang and his Guest, and also plays on the two possible translations of *ni* 擬 as “express” and “resemble” in Xi Kang’s description of how music becomes meaningful when played with tranquil heart. Resemblance theories of musical expression do not claim that music conveys the feelings of the composer or musician per se, but rather music is thought to elicit certain responses according to the ways it resembles human emotions or the broader world of feelings generally. This theory highlights how arousal and expression explanations are not mutually exclusive, yet cannot be assimilated to one another. Malcolm Budd writes,

> Perhaps the most popular misunderstanding of the musical expression of emotion is the assimilation of it to the musical arousal of emotion. But it should be immediately clear that these are different phenomena, even if there are important connections between them.

> A rather more plausible strategy is to attempt to elucidate the musical expression of emotion in terms of the notion of a perceived resemblance—an audible similarity between music and either emotion itself or some phenomenon closely bound up with emotion...In what way can music *sound the way an emotion feels*?\(^{34}\)

The use of resemblance to explain the relation between sound and feeling, expression and response, is appealing given our perception of music as patterned and the felt similarities between the moving

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patterns of music and the inner life of emotions. The suggestion that music sounds the way emotions feel is itself a demonstration of resemblance in the way it “strikes a chord” as an idea. But what could it mean to say music sounds the way emotions feel, or to speak of the way an idea strikes a chord? How does resemblance operate here?

Among the many possible elucidations of resemblance between music and feeling, philosophers tend to either maintain that music resembles human physical expressions of emotions—in gestures, countenance, voice, posture, and other bodily movements and behavior—or to favor the idea that music is more formally symbolic. Although resemblance is not necessarily dependent on a representational conception of meaning, strong presumptions about the primacy of linguistic and emotional meaning, as well as etymological processes, easily lead philosophers to think that music must be symbolic or representative of these supposedly more genuine sources of meaning. But again, how we come to identify and name feelings may not be so different from how we describe music. In both cases, resemblance ought not be confused with representation.

In being guided by the question of how music is meaningful, in contrast to a search for meaning in music, my project here also eschews a representational theory of meaning. To seriously evaluate resemblance theory in this context then, representational meaning cannot be imported, for instance, by thinking that minor chords symbolize or represent sadness via resemblance. This is not to deny that musical sounds can operate symbolically, rather it is to assert that this is not their primary use and not the central way we experience them as meaningful. Why not consider, for example, that minor chords are appropriate in sad songs because these sounds are an integral part of

what it means for a song to be sad in a certain form of life? What can be said about our way of life in which learning to appropriately call a dirge “sad” is equally a moment of understanding sadness in general and learning to recognize sad faces and sad people?

Many philosophers have compared understanding music to understanding a face, including Xi Kang’s foil, the Guest from Qin, Wittgenstein, and contemporary theorists such as Peter Kivy and Stephen Davies. Kivy has compared listening to a sad musical expression to seeing a Saint Bernard’s face as sad, while Davies has draws the comparison with a Bassethound. We see sadness in the dog’s face because its features resemble our own faces when we express sadness, and we attribute emotions to music in a similar way (e.g., music “droops”). In turn, the criteria for musical expression of an emotion are supposedly dependent on publicly agreed upon criteria for human emotional expression and thus do not require occurrent emotions—neither the Saint Bernard nor I need to actually feel sad for me to perceive its sad face, likewise the sadness of a song need not belong to anyone. 36

However, while it seems that perceiving emotional attributes in music should be linked to how we perceive human emotions, we cannot be certain that the former is wholly dependent on the latter. Sensing emotions may also rely on being able to recognize emotional qualities, or meaningful resemblances, in non-human phenomena. Our ability to make sense of red-hot anger, having the blues, or blooming joy suggests that aesthetics are not less important than psychological and social designations in identifying and understanding emotions. These aesthetic outward criteria often illuminate the supposedly internal processes we call emotions, and ought to prompt the question of how sadness resembles a dirge, not just how a dirge resembles sadness.

36 “Because there are objective criteria that provide the basis for our attributing emotions to people, and because the grounds for our attributing an expressive character to appearances (without regard to feelings) derive directly from these criteria, the expression of emotions in music is no less public or objective than is the case with other attributions of emotions. Stephen Davies, Musical Meaning and Expression, 241.
Moreover, do we know when a Saint Bernard or a Bassethound is actually sad? While we sometimes misperceive other people’s emotions and can be fooled by appearances—a key point in Xi Kang’s argument—we are nonetheless often aware of what others feel despite appearances to the contrary. Hearing music as sad, while perhaps like seeing sadness in the drooping features of a Bassethound’s face, or in a weeping willow tree, may be better compared to perceiving the face of a friend who truly feels sad and does not simply display a fallen countenance. This would not be a matter of just recognizing certain structural features such as a downturned mouth or a furrow, for we are able to recognize emotions masked behind contradictory forms. If perceiving music is like understanding a face in this way, then something deeper than recognizing structural properties and external resemblances is at work—something that also helps differentiate between hearing meaning in music and listening meaningfully.

In “A Simulation Theory of Musical Expressivity,” Tom Cochrane gives a useful account of a causal basis for attributing emotions to music that centers on the thesis that music takes over the simulation mechanism of the brain responsible for detecting one’s own and other people’s emotions.37 Starting with a theory of the emotions as primarily constituted by patterns of felt bodily changes, rather than emphasizing the role of conceptual judgments in emotions, Cochrane claims that any bodily changes (including respiratory, circulatory, digestive, musculoskeletal, and endocrine) that generate feelings can be incorporated into an experience of an emotion. Tactile sensations such as pressure, movement and heat are therefore all features of emotional states, and “even things like the feel of a cold winter’s day or a fur coat could potentially be incorporated within the emotional

state because they directly affect the sense of impact on one’s body and could thereby modify the experience of an emotion.”

In addition to assuming that bodily changes are essential to emotions, Cochrane stresses the neural basis of feeling these changes. According to what neurologist Antonio Damasio calls the “as-if” loop of neural simulation, the brain continuously maps the body’s overall state, providing an immediate, centralized basis for the conscious sensing and regulation of emotions (as patterns of bodily change), while also enabling the anticipation and simulation of physiological changes, even in their absence. Cochrane connects the way this system, with its ongoing tracking, anticipation, and simulation of bodily changes (including expressive movements), may overlap with the mirror neuron system, which fires both when we perform an action and when we perceive the action. The operation of these systems can be witnessed in emotional contagion such as laughing or panicking when another person does, despite not knowing why, or in the way emotional states can be altered through bodily movements and postures. Mirror neurons are thought to be critical to the human capacity for empathy, such that perceiving another person’s emotion is tied to our neural mirroring of it; in empathy, my perception of you is converted into a motor understanding for producing the same behavior myself. Mirroring expressive behavior stimulates neural activity that arouses an emotional feeling in us, which is also perceived as belonging to the other person. In this way, a first person sense of the other is produced. Empathy is thus grounded in the simulation of bodily patterns, and one cannot be directly aware of another’s emotions without this sympathetic arousal.

Likewise with music, the arousal of bodily changes in the listener grants an immediate and directly felt experience of these changes, while also leading to the impression that the emotions are

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in the music. In order to explain the relationship between music and the arousal of bodily changes we feel as emotions, Cochrane incorporates resemblance theory, but in a stronger sense than Kivy and Davies. While their theories account for musical expressivity through outward resemblances between musical structures and bodily movements, shapes, and vocalizations, construing resemblance according to the operations of the simulation mechanism and mirror neuron systems means that resemblance operates more intimately than just as similarities between outward forms.

If expression supposedly conveys what the expressed state feels like, then hearing music as expressive of joy or sorrow, for instance, cannot just be a matter of recognizing outward similarities. There must be a relationship between the perceived audio qualities and the embodied experience of the emotional state. If music conveys (or induces) the patterns of bodily changes associated with various emotions, it is because there are important intermodal connections between sound and touch, which, for instance, allow us to grasp resemblances between music and motion, and help forge a unity of sonic-emotional perception. Since the “as-if” simulation loop maps the temporal development of bodily changes, Cochrane speculates that it may serve as the neural basis for mirroring the aural presentation of movement in music, resulting in feelings (tactile and emotional) that we attribute to music (auditory). As he and many other sound theorists emphasize, hearing evolved through a refinement of our sense of touch and the two senses share much in common, including structuring experience less in terms of discrete objects than vision. Tactile feelings, for

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39 Cochrane notes that restricting resemblance to the surface level, for instance by claiming that hearing sad music is like seeing the mask that traditionally denotes tragedy (because both resemble the appearance of a sad person’s face), limits any explanation of the connections between the perception of outward qualities and the embodied experience of the emotional state. “If one defers to the resemblance between the mask and a real sad face, then one simply pushes the question back to why real faces are expressive of emotion.” Cochrane, 201.
example, are characterized by “ongoing actions and textural contrasts” and sound is experienced as “continuous streams of movement and timbral contrasts.”

The feeling of movement in music, especially in timbral contrasts, is characteristically intensive. This seems to accord with the idea that sound and music are not extensive and therefore non-spatial. Touch, on the other hand, is the sense through which we most straightforwardly experience the extensive characteristics that define space, such as dimension. But considering that hearing is actually a refined form of touch, sound presents a very interesting transition point from the extensive to intensive. Is the persistent sense of space in music just a metaphor of the extended world left by the sensory kinship between touch and hearing? The sonic movements of music do provoke our embodied sense of extended space, as dance testifies, yet some of the aspects of music that feel most spatial are intensive and, as such, are resistant to the kind of objective measurements we associate with extensive phenomena.

By way of illustration, theories that limit resemblance to forms that can be objectified have difficulty capturing timbre and harmonic texture, which more closely resemble tactile and proprioceptive feelings, but without being extensive. As resonant phenomena, timbre and harmonic texture are readily felt but difficult to objectify; to use a provisional distinction, they tend to convey the way a sound is rather than what it is (although interestingly, they do convey the material of the instrument). Cochrane notices the way sound in general resists objectification and so tends to absorb the listener, stating that, “music literally resonates with feeling.” Although he chooses to call his account a “simulation” theory of music expressivity, resonance, mentioned only once, is a stronger challenger to the idea that music sounds the way emotions feel because they formally resemble each

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40 Cochrane, 202.
41 Cochrane, 203.
other. Because resonance implies a more affective, qualitative, and mutual process than simulation or mirroring, it guards against reifying resemblance.

Cognitive or neuroscientific explanations of the relationship between music and emotions do not substitute for an aesthetic account, but they are useful when considering the perception of resemblances between music and emotion. In particular, the introduction of resonance into the discussion of perceiving resemblance may not only help resolve the question of why the simulation mechanism—supposedly developed to track the emotions of people—is triggered by music to begin with, but raises the related, and perhaps more important, question of whether listening meaningfully to music is more like understanding a sad person than seeing a weeping willow or Saint Bernard as sad. If music does resonate with feeling, then by definition it would activate or amplify our systems for perceiving actual emotions and not just resemblances of them. The question has now shifted from how feelings and music resemble one another to how they resonate.

And, circling back to an initial aesthetic question, even if music does convey the bodily changes that give emotions their felt character, and perhaps “resonates with feeling” as a result, is this proof that music expresses emotions? Reminded again by Analects 17.11 that bells and drums do not constitute music, by Xi Kang that weeping does not constitute grief, and by Wittgenstein that inner processes stand in need of outward criteria, bodily changes may be an important, even essential, part of emotions and yet not be sufficient to constitute them. Although Cochrane’s theory seeks to demonstrate that music expresses emotions, by remaining largely neurobiological, his account cannot fully address the aesthetic issue of expression. Moreover, he does not consider a broader account of resonance in which it is a way of perceiving not limited to its effect on human emotions. Such an account bears on what, if anything, can be conveyed through music.
1.2 Resonance: The Possibility of Sense

In *Listening*, Jean-Luc Nancy speaks of how “the possibility of sense” may be “identified with the possibility of resonance, or of sonority itself.” For Nancy, listening is oriented to sonority and resonance rather than message, and therefore to sense itself and the possibility of meaning, while hearing attends to signification and determinate meanings. When someone speaks to us, we hear—or attempt to hear—a message; but in music, we listen for the sounds themselves. In Nancy’s phrasing, sound tends to disappear in speech, while sense becomes sound in music. This difference is encouraged by the way the sonorous “outweighs form”: “It does not dissolve it, but rather enlarges it; it gives it an amplitude, a density, and a vibration of undulation whose outline never does anything but approach.” Consequently, in sound sense is not “content” to make sense as *logos*, but wants also to resound.

Applying Nancy’s distinction to Xi Kang’s ideas about sound, listening rather than hearing is attuned to harmonious sounds because they are without signs, images, or form (*xiang*). What he means by harmonious sounds remains to be discerned, but to start let us note that during Xi Kang’s time, philosophers, musicians, and rulers alike took *ganying* or resonance (variously construed as mutual, sympathetic, and spontaneous) to be a key sonic and cosmological phenomenon that explained the connections between discrete objects across space and time according to resonating, mutually shared patterns and dynamics. In turn, this most serious regard for resonance further established the trustworthiness of sound and the perceptual privilege of listening.

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44 The rise of systems of spontaneous resonance is dated to late Warring States and Han times (roughly 4th to 2nd century BCE), when correlative cosmologies and the belief in sound as a cosmic power also rose to prominence. See Erica Brindley, “The Cosmic Power of Sound in the Late Warring States and Han Periods,” *Journal of Chinese Religions*, Vol. 35, 2007, 29-64.
1.2.1 *Ganying* 感應: Mutual Resonance

In Chapter 6 of the Han Dynasty (206 BCE—220 CE) text, the *Huainanzi*, the following description is given:

The mutual response of things which resemble one another is darkly mysterious and extremely subtle. Knowledge cannot explain it, nor discussion unravel it. Thus when the eastern wind arises, clear wine overflows. When the silkworm exudes fresh silk, the string of the *shang* note snaps. Something has stirred them. When a drawing [of the moon] is traced in ashes, the moon’s halo becomes incomplete. When a whale dies, comets appear. Something has activated them.\(^{45}\)

In this text, with which Xi Kang and his fellow friends of the Bamboo Grove were familiar, the mutual responsiveness of things via resonance is a pivotal theme reflecting the popularity and systemization of theories of resonance during the Han period. *Ganying* 感應, or mutual resonance, was thought to disclose the primary interrelationality among phenomena, and provided a way to explain the processes of influence at work in the cosmos and culture alike. Erica Brindley has persuasively suggested that the emergent cosmology of the late Warring States and early Han, commonly referred to as “correlative cosmology,” may be better captured in the idea of resonance rather than correlation.\(^{46}\) While “correlative cosmology” usefully distinguishes the natural philosophy


\(^{46}\) On the distinction between a correlative and resonance cosmology, Brindley writes, ““Discourses of the day on the workings of nature display a fundamental belief in the inherent harmony and relationship between certain categories of objects in the world. Most scholars use the term ‘correlative cosmology’ to refer to a very diverse range of discourses on the natural philosophy of the day. Because such a reference fails to describe adequately the underlying view of causation that makes such a cosmology distinctive—namely, that radically different objects obtain mystical resonance with each other—I prefer to use the phrase ‘cosmology of mystical resonance’ instead.” Erica Brindley, “Music, Cosmos, and the Development of Psychology in Early China,” *T’oung Pao* XCII (2006), 5. I differ from Brindley in choosing the more practical description, “mutual resonance,” instead of the more esoteric term, “mystical resonance.” While the interactions of phenomena are mysterious indeed, “mystic” is likely to evoke ideas of metaphysical and religious transcendence of dualism—ideas which are foreign to indigenous Chinese philosophy. In addition, any talk of causality here implies neither necessary nor sufficient causation. If there is a principle of causality in traditional Chinese thought, it is a principle of insufficient reason. On causality in Chinese philosophy, see Cheng Chung-yung, “Model of Causality in Chinese Philosophy: A Comparative Study,” *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (Jan. 1976), 3-20.
of the Chinese from the metaphysics of other traditions, most especially from substance dualism, correlation indicates but does not explain how transformation—the centerpiece of Chinese cosmology—actually occurs, and therefore remains vulnerable to the tendency to formalize or objectify resemblance. Certainly, an adequate understanding of qi 氣 as the dynamic energy driving the mutual transformation of correlatives, such as yin/yang 陰陽 and wuxing 五行 (five phases), helps prevent interpreting correlation as correspondence, especially if qi is also understood in terms of its own resonant activity in the processual and mutual dynamic between correlates. But by emphasizing resonance instead of correlation, the changing, affective, and qualitative dynamics between things is more strongly highlighted, and wards against objectification (and representation) when answering how music sounds the way emotions feel.

*Ganying* is often and erroneously translated as “stimulus-response.” Most critically, the model of stimulus and response implies an autonomy of entities and interactions that simply does not exist in Chinese philosophy. All things are structured by a fundamental intimacy with other things, in mutually determining relationships and co-constituted processes. An equally mistaken aspect of the stimulus-response rendering of *ganying* is that it ignores how this activity is characterized by affective unity. When the meanings of *gan* 感 as “to feel,” “to move,” “to touch,” or “to affect” and *ying* 應 as “to answer” or “to respond,” are kept separate, we are led toward the diachronic, “stimulus-response” translation. However, closer consideration of the range of meanings indicates that *ganying* is a more aesthetic activity driven by synchronic, mutual affectivity. Both *gan* and *ying* contain the heart radical (心), implying that their interaction is not mechanistic but arises through feeling. Above

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47 John Major attributes the formulation of *ganying* resonance through the medium of *qi* to Zou Yan (305-240BC), the influential scholar and synthesizer of *yin/yang* and *wuxing* theories. Although his may be the first official formulation, the idea of *qi* as resonant is present in numerous philosophical, acoustic, and medical texts. John S. Major, *Heaven and Earth in Early Han Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 44.
the heart radical, in *gan*, is the character *xian* (咸) meaning “together” and “unite,” while in the same position in *ying*, we find *yan* (雁) depicting birds flying together in formation. Importantly, *ying* also means “echo,” and so invokes re-sounding and resonance. In any case, the conceptual key is the way that the response reflects, echoes, or is otherwise interdependent and reflexive with what has touched it—a point absent from the stimulus-response model.

In addition to assuming a hard split between subject and object, the stimulus-response structure assumes a model of perception that does not fit the understanding of embodiment in Chinese thought in which the distance between our bodies and the world makes sensing possible by being a space of constitutive interrelationality, rather than serving as an ontological partition (and invitation to skepticism). An understanding of embodiment more agreeable to the Chinese tradition can be found in Merleau-Ponty’s analysis of behaviorism, wherein he critiques the stimulus-response model of perception for positing a simplistic causal account in which an autonomous agent acts on its environment, on one side, and a passive recipient receives an input on the other side. In contrast, he prioritizes the phenomenal body, a lack of ontological disjunction between subject and object, and relations that are intrinsic and reciprocal rather than extrinsic and one-directional. There is always pre-conscious contact with the world that is not the result of being a passive recipient of a stimulus, thus a response is never to a discrete stimulus but to a mutual situation. Perception, for Merleau-Ponty, indicates direction (*sens*) rather than function. Sense as direction comes from

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48 In his critique of theories that posit sensation as a “unit of experience,” Merleau-Ponty writes, “Behavior is thus hidden by the reflex, the elaboration and patterning of stimuli, by a longitudinal theory of nervous functioning, which establishes a theoretical correspondence between each element of the situation and an element of the reaction.” The problem here is that each stimulus must have a “point-by-point” and constant correspondence to an elementary perception. But simple examples such as combining colors show that phenomenon do not correspond to stimulus in this way: “When red and green, presented together, give the result grey, it is conceded that the central combination of stimuli can immediately give rise to a different sensation from what the objective stimuli would lead us to expect…In this case, therefore, the ‘sensible’ cannot be defined as the immediate effect of an external stimulus.” Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (London: Routledge, 2002), 8-9.
embodiment in a world in which space—and distance—are decidedly mutual, affective, and non-mechanistic.

More recently, the stimulus-response model has been criticized by a number of the heirs to Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy who work on enactive theories of perception. Susan Hurley, for example, has argued for the constitutive interdependence of perception and action and against a parallel of the stimulus-response framework, what she called the “input-output” model. Under this view, perception is reduced to sensory input from world to mind, and action is output from mind to world, with cognition somehow mediating between.\(^49\) Along these lines, Alva Noë has observed that if the input-output scenario is correct, then it should be possible to “dissociate capacities for perception, action, and thought.”\(^50\) But, as enactive theorists endeavor to prove, and as is generally assumed in Chinese philosophy, dissociating these capacities is problematic in ways that cast doubt on the possibility of clearly disentangling sensor and sensed.\(^51\)

Finally, while ganying is not captured by the model of stimulus-response, it is also not simply a function of correspondence between two things. Although ganying resonance is often described as occurring between things in the same “category,” or that “resemble” one another, these are correlative relationships operating through mutual implication and complementarity, rather than as correspondence between autonomous entities. Similar to the difference between conceiving of resemblance as matching, objectified forms and resemblance as a process of mirroring or resonance, the interaction between things based on ganying cannot be reduced to concretized forms somehow

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\(^{51}\) For an excellent overview of the views of ancient Chinese philosophers on the holistic nature of sense discrimination and the belief in a “blending” between the senses and the world, see Jane Geaney’s study, *On the Epistemology of the Senses in Early Chinese Thought* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2002).
corresponding to one another according to the ever-problematic idea of sameness. How, then, does *ganying* operate as mutual or sympathetic resonance?

### 1.2.2 Historical Background: Chinese acoustics and philosophy of sound

Historically in China, the idea of *ganying* drew on musical resonance as the favored model and metaphor of how things of resemblance activate one another, as exemplified in the story of a *guqin* tuner causing two instruments to resonate sympathetically while only striking one.

> When the guqin tuner strikes the *gong* note [on one instrument], the *gong* note [on the other instrument] responds: when he plucks the *jiao* note [on one instrument], the *jiao* note [on the other instrument] vibrates. This is because correlated musical notes are in mutual harmony. Now, consider that someone changes the tuning of one string such that it does not match any of the five notes, and striking it causes all twenty-five strings to resonate. In this case, there has as yet been no differentiation regarding sound; it just happens that the sound which governs all musical notes has been evoked. 52

*Ganying* cannot be considered without *he 和* or harmony; not only do musical notes resonate according to their mutual harmonies, there are even higher orders of resonance and harmony governing sound and music on the whole, such as the “Great Harmony” (大和) referred to by Xi Kang. In Charles Le Blanc’s explication of the *Huainanzi*, he defines *ganying* as “the power of things to affect and to be affected in such a way as to bring about harmony,” but as this passage indicates, harmony is also what makes resonance possible. (There is, in fact, a technical basis for this claim)

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52 Charles Le Blanc’s translation of chapter 6 of the *Huainanzi* (sections 11/15b), with “corresponding” notes changed to “correlated.” Charles Le Blanc, *Huai-nan Tzu: Philosophical Synthesis in Early Han Thought: The Idea of Resonance (Kan-Ying) With a Translation and Analysis of Chapter Six* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1985). This example of sympathetic resonance between two guqins occurs in a number of other texts, such as the *Zhuangzi* (24/158), *Chu Ci* (13/156), *Lishi Chunqiu* (13:2/127), and *Chunqiu Fanlu* (57/4b-5a).
insofar as mutually shared harmonic frequencies allow two things to resonate together). Resonance and harmony imply one another, in the physics of sound, and by analogy in the non-musical world.  

The influence of music on Chinese philosophy can be seen in the distinctive use of resonance and harmonics in classical Chinese music, as well as devotion to the nuances of tone quality and the subtleties of “flavor” and “touch” in a single tone. As composer Chou Wen-chung remarked in 1968, although at the time there was a “a growing auditory awareness of a supposedly new dimension in compositional resources — the so-called ‘deviations’ in tonal characteristics,” in Chinese (and Indian) music, single tones have always been considered musical entities themselves, as well as musical events within a composition. For a guqin player in old China, a single tone was a site of tremendous musical diversity and a sonic manifestation of both allusiveness and meaningfulness, lending further esteem to the guqin by philosophers who considered it a “hearing aid,” or instrument of sympathetic resonance able to train the listener to access the deepest and subtlest sounds, including those of nature and the cosmos.

Along with tonality and the dimensionality of single notes, classical Chinese music was likewise obsessed with timbre or sound quality. In *Science and Civilisation in China*, Joseph Needham remarks that the Chinese attention to timbre contrasted so sharply with the European emphasis on

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53 Le Blanc, *Huai-nan Tzu*, 209. A number of other scholars have discussed the influence of acoustic investigations of resonance on Chinese philosophical ideas. Joseph Needham, in *Science and Civilization in China*, and John Major, in his work on chapter 4 of the *Huainanzi*, have each argued that the Chinese imported many important ideas from acoustics into philosophy.


55 Aniruddh Patel, in *Music, Language and the Brain*, points out the rarity of organized systems of timbral contrast within instruments of a culture. Along with the guqin, the tabla is one of only a few timbre-based musical systems. Organized timbral contrasts between instruments, on the other hand, are not unusual and are employed systematically in a number of musical traditions. Patel examines the parallels in timbral organization between tabla music and speech, in particular the association between each drum stroke and a certain “vocable” called a *bol*, from the Hindi word for speech sound. According to Patel’s empirical research, there is a verifiable correspondence between the timbral distinctions of the vocables and the sounds of the tabla. Aniruddh Patel, *Music Language and the Brain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 64.
melody and scale that the first Europeans to experience Chinese music were, as he put it, “baffled.”\textsuperscript{56}

The Chinese delight in tonal nuance and the complexity of timbre abides with their interest in resonance, which in turn reflects their more general fascination with music as a means to explore the interactions of supposedly separate entities across distances, and a philosophical predilection for the subtle, allusive, and liminal. Notably, these qualities were not valued just for their aesthetically productive ambiguity, but because they were believed to offer authentic access to things.

Because timbre involves multidimensional sonic attributes, and encourages the imagination through perceptual indeterminacy, it is both complex to measure and taken to be a largely subjective phenomenon. As a result, it is usually defined either negatively—as that aspect of sound different from other sounds of the same pitch, duration, and loudness—or metaphorically, as the “color” of sound. A ready example illustrating timbre is the difference in sound between the same note played on two different instruments or two people speaking the same word differently.\textsuperscript{57} Technically speaking, while many features influence timbre, its character is largely a matter of temporal envelope and harmonics, or to put it another way: \textit{the shape of time} and \textit{resonance}. The temporal envelope of a sound refers to the evolution of the amplitude of a sound through time; for example, a piano has a sharp attack and a rapid decay whereas the tone of a cello often begins and ends more gradually. The shape of each temporal envelope contributes to a different timbre for the two instruments even when the same notes are played on each. Harmonics, or spectral profile, refer to the distribution of resonant frequencies in a sound and their relative amplitudes. Musical instruments are built to take advantage of the fact that objects have natural frequencies, or harmonics, at which they resonate.

\textsuperscript{56} Joseph Needham, Science and Civilisation in China, 142.
\textsuperscript{57} Aniruddh Patel offers a useful comparison between timbre and the “look” of a human face. If we imagine describing human faces in terms of height, width, complexion and “looks,” then the latter is meant to capture an “overall quality created by the interplay of a number of different features” and is “what makes one person’s face different from another, when faces are matched for height, width, and complexion.” \textit{Music, Language and the Brain}, 28-29.
A single harmonic will create a “pure” sounding timbre, whereas multiple frequencies will generate a richer sound, such as heard in the complex harmonic resonances of a guqin or sitar.

Nancy observes that even if timbre can be separated from other the other aspects of sound, they do not exist without timbre. There is no sound without timbre, just as there is no surface without color. Timbre, he writes, is the “resonance of the sonorous” or “sound itself”:

Timbre is above all the unity of a diversity that its unity does not reabsorb. That is also why it does not yield to measurement or notation as do other musical values (which, however, can never be identified—even pitch—with strict mathematical values)…

Timbre opens, rather, immediately onto the metaphor of other perceptible registers: color (Klangfarbe, ‘the color of sound,’ the German name for timbre), touch (texture, roundness, coarseness), Taste (bitter, sweet), even evocations of smells. In other words, timbre resounds with and in the totality of perceptible registers.

As a unity of diversity that does not give itself up to measurement, timbre is intensive rather than extensive, and if it can be said to have shape, as the temporal envelope of resonance, it is not a spatially extended shape. The astronomical possibilities of temporal contour and harmonics make timbre difficult to objectify, and therefore to systematize, so while timbre is as aesthetically important as pitch, as mentioned earlier, it differs from pitch in rarely being the basis for a musical system. In perceiving timbre, we attend more to how the tone sounds than what the note is (C, E#, etc.). Like the prosodic aspects of speech (rhythm, stress, intonation), which add meaningful affect not conveyed by the formal structures of language (grammar, words) alone, the timbre of sound conveys qualities and feelings not captured by formal elements. If prosody—from the Greek prosōdia, meaning song for instrumental music and pros (“toward”) oide (“song”)—is the music of language, then timbre may well be sonority of music.

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58 Nancy, Listening, 39-40.
Despite the qualitative and quantitative challenges that timbre presents to formalization, timbre is neither beyond perception nor degrees of measure. Digital technologies have allowed the measurable physical attributes of timbre (including harmonic frequencies and temporal envelope) to be calculated and visually represented, leading, for example, to the timbral innovations found in electronic music. Auditory perception of timbre, while subjectively quite refined, eludes systematic categorization because the challenge is not just quantitative but phenomenal; yet for this very reason, timbre opens up a more qualitative vocabulary of metaphorical or secondary senses: a “bright” or “warm” tone, a “blue” or “tight” sound. The complexities of resonant harmonics that constitute timbre demand an aesthetic vocabulary to match its perceptual riches for the listener. If music presents a limit case for semantic analysis, then timbre offers a similar limit case for formalizing and analyzing music, perhaps contributing to its rarity as the basis for formal musical systems.

Jean-Luc Nancy makes much of Jules Lagneau’s observation that when perceiving timbre, we measure nothing: “Intensity and timbre are immediate sensations, in which we can note complexity only by using external analysis. There is something ultimate there for consciousness.” For Nancy, sonority is its most sonorous or least signified in timbre and rhythm. This distance from signification is necessary to the immediacy of intensity and timbre, but does not require a distance from meaningfulness. For example, the classical Chinese belief in an integral relationship between ambiguity and meaningfulness, and the great value placed on cultivated listening, fostered a natural focus on tone and timbre in Chinese music that easily shifted into philosophical terrain. We can witness this in the way that the great number of fingering techniques for producing nuances of tone and harmonics on the guqin—more than any other known musical instrument—are elaborated in

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59 The fundamental metaphors used to describe timbre are often categorized into four dimensions: 1) dull-sharp 2) compact-scattered 3) colorful-colorless and 4) full-empty.
60 Listening, 83, footnote 33.
notation with poetic symbolism and philosophical guidelines to convey the requisite internal disposition of the musician, external setting (usually in nature), and qualitative aspects of the sound played. In *The Lore of the Chinese Lute*, for instance, Van Gulik stresses the importance of symbolic explanations in instructions for *guqin* fingering techniques, such as “A crane dancing in a deserted garden” for the *tuo* fingering (the thumb of the right hand pulls a string outwards) or “A crane singing in the shadow” for the *mo* fingering (the index pulls a string inward). In the absence of systematic measurement, tone and timbre must be conveyed through metaphor.

Given a fondness for the possibilities of individual sounds, and for acoustic limit cases such as timbre, it is not surprising that Chinese musicians also prized silence. Special importance is placed on silence in *guqin* music, including feeling the space between notes, imagining the continuation of sounds once the audible music has ended, and “playing” without making sounds by moving one’s fingers just above the strings of a *guqin*. These practices train the ear to listen into silence with increasing precision, and results in a more profound appreciation for the subtleties of allusive and elusive sounds. “Emptying” the ears of sound through articulated silences thus also further heightens the perceived meaningfulness of sound and music.

The relationship between the musical practice of silence and philosophical considerations of silence is evidenced throughout.

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62 As for musical investigations into the workings of silence, John Cage’s *4’33* was at least a thousand years behind the pioneers of silence in ancient China. In *Silence*, Cage writes, “The material of music is sound and silence. Integrating these is composing.” John Cage, *Silence* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1973), p. 62. Eliot Deutsch describes the “performing silences” of music as “articulated silence-and-sound”: “Ontologically, there is a silence that is pure being, without beginning or end. A plentitude, this silence constitutes, as it were, the prebeginning of sound...Music always has a nearness to silence an ever-presentness that is its dwelling place.” Eliot Deutsch, “Music as Silence-and-Sound,” in *Essays on the Nature of Art* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 53.
Chinese intellectual and religious history; in Daoist discourses and practices of emptiness and mysterious profundity (wu 無, xuan 玄), in Chan Buddhism of course, as well as in notions such as “music without sound,” referred to by Xi Kang as the “father and mother of the people.”

The musical idea with the most pervasive influence in Chinese philosophy, however, is undoubtedly harmony (he 和), even though traditional Chinese music did not develop the complex harmonies and harmonic progressions found in other cultures. Relying instead on getting the most nuance, texture, and flexibility out of single lines of pitches (melody), and usually employing only five notes per octave, Chinese music extracted tremendous variation out of musical ingredients limited in quantity when compared to the chromatic harmonies of the West, for instance, or the breadth of scalar combination and pitch sequencing in Indian classical music. Rather than depending on the natural complexities of quantity, traditional Chinese music attended to harmony through utilizing the qualitative effects of harmonic resonance, as well as employing the idea of harmony as a unity of particulars that enhances each through their unique yet integrated participation in a whole.

Harmony, as a crossover concept from music to philosophy (and perhaps vice versa) was intertwined with resonance in at least two ways then: in the shared harmonic frequencies that allow sympathetic resonance between different things, and as an agreement of parts that intensifies each according to its mutual influence and responsiveness to the others.

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63 故無聲之樂，民之父母也.
64 In the glossary to their translation of the Zhongyong, Roger Ames and David Hall define harmony as “an elegant order that emerges out of the collaboration of intrinsically related details to embellish the contribution of each one.” Roger T. Ames and David L. Hall, Focusing the Familiar: A Translation and Philosophical Interpretation of the Zhongyong (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001), p. 66. Cheng Chung-ying has developed the idea musical harmony, as “the agreement of musical notes that creates a perception of internal togetherness and mutual support among the individual notes,” into a broader account of harmony as transformation in “On Harmony as Transformation: Paradigms from the Yijing,” Journal of Chinese Philosophy, Supplement to Volume 36 (2009), 11-36.
The emphasis on harmonics, timbre, and tonality in the Chinese musical tradition is also a sonic practice of the idea that the sonorous exceeds form, to use Nancy’s phrasing, and further demonstrates that the more resonant aspects of sound defy accounts of music’s meaningfulness that overemphasize form and structure. These aspects also happen to give us a sense of spatiality in music, but through their intensiveness rather than the extension that comes with form. Finally, attending to resonance also prioritizes listening, as the early Chinese musicians and philosophers practiced, for sensing what cannot be signified or otherwise formalized is an importantly different activity than hearing a message.65

1.2.3 Ganying as fidelity

The aesthetic qualities valued in Chinese music suggest how the intimacy of listening contributes to sensing music as meaningful. In contemplating the relationship between ambiguity and significance in sound, resonance, timbre, and silence, one notices how listening to music can induce an immediately embodied and personalized experience. As though being touched, there is at once a visceral activation of the body, and perhaps the triggering of the mirror system with its contributions to vivid first-person experience. While styles of music that utilize greater sonority (resonance and timbre) draw attention to how perceptual indeterminacy and complexity encourage us to focus on the way a sound is, all music is sonorous to varying degrees. Sonority provokes the immediate immersion of a listener in the qualitative feeling of the sound, and thus to an intimacy with what are arguably the more affective aspects of sound. And while musical sounds of relatively greater resonance demonstrate this process more obviously, it may be said that any sound that

65 According to Jane Geaney, the early Chinese distinguished hearing from listening by considering hearing as accomplished or completed listening. This is accurate insofar as hearing grasps a message. This distinction should not be taken hierarchically or teleologically however, since listening is also valued in the Chinese tradition because of its indefinitely open attunement to sonority without signs, and precisely for its inability to ever be completed.
intensifies our feelings is resonant in its effects, and likely to encourage sensing music as sounding the way emotions feel. Still, in the immediacy and intimacy of listening, when the hearing of messages is bypassed in favor of listening to the sound itself, we feel the meaningfulness of music without needing to hear it as sad, happy, or otherwise.

The mutual resonance of *ganying* also relies on an intimacy of communication; for example, between *yin* and *yang*, and the sixty-four hexagrams (*gua*) of the *Yijing*, as described by Wang Bi:

Things with the same tonality resonate together, yet they do not have the same pitch…

Resonance provides an image of shared purpose, and the position taken provides an image of what it means for a line to be located there.66

This idea of resonance as a matter of shared purpose is elsewhere reflected in the *Huainanzi*, where *ganying* is illustrated through a comparison of the sage’s relationship to *dao* and a sunflower to the sun.67 Charles Le Blanc’s translation reads:

The relation of the Sage to Dao is like the relation of the sunflower to the sun; although they cannot be together all the time, the fidelity of their tendency never wavers.68

The heliotropic nature of these relations across distance, rendered by LeBlanc as a “fidelity of tendency” (其鄉之誠), could also be translated as “the wholeheartedness they face each other with,” in order to capture the affective quality of the relationship, and to strengthen the idea of tendency by emphasizing the heart. Le Blanc’s phrasing nonetheless hints at how resemblance may be understood in terms of resonance. If tendencies are patterned, and if fidelity involves sense in the

67 In *Metaphor and Musical Thought*, Michael Spitzer notes that in the 17th century, Athanasius Kircher posited a musical structure to nature and world in which a “harmony of lower objects” was the “echo or repercussion” of the music of the stars. He compared the “magnetic attraction” between the two orders with the relationship of the sunflower, or heliotrope, to the sun. Spitzer, *Metaphor and Musical Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), p. 127.
multivalent meanings of sens as fit, direction, and significance, perhaps ganying may be understood as a fidelity or resonance of patterns—and by extension, feelings. Returning, then, to the earlier description of ganying from the Huainanzi—“The mutual response of things which resemble one another is darkly mysterious and extremely subtle”—resemblance is not just a matter of forms matching up as structures, but also involves resonance as the mutual response or sensing of things that surpasses forms through movement and change.69

In this line of thinking, forms may provisionally be considered as patterns. According to Merleau-Ponty, meaning at its most primordial just is pattern; to this it must be added that pattern perception is a way of perceiving, like listening meaningfully or understandingly, and therefore is not the apprehension of a pattern as an abstract object. Here, sense (as meaningfulness) and sensing (as perceiving) align, even if only at the primordial level. Further elaborating this dynamic, the very activity of perceiving pattern as form is a simultaneous exceeding of it, because any perception of pattern or form is always dependent on it being a figure against a background situation or context from which it arises and is perceptible.70 The figure and background must fit one another in a way that affords perception (sens as making sense), and, as Merleau-Ponty notes, we must also pattern ourselves towards this figure of significance in order to perceive it (sens as directionality or orientation). The fit or appropriateness of these patterns together, including their resemblance and

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69 According to François Jullien by between the Tang and Song dynasties the tension between resonance and resemblance had intensified, with resonance becoming the central aim and evaluative standard of Chinese painting: “True to that re- of duplication, which turns out to be so different in the two cases, resonance is a prolonged reverberation of an internal timbre, while resemblance is the specific reproduction of external traits…Hence the following judgment was becoming commonplace: (formal) resemblance is ‘easy’ and (spiritual) resonance ‘difficult.” François Jullien, The Great Image Has No Form, On the Nonobject Through Painting (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 114.

70 In Phenomenology of Perception, Merleau-Ponty describes the figure-background structure of perception as: “Each part arouses the expectation of more than it contains, and this elementary perception is therefore already charged with a meaning…each point in its turn can be perceived only as a figure on a background.” Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, 4. I would substitute “meaningfulness” for “meaning” here, since it is more a result of resonance between perceived and perceiver than a message transmitted.
our attention to them, are not limited to how forms coincidentally match up, but are also dependent on the way certain patterns have fidelity according to their tendency to tend to amplify one another through resonance. In other words, things resonate (make sense as both sensing and meaningfulness) according to their mutual sonority—or as Wang Bi described of the patterns of the Yijing, they do not require the same pitch, only shared tonality, to resonate.

There is another sense of fidelity that is not a matter of one thing “being true to” another, whether through formal resemblance or shared tonality. Borrowing the idea from the Yue Ji (Record of Music) that “only in music can no falsehood be done,” fidelity can also be “true like ice, like fire.” In this second understanding of fidelity, music does not represent or match up with something else that gives it meaning; rather, like fire and ice, music is true by conveying itself and nothing more. If music is without signs, as Xi Kang suggested, then how it ever be false? In this sense of being true, where fidelity is non-representational (and non-representable) authenticity, music most strains linguistic description; and yet, here music also offers itself most intimately and immediately to the activity of listening meaningfully because a secondary act of deciphering signs is unnecessary.

The twofold conception of fidelity (as both being true to and being true) can also be interpreted according to its use as a term of acoustic technology where a spectrum of high to low fidelity describes the accuracy of a sonic reproduction. High fidelity implies minimal harmonic or resonant distortion of the source sound, with the ideal of perfect replication or sameness. And yet, low fidelity sound is often described as “authentic,” even though it is less technically faithful to its source due to distortion and input from the medium of production, or because it leaves silent some aspects

71 “My love, she speaks like silence, without ideals or violence. She doesn’t have to say she’s faithful, yet she’s true like ice, like fire.” –Bob Dylan, “Love Minus Zero/No Limit,” from the album Bringing It All Back Home. This song can be heard on Track 5.
of the original sound. What makes lo-fi sound authentic then? Within many possible responses to this question—including interesting social and political notions of authenticity—one is particularly germane here. Low fidelity sound fails to exactly reproduce a given sonic form to the degree that it is altered by the addition of resonance. Is this another way that the sonorous—operating here are resonant distortion—“outweighs” form and encourages the alignment of sense and sensing? While lo-fi sound still refers to its source, its authenticity or meaningfulness nonetheless comes about through a break from identity, representation, and formal resemblance alone, with a mode of fidelity that does not require “being true to” a determinate sound or meaning.

The resonance between listener and music, as between a sunflower and the sun, and a sage and dao, occurs in the many senses of fidelity—in resemblance, authenticity, fit, attention, and meaningfulness. A sage is oriented, or true, to dao with a wholeheartedness that assures a mutual resonance in which the transformation of the sage is reflected in the ever-changing meaning of dao as way, path, and significance. And so, while the sunflower certainly has fidelity to the sun through resembling its aesthetic form, and in the way it turns to face the path of the sun across the sky, we may also ask how the sun is true to the sunflower, dao to the sage, and music to the listener. Even further, in considering what music conveys and how listening to music is meaningful according to ganying, we need not limit ourselves to the question of whether music sounds the way emotions feel, we may also ask how feelings are musical.
1.3 Intimacy and Intransitivity

The thoughts I find expressed in music that I love are not too indefinite, but on the contrary, too definite to put into words...If you ask me what I was thinking when I wrote a certain piece, I would say: the song, just the song, as it stands.

– Felix Mendelssohn

Listening to the opening sound of the second movement of Beethoven's 7th Symphony, Wittgenstein reportedly commented that it surely “says something.” And yet, like Xi Kang, he insisted that music conveys only itself. For Wittgenstein, the belief that “This tune says something,” too often prompts a misguided search for what it says. First, this approach to music errs by reifying and objectifying meaning—a mistake regarding music as well as language. Second, Wittgenstein maintains that understanding music is an intransitive activity in which extramusical sources of meaning are unnecessary; listening to music as meaningful requires nothing—whether ontological or empirical—beyond the music.

By describing understanding music as “intransitive,” Wittgenstein did not mean that there is no object of perception, rather his point is that music need not be translated into another form of expression—in fact this would be impossible—nor is it necessary to think of anything but the music itself in order to understand it. In Philosophical Grammar, he describes the autonomy of intransitive understanding:

If I say: “I understand this picture” the question arises: do I mean “I understand it like that”? With the “like that” standing for a translation of what I understand into a different expression? Or is it a sort of intransitive understanding? When I’m understanding one thing do I as it were think of another thing? Does understanding, that is, consist in thinking of something else? And if that isn’t what I mean, then what’s

72 On Track 6, the London Symphony Orchestra performs this work by Beethoven. (Symphony No. 7 in A Major, Op. 92: II. Allegretto).

73 In addition to Wittgenstein’s statement on musical expression that opens this chapter, see §523 of Philosophical Investigations: “I should like to say ‘What the picture tells me is itself.’ That is, its telling me something consists in its own structure, in its own lines and colours. (What would it mean to say ‘What this musical theme tells me is itself’?). This idea reoccurs in The Blue and Brown Books (New York: Harper & Row, 1958) in several places. See for example, 167.
understood is as it were autonomous, and the understanding of it is comparable to the understanding of a melody.\textsuperscript{74}

Properly distinguishing transitive and intransitive understanding therefore also determines what sort of justification is possible when speaking of music. In §527 of \textit{Philosophical Investigations}, Wittgenstein claims that although the question of why a musical theme is played according to a certain pattern of variation in loudness or tempo might legitimately be answered by saying, “Because I know what it’s all about,” it is nonetheless impossible to say what it is about. At most, one can compare it with something else that has a similar pattern; but in the case of aesthetic statements, what seems to be a comparison is most likely an emphasis on how something is. To explain this, Wittgenstein uses the example of observing the way someone is sitting. An expression such as “He has a particular way of sitting” has a transitive sense when it is directed at a definite feature such as crossed legs, however the expression is intransitive when it is a means of emphasis that indicates I am concentrating on \textit{how} someone is sitting, retracing it in my mind perhaps, without abstracting a certain, separable feature.\textsuperscript{75}

This distinction between transitivity and intransitivity, which Wittgenstein locates at the root of a number of philosophical problems, is ordinarily disguised by the way the “surface appearance” of grammar easily leads to conflating the two. One consequence is believing that we understand “the meaning” of a song rather than understanding it meaningfully or listening to it in a meaningful way. There is no explanation of this “way” of listening or understanding beyond the phenomenon itself, nothing external to the music of the form “By ‘A’ I mean ‘B’, where B is an explanation of A.”\textsuperscript{76}

Wittgenstein illustrates this point in the \textit{Blue and Brown Books} when he testifies that his response to the question “How do you think this melody should be played?” would be just to whistle it in a


\textsuperscript{75} Wittgenstein, \textit{The Blue and Brown Books}, 165.

\textsuperscript{76} Wittgenstein, \textit{The Blue and Brown Books}, 160.
certain way, “and nothing will have been present to my mind but the tune actually whistled (not an image of that).” This does not preclude finding a linguistic counterpoint to the music, nor does it devalue transitive descriptions of music, but external justification or explanation—whether through language or even just as a “paradigm somewhere in our mind”—is unnecessary to the understanding the melody.

In the suggestion that “music sounds the way emotions feel,” can “way” operate intransitively? Can “way” function as the word “particular” does when it is used to point out how something is without abstracting or objectifying any certain features? For Wittgenstein, the only appropriate explanation or description of music beyond the music itself may be a comparison to something similarly patterned; but this is a strange or queer sort of comparison that functions more as emphasis than comparison in its ordinary use (object A is like object B in such and such ways). Akin to how the word “peculiar” or “particular” can be used intransitively to emphasize or point out instead of explain or justify, the “way” music sounds as emotions feel may not require any further parsing, despite what the surface grammar of the statement seems to indicate. One benefit of the intransitive account is that it avoids subsuming music into emotional and linguistic paradigms of meaning, unlike, for example, morphological and semiotic analyses of music that assume music only gains meaningfulness vis-à-vis its resemblance to emotions or language. These approaches tend to both diminish what is musical about music’s meaningfulness as well as transfer confusion about emotions and language to music.

Perhaps the most egregious confusion is the idea that meaning is something words refer to and sentences picture—an idea that leads us to believe meaning (and emotions) could exist in music.

77 Wittgenstein, The Blue and Brown Books, 166.
as extractable entities. Objectifying what music expresses is similar to the mistaken belief that a face expresses some thing, rather than, as Wittgenstein puts it, “giving ourselves up to the features before us.” In both cases, we erroneously seek a separate realm of meaning. The claim that understanding a face can happen intransitively does not rule out finding a word to sum up one’s understanding, as happy or sad for instance, just as one can find a verbal expression, or a verbal “counterpoint” as Wittgenstein put it, of a musical theme. But what remains most important here is that in the activity of intransitive understanding there is no extrinsic reality serving as the bedrock of justification or meaning. Consequently, while we may say that a tune or a face “says something,” we are mistaken to hunt for the message as a separate entity of meaning.

Does the intransitivity of understanding music imply that music is self-sufficiently meaningful? Is music meaningful as music without reference or resemblance to anything else? Wittgenstein seems to think so, particularly if we consider his remarks on the inseparable and constitutive relationship between sensations and meaning. In PI §568, he goes so far as to say that meaning is a physiognomy. In addition, meaning is never an accompanying process: “Meaning is not a process which accompanies a word. For no process could have the consequences of meaning.” For example, the “if-feeling” is not a feeling that accompanies the word “if,” rather it is

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78 Wittgenstein’s theory of meaning as use is an exception to this confusion, and he intriguingly compared understanding language to understanding music in ways that pull language closer to music rather than vice versa. In PI §527, Wittgenstein states, “Understanding a sentence is much more akin to understanding a theme in music than one may think,” an idea he elaborates in The Brown Book, where he says that understanding a musical theme is not like the mistaken picture we have of understanding language, wherein we think it points to an outside reality. In rejecting this picture of language, Wittgenstein emphasizes that understanding a sentence is more akin to understanding a tune because the former is a matter of getting hold of the content of the sentence, which is in the sentence—neither music nor language refer to an external (extra-linguistic or extra-musical) reality.


80 Roger Scruton adopts Wittgenstein’s idea of intransitive expression and comparison between understanding music and understanding a face.

81 Wittgenstein also describes words having “faces,” “physiognomy,” “character,” “soul,” and “feeling.” See for example: PI §530 and Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology I, 322.

82 PI, 186.
akin to the feeling a musical phrase gives us. There is no identifiable and determinate process that accompanies the meaningful use of a word or musical phrase. In Wittgenstein’s work on meaning, mental processes that give additional signs to signs do not determine the living meaningfulness of a word as it is used; that is, when we interpret a symbol, the interpretation is a new symbol added to the old one in a process that is secondary to the meaningful use of a symbol. Interpretation alone cannot determine meaning because it “still hangs in the air along with what it interprets and cannot give it any support,” and for this reason, it also cannot hold up understanding. The process of adding signs to signs—a symbolic spinning of wheels without traction—cannot generate the movement of meaning, leading Wittgenstein to suggest that “It might almost be said ‘Meaning moves, whereas a process stands still.’”

Applying these ideas to music, he writes, “It is wrong to call understanding a process that accompanies hearing. (Of course its manifestation, expressive playing, cannot be called an accompaniment of hearing either.)” We understand music while listening and not as an experience that accompanies perception, and attempting to link expressive movements to sensations ignores the intransitive, adverbial nature of listening to music. Taking this into account, Wittgenstein’s rejection of the claim that music conveys emotions such as joy and melancholy becomes clearer because this claim suggests a causal structure in which the “expression of feeling” is an effect (the feeling) of an object (the music) on a subject (the listener). The failure of this model is twofold: it makes feeling an accompaniment of listening and expression an accompaniment of playing. In Wittgenstein’s critique, expressive playing and listening meaningfully are not to be confused with expressing

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83 PI, §198

85 Wittgenstein, *Zettel*, 29e, #163.
feelings in music and hearing the meaning of the music—a distinction that also illuminates the
difficulty in understanding music in terms of signs, whether linguistic or emotional, that can be
decoded or interpreted to reach something identifiable as the meaning of the music.

Wittgenstein’s separation of understanding and meaning from interpretation is not just a
rejection of the belief that understanding is the correlation of signs with other signs; here he also
provocatively suggests that feeling is inseparable from, and even constitutive of, meaning. Because
interpretation maintains a distance from the feeling of a word or a piece of music, it cannot
sufficiently support their meanings or our understanding of them, whereas in contrast, the feeling of
language and music supports a kind of non-interpretive understanding that could be called listening
meaningfully. The possibility of intransitively understanding both music and emotions recasts the
question of whether music conveys joy or sorrow in at least two important ways. First, because
music need not convey anything but itself, meaningfulness that is distinctly musical and not parasitic
on other modes of meaning, such as linguistic or emotional, is possible. And second, once the
question is freed from this hierarchy of meaning it can be reformulated to ask how other
phenomena, including language and emotions, are musical.
1.4 Conclusion: Empty Music and the Intimacy of Listening

The evidence that music’s meaningfulness is not a matter of interpreting signs, along with the nagging insufficiency of analyzing music in terms of its formal resemblance to other things, returns us to the idea that music conveys itself. In a similar vein to Xi Kang and Wittgenstein, Merleau-Ponty also attested to the self-sufficiency of music, writing that,

The musical meaning of a sonata is inseparable from the sounds which are its vehicle: before we have heard it no analysis enables us to anticipate it; once the performance is over, we shall, in our intellectual analyses of the music, be unable to do anything but carry ourselves back to the moment of experiencing it. During the performance, the notes are not the ‘signs’ of the sonata, but it is there through them, it enters into them…The meaning swallows up the signs.\(^{86}\)

Instead of positing signs that are swallowed up by the music, Xi Kang argued for the stronger thesis that music is absent of signs altogether and if there is meaning, it is the sounds themselves. Nothing more or less. In taking this radical departure from the traditional view of music, he was able to correctly identify a number of the problems with attributing emotions to music, however he did not notice (as Wittgenstein did) that applying emotional terminology to feelings is problematic in similar ways. In both cases, we learn to name via forms of life, cultural practices, and traditions such that calling a dirge “happy” is a mistake regarding both music and emotions. Xi Kang was right that music is empty of sentiments, at least insofar as it is empty of them in the way that a meaningful experience is not full of meaning. But precisely because it has no signs, might music be joyful or sorrowful without being full of joy or sorrow? Is this an implication of the idea that music intransitively sounds the way emotions feel?

\(^{86}\) Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 182. Nearby, he describes the “physiognomy” of “the act of speaking,” and says, “In the first place speech is not the ‘sign’ of thought, if by this we understand a phenomenon which heralds another as smoke betrays fire…The word and speech must somehow cease to be a way of designating things or thoughts, and become the presence of that thought in the phenomenal world, and moreover, not its clothing, but its token or its body.”
To understand a song as intransitively joyful would not necessarily impute joy to the song itself—at least not as some sort of emotional object or form extracted by a listening ear. Nor would it mean that there is a process in which forms of music are matched to forms of emotions. In fact, immediacy is one of the most important aspects of intransitivity and is particularly characteristic of the spatiotemporality of musical experience. Immediacy and intransitivity afford, in a word, the intimacy of listening to music. In turn, this intimacy—or what could also be described as the resonance of music with feeling—encourages the release of emotion. Or as Xi Kang described it, harmonious sounds cause the feelings of the heartmind to be released (fa 发).

Whatever the philosophical potential here, it is unlikely that Xi Kang would endorse even an intransitive attribution of emotions to music. Heeding his warning about conflating our responses to music with what music itself conveys, we might allow for the possibility of listening joyfully to music while at this point avoiding the stronger claim that music is joyful. The distance he places between music and emotions, and by extension music and meaning, should not be hastily collapsed, for it establishes a critical space for the question of how, and whether, music is meaningful. One very important piece gathered from considering music’s autonomy from human emotions is some evidence that by virtue of communicating immediately and intransitively, music conveys itself directly in a unification of sense as perceiving and as meaningfulness. On its own, this evidence remains preliminary, but nonetheless demonstrates what is obscured in accounts of music that focus on music’s formal resemblance to emotions rather than, for example, on the relationship between sonority and sense.

And if what music conveys is just itself, then how does it do this? It is, I have gathered so far, facilitated by ganying as the resonance between listening and music afforded by the natural structures of harmony within music and by the way the sonorous qualities of music encourage a unity of sense
as both perceiving and meaningfulness. Insofar as resonance is also a matter of fidelity, the perceptual importance of listening was further indicated, with fidelity operating not just as loyalty or adherence to a person, situation, or pattern, but also through its special relationship with sonic accuracy. Finally, Xi Kang argued that the lack of signs in the harmonious sounds of music not only catalyzes the release of emotions from the heartmind, but this very emptiness through which music conveys itself also offers access to the “Great Harmony” (大和) structuring existence more broadly, yet ordinarily blocked by the myopia and vagaries of human emotion. If so, then the description developed thus far—how the resonant fidelity of listening and sound supports music’s meaningfulness—also raises the question of what else can be understood musically.
CHAPTER 2
Skilled Listening and the Virtuosity of Virtue

子與人歌而善，必使反之，而後和之。
When the Master was with others who were singing well, without fail he asked them to sing the song before harmonizing with it.
— Analects 7.32

雖無德與女式歌且舞。
Although I possess no virtue
Which I can reveal to you
Let us sing and dance.
— Book of Songs, 218

The focus in the previous chapter on the intimate character of listening directed us to consider how neither meaning nor emotions exist in music as content that can be extracted or formalized. This encouraged paying closer attention to the more sonorous and less objectifiable aspects of music (timbre, tone, and harmonics) that in turn led away from theories of formal resemblance in favor of the idea that resonance (ganying 感應) supports a fidelity of sensing between listeners and music. So far, the possibility that music conveys only itself has been maintained, as has the distinctness of music’s meaningfulness from both language and emotion. Chapter two returns to the relationship between music and emotions, albeit without subordinating the meaningfulness of the former to the latter, as part of examining the skilled dimensions of listening. This work takes its primary cues from the Ru 儒 (Confucian) understanding of music as an aesthetic and ethical practice for cultivating virtuous people and harmonious communities through regulating emotions, encouraging excellence or virtue (de 德), and “attuning one’s ear.” In particular, music provides an
opportunity to embody timeliness and harmony as key elements of the spatiotemporal aesthetics of virtue as virtuosity. The details of this account are elaborated through a discussion that brings together mutually illuminating aspects of the early Chinese understanding of the senses with contemporary ecological theories of perception.

More controversially, the Ru belief that music can reveal character (both personal and cultural) is examined. Can the claim that music conveys itself be maintained along with this belief? What does music include when we consider the ongoing, resonant collaboration between not only ears and sounds, but people and music as well? Given a rejection of “input-output” and “stimulus-response” models of perception in favor of a theory of sensing as enacted by an organism reciprocally embodied in its environment, does the perception of music become more direct? These questions regarding the mutual influences between music and character, cultural practices, and ways of life, lead back to the earlier question whether someone who mistakes a dirge for a happy song is as mistaken emotionally and culturally as they are aesthetically.

This chapter also builds on the earlier suggestion that if the explanatory burdens of representational meaning are dropped, and a smile does not represent happiness any more than a rising series of major chords represents joy in a song, then we invite the possibility of seeing joy in a face, or hearing it in music. The key remains understanding in so as to avoid the objectification of meaning in music (and emotions in people), for example, in the way that the intimacy of listening and intransitivity of music’s meaningfulness allow us to listen joyfully without objectifying or representing joy in music. But is listening joyfully or sadly the limit of attributing emotions to music? Although Wittgenstein argued that music conveys only itself, when comparing understanding music
to understanding a face, he also claimed that fear is “alive in the features of a timid face.”\(^1\) Can the same be said of music? While still accepting that emotions are not inherent in music and their perception arises within forms of life, what can we take from the suggestion that learning to call a dirge “sad” also requires coming to understand sadness more broadly, including correctly recognizing sad people? In what follows, an answer to these questions is sought through their alignment with Confucius’ own aesthetic and ethical inquiry into the cultivation of character and culture through music, exemplified in *Analects* 3.3:

The master said: “What does a person who is not virtuosic (ren 仁) have to do with ritual propriety (li 禮)? What does a person who is not virtuosic have to do with music (yue 樂)?”\(^2\)

### 2.1 Yueji 樂記

In all cases, the arising of music (yin) is born in the hearts of people. The movement of people’s hearts is made so by [external] things. They are touched off by things and move, thus they take shape in sound (sheng). Sounds respond to each other, and thus give birth

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\(^1\) In PI §535 – 537, Wittgenstein wonders how we learn to feel the ending of a song as an ending, and then draws a comparison between reinterpreting the changing features of a face, from fearful to courageous for instance, and reinterpreting the modulation of a musical chord from one key to the next. Notably, he suggests that, like understanding music, understanding a face is intransitive.

\(^2\) While it is unorthodox to translate *ren* as “virtuosic,” I do so here for a number of reasons that support an appropriate reading of this particular anal ect, as well as Confucius’ broader concern with the relationship between music and virtue. Various other translations for *ren* include “authoritative person or conduct” (Roger Ames and Henry Rosemont), “consummate person or conduct,” (Ames), “benevolence” (Chung-ying Cheng and D.C. Lau), “co-humanity” (Cheng), “good” (Edward Slingerland), “humane” (Chichung Huang), and “complete virtue” (James Legge). The merits of each demonstrate the impossibility of both uniform and accurate translation across all cases. Although leaving such terms untranslated is sometimes preferable, there is much to be gained by a translation that conveys both the ethical and aesthetic character of *ren*. Taking *ren* to be one who embodies and exhibits a virtuosity of virtue captures the core ideas that being *ren* is consummate, masterful, and comprehensively skilled, and moreover is an ongoing ethical-aesthetic accomplishment. As well, this translation draws attention to the relationship between *ren* and *de* 德, which includes “excellence” and “virtue” among its meanings. Finally, the musical connotations of “virtuosity” also evoke the relational demands of playing music with others, including skilled listening, and so indicate the social and intersubjective dimensions of *ren*. 

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to change. Change forms a pattern, and this is called music (yin).
This music is brought close and found enjoyable, and reaching the
point of shields and axes, feathers and pennants, it is called Music (yue).

In the Yue Ji or On Music, we find the earliest Chinese musical treatise (written no later than
second or first century B.C.) and an eloquent articulation of Ru ideas regarding music and its
relationship to natural patterns, proper government, and ritual propriety. Most importantly, the
development of human character is described as a musical progression with ties to the
transformation of sound (sheng) into music (yin) as patterned sounds or tones, and then into
Music (yue) that is distinguished by its relationship to excellence or virtue (de). The dynamic
described between the emergence of music out of sound and voice and the progressive cultivation
of human excellence is not just analogous. At each stage of development, music and character
reflect and influence one another, culminating in a kind of Music (yue) that both communicates and
fosters virtue, and in turn that can only be fully understood by people who have attained exemplary
bearing themselves.

Music (yue) is that which connects with [ethical] human relationships
and principles (lunli). For this reason, those who know sounds (sheng)
but do not know music (yin)—these are the birds and the beasts. Those
who know music (yin) yet do not know Music (yue)—these are the common masses.
Only the exemplary persons (junzi) can know Music (yue)…To know Music (yue) is to
be close to ritual propriety (li). If ritual propriety and Music

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3 Section 1.1 of the Yue Ben (“Roots of Music”) chapter of the Yue Ji (“Record of Music”). The translation used here is
Scott Cook’s, with my minor changes. Scott Cook, “Yue Ji 樂記 – Record of Music: Introduction, Translation, Notes,

4 These terms do not have single equivalents in English. Sheng 聲 can mean “sound” or “voice”; yin 音 can mean music
as ordered sounds, individual tones, or timbre (as in the “eight timbres” or ba yin 八音). Yue 樂 was a multimedia art
form that included poetry and dance in addition to music. But as Scott Cook emphasizes in his translation of the Yue Ji,
the most important characteristic of yue is that it carries and conveys virtue. Cook distinguishes between music as yin and
yue by capitalizing the latter as Music and I follow this designation as well. Where grammatically feasible, I employ the
phrase “playing music” for yue 樂 to emphasize the live, participatory nature of this kind of music.
are both attained (de 得), this is called “having virtue (de 德).”

The description in this passage of the necessity of both ritual propriety and Music in attaining virtue is elaborated further in the Yue Lun or “Discourse on Music” chapter of the Yue Ji, where it is explained that Music unites (tong 同) us from within while ritual differentiates (yi 異) us from without. As a consequence, when ritual dominates music, people are distant (li 離) from one another, but music without the structure of ritual propriety encourages people to behave indiscriminately and without boundaries (liu 流).

Elsewhere in the text, the correlative functions of music and ritual propriety are further explained according to the patterns and relationships found in nature. Music is said to cultivate a sense of unity by participating in the harmony of the heavens and earth (tiandi 天地) while ritual draws upon the ordering of these in establishing appropriate distinctions and roles among people. Leaders must therefore clearly understand the dynamics of tian di before they can facilitate proper music and ritual, which as a result should embody the spatiotemporal harmony and order of tian di through natural ease (music) and elegant simplicity (ritual). In this regard, music was thought to display the excellence or failure of a culture as well as the character of its musicians and rulers. Chaotic music, for instance, lacking in smooth dynamics and refined harmony, was believed to result in feelings of dissolution that both testified to and encouraged similar characteristics in the broader culture.

According to this account, music is also bound to character because it arises in the hearts of people, carrying these roots in the same way that emotions are expressed in sound and voice.
sounds we make (sheng) convey our emotional state through particular qualities; as the text says, when we are sad our sound is “exhausted” and “decaying,” whereas when we are happy our sound is “spacious” and “leisurely.” And because music differs from sound by being complexly patterned and consciously composed, it is not limited to influence from the individual player alone, but also responds to and partakes in the patterns of society and nature. Music’s dao (道) can thereby be connected to governance: “the music of a well-governed age is peaceful…the music of a chaotic age is resentful…the music of a lost state is mournful.”

To be precise, while the Yue Ji implies that emotions are expressed in sound and music, the text does not explain whether they are directly transmitted or inferred from other qualities. In fact, although we might assume that voice is a fairly direct conduit for emotions, the text does not even describe voices as “sad,” but rather a sad person has an “exhausted” or “decaying” sound. This should bear importantly on any assessment of the idea that music is an indicator of character. The question whether music carries emotions themselves requires also asking what this could mean—after all, what is an emotion itself and how is it identified? Is it possible to directly sense an emotion?

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6 Cook, Yue Ji, Section 1.3, p. 29. Also, “The music of Zheng and Wei is the music of a chaotic age. It borders on dissoluteness (慢). The music from among the mulberries atop the Pu River is the music of a lost state. The administration was disorganized and the people dispersed. Superiors were slandered and private ends were carried out, and it could not be stopped.” Section 1.5, p. 32. On Track 8, an excerpt from William Basinski’s The Disintegration Loops can be heard. In 2001, Basinski attempted to preserve a series of twenty-year old analog tape loops of his music by transferring them to digital files. In the process, the tapes began to disintegrate. Flakes of the magnetic material of the old tapes were scraped away by the reader head, erasing and altering parts of the music as the loops were transferred—or, as Basinski says in the liner notes to the album, “the music was dying.” Basinski finished the project on the morning of the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City and listened to the final cut on his Brooklyn rooftop as he watched the towers slowly fall. He describes the original music as “pastoral”: lush and simple songs meant to evoke idealized notions of nature and its beauty. In the sonic ruins that emerged—in the temporal documentation of decay and accidental elegy—he heard “my paradise lost” and music for “the end of the world.” In September 2012, The Disintegration Loops was inducted into the National September 11 Memorial Museum.

7 According to Scott Cook, there is nowhere in the Yue Ji where Music (yue) is a “direct expression of internal emotions touched off by external things—this is reserved for sheng and its developed form as music (yin).” Virtuous Music is distinct because it “realizes its origin and seeks to return there as motivator rather than motivated.” Cook, Yue Ji, 37.
at all, let alone in music? Or, does music have particular aesthetic qualities that encourage listeners to sense certain emotions? More intriguingly, do emotions have aesthetic characteristics that allow music to convey them without resort to analogy or representation? These questions prompt a reconsideration of the earlier suggestion that music sounds the way emotions feel, this time reversing the order—how do emotions feel like music?—in order to prioritize the aesthetics of emotions emphasized in the Ru understanding of music.

Leaving these questions aside for a moment to return to the central concern in the Yue Ji, how does music become virtuous? According to the text, as music emerges from sound, if it participates in the same productive patterns of harmony, order, and change as in the natural world, then participants (musicians and audience alike) will be influenced to behave in accord with these, including appropriately regulating the tendency of emotions to throw humans out of balance. Music becomes “great Music” (da yue 大樂) by taking part in the harmony of the heavens and earth, which is to say that yin and yang are harmonized in music with the same productivity operating in the transformations (hua 化) of the natural world such as the changing of the seasons. Such harmony is not simply a balance of elements nor is it a static configuration, rather it is the ongoing spatiotemporal activity of harmonizing made possible because of the resonance and mutual responsiveness of nature: “Within the heavens and earth there is merely a gan 感 (feeling) and ying 應 (response), what other things are there?”

Effecting transformation alone is not enough to make music virtuous, however. In the Yue Ji, music is not just an art of time; its power comes from timeliness. The text specifies that in the case of

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8 From Zhu Xi’s Jin Si Lu, Quoted in Cheng Chung-yung, “Li and Qi in the Yijing,” Journal of Chinese Philosophy, Supplement to Volume 36 (2009), 97.
both nature and music, if changes are not timely (shi 時), they will not lead to growth (sheng 生).

While music in general is described as embodying the basic alternation between relative stillness and movement from which all things arise, great music has a special timeliness that potentiates the growth of de. The explanation given is that the timeliness of great music cultivates de by contributing to the productive and opportune rhythms characteristic of the patterns of resonance (ganying) and mutual responsiveness found in nature. Music that embodies the timeliness and mutual resonance of nature inculcates and amplifies similar patterns in people such that their de is patterned in accordance. The resonance of timely music cultivates de such that, in turn, people make music that embodies de and so may be called virtuous.

What is timeliness? In early Chinese philosophy, it is often understood as an opportune moment, as expressed in an apropos passage from the Yuan Dao 原道 chapter of the Huainanzi:

The right moment becomes the wrong
Before one can take a breath.
One who acts too soon anticipates the opportunity,
And one who acts too late gets left behind.
The sun revolves, the moon wheels its course,
And the right moment waits for no man.
Thus, the sage values an inch of time over a foot of precious jade.
It is because the right moment is so hard to catch and so easy to miss.9

Attuning oneself to the timely rhythms of nature, then, facilitates sensing opportune moments of transformation, as exemplified in the celestial movements or the changing of seasons brought by the shifting winds. And music that embodies this timeliness would therefore serve as a means for entraining ourselves to perceive and act upon the right moment; at a minimum through teaching timeliness as a rhythmic skill in contrast to mere repetition or punctuality. As with the difference

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between *kairos* as the opportune moment (qualitatively sensed) and *chronos* as sequential time (quantitatively measured), the timeliness of nature is aesthetic rather than metaphysical. It therefore cannot be measured by clocks, or arguably measured at all, which contributes to its unique effects on one’s *de*. In the *Yue Ji*, timeliness does not propagate *de* because it is punctual (which assumes a uniformity of time), but instead, like harmony and resonance, timeliness exists according to the particular details of each situation. For this reason, timeliness is not transferable across “times” without losing or altering its transformative potency any more than the same rhythmic moment works in every song.

What is a right or timely moment in music? While it is certainly something we can hear, it is doubtful whether it can be measured or formalized since timelines is not limited to punctuality, or in the case of music, to metronomic time. The example of *guqin* music is again instructive. Early *guqin* notation indicates finger placement, what strings to pluck and how, and tuning, but tells nothing of rhythm. This sparse notation allowed for great creativity on the part of individual players, particularly in the craft of sounding the right tone, moment, and mood.¹⁰

The timeliness that characterizes virtuous music enters into reciprocity with human character through mutual patterning. People whose character is shaped appropriately by music are in turn able to create music that furthers harmonious relations and ethical behavior while also displaying their excellence—which is to say that they make music that both attests to and encourages their *de*. As Kong Yingda describes in his commentary on the *Yue Ji*, “Music comes from the people, yet returns to affect people. This is like rain coming from the mountain yet returning to rain upon the

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¹⁰ The idiosyncratic rhythms of Lo Ka Ping’s *guqin* playing are characteristic of this creative freedom and can be heard on Track 9, *Water Spirit.*
mountain, like fire coming from wood yet returning to burn wood.” The return in each case is not simply repetition or change per se, rather its timeliness contributes to productive and opportune rhythms that are characteristic of the patterns of resonance (ganying) or mutual responsiveness between the heavens and earth. Music that embodies the spatiotemporality of nature’s timeliness, resonance, and harmony inculcates and amplifies similar patterns in people—importantly described as powers, however, rather than as properties. Similar to the ever-changing moving forms of musical patterns, de does not designate character traits as fixed properties, but instead indicates a person’s living, transforming powers. If one’s powers can be patterned by music, is sensing someone’s de a kind of pattern recognition that can be trained through music?

2.2 Skilled Listening

Now you, with your trifling modern knowledge, are limited by leveling out what you see. Thus, can you do anything but slander the understanding of the subtle that the former worthies had, and reject Confucius’ mysterious powers of observation?

— The Guest, *Music is Without Grief or Joy*

While the *Yue Ji* describes the growth of human virtue according to the recursive dynamic between the harmony and resonance of the heavens and earth (tiandi) and timely music, texts such as the *Analects* and *Mencius* focus on the relationships between music and character within the context of human cultural practices and social relations. Their statements on these matters raise questions regarding the training of one’s senses through the arts and the ethical implications of such practices.

12 According to Chapter 40 of the *Dao de Jing*, “returning” is how dao moves.
When, in the *Mencius*, Zigong states, “By viewing their ceremonies we know their administration. By hearing their music, we know their *de* (德),” what kind of knowing and perceiving is he referring to?¹³ In Xi Kang’s “Music Has in It Neither Grief nor Joy,” the Guest repeatedly presents Confucius as an exemplary “skilled listener” (*shan ting cha zhe* 善聽察者) and as one who had cultivated unusually subtle perceptual abilities (*shen miao du jian* 神妙獨見) that allowed him to hear, for example, the *Shao* music and know the virtue (*de* 德) of the sage-king Shun. In fact, while the central debate between the Guest and Xi Kang has traditionally been cast as a matter of whether or not there are emotions in music, the discussion turns crucially on questions regarding the limits and possibilities of perception, with the Guest defending the idea that what can be detected in music is largely a matter of perceptual *skill*. Examining certain features of the Chinese idea of the senses and body during the time of these texts, then, will benefit an evaluation of the Ruist claim to perceive character or virtue in music.

### 2.2.1 Sensing the Wind

* Autumn has come invisibly.  
  *Only the wind’s voice is ominous.*¹⁴

In the *Yue Ji*, music and ritual together form complementary means of self-cultivation according to the way music influences the inner person while ritual propriety shapes the outer.

Although the relationship between music and ritual is described here and in other texts in terms of inner and outer (*neiwai* 內外), this binomial is nonetheless characteristically Chinese in that the pair

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¹³ 子貢曰見其禮耳知其政聞其樂而知其德。*Mencius*, 2A2.
are correlative, reciprocal, and in the vocabulary developed in the previous chapter, resonant. This understanding of the spatiality of inner and outer is also present in early Chinese conceptions of the body such as xing, shen, and gong, and especially in the idea of body most associated with sensing and embodiment: ti. As Nathan Sivin describes in “State, Cosmos, and Body in the Last Three Centuries B.C.,” the body was not defined by its innate difference from other things, but “by its intimate, dynamic relation with its environment.”

To begin, among the various terms for body, xing (形) is the basic form, structure, or shape of a thing. It can be the visible, immediately perceivable form or external pattern, or it can indicate a subsurface structure such as the skeleton of the human body (xing hai 形骸), but in all cases it has discernible boundaries. Xing forms may nonetheless be subtle, such as the forms of the mind described in the Neiye (Inner Cultivation) section of the Guanzi (管子), or broad, such as the topographies of terrestrial landscapes, geopolitical boundaries, and the configurations of military maneuvers. As Roger Ames describes, xing are morphological rather than genetic or schematic. As forms, xing are correlative with formlessness or wu xing 無形; they are often described as the first, primordial forms to emerge out of inchoateness, and although they are identified by their boundaries, xing bodies retain a nearness to non-form.

In contrast to the xing body, which as the human frame is not readily altered by subtle means, the shen 身 body is sensitive to cultivation through social practices and inner reflection. While the

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17 Sommer notes the use of the expression “flowing into form” (liu xing 流形) to describe the earliest stages of pregnancy in the Book of the Generation of the Fetus (Tai chan shu 胎產書) in the Mawangdui texts. Sommer, “Boundaries of the Ti Body,” 302.
The *shen* body (notably cognate with *shen* 神 as “spirit”) is less tied to form than *xing* and less bound by flesh than *ti*, and accordingly is the body most open to development through thought and the idiosyncratic influences of one’s personal narrative. In Analects 1.4, for example, Zengzi examines his *shen* body daily in order to assess whether he has done his utmost, been trustworthy, and put into practice what he has learned. As mutually responsive to both social context (*shen* bodies absorb disgrace, for instance) and introspection, one’s *shen* body surpasses discrete boundaries of inside and outside, self and other.

A more specific description of the socially cultivated body can be found in the idea of *gong* 勝. This body performs public, ritual actions and in doing so displays one’s virtues to an audience who in turn is capable of perceiving them. As Sommer describes, the *gong* body is “ritualized, stylized, nonspontaneous, and guided by traditional mores and social obligations.” In addition to being the site of publicly performed values, this body also refers to the fact that such actions must be done oneself, hence the translation of *gong* as “person” or “personally” and its association with *qin* or “to do in person.” But although the *gong* body is personal, it is shaped more by social responsibilities than introspection and its actions are oriented toward the benefit of one’s community, society at large, and the dynamics of public, mutual recognition.

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18 Ames describes the *shen* body as the “lived body” and one’s “entire psychosomatic person.” “The Meaning of the Body in Classical Chinese Philosophy,” p. 165. For Sommer, *shen* is “the socially constructed self that is marked by signs of status and personal identity, and it is the accumulated corpus of a person’s moral values, character, experience, and learning.” “Boundaries of the *Ti* Body,” 303.
Finally, *ti* refers to the concrete physical body, its four limbs (*sì ti* 四體), or the physical form in general, and of the various terms used for body it is the one most closely associated with the senses. Yet strikingly, while *ti* is the most corporeal body (*ti* are the bodies that eat food, for example), its boundaries are also the most indeterminate and its spatiality is the most changeable of the different bodies. *Ti* bodies can overlap and extend into other *ti* bodies, and can be divided while still retaining a part-whole structure. Deborah Sommer describes the qualities of the *ti* body as such:

…a polysemous corpus of indeterminate extent that can be partitioned into subter units, each of which is often analogous to the whole and shares a fundamental consubstantiality and common identity with that whole. *Ti* bodies can potentially extend in all directions and can exist in multiple, overlapping layers or valences. Boundaries between valences are often unmarked or are obscure. When a *ti* body is fragmented into parts (literally or conceptually), each part retains, in certain aspects, a kind of wholeness or becomes a simulacra of the larger entity of which it is a constituent.20

As a result of the malleable and multivalent boundaries of *ti*, one person may have several *ti* bodies or many people may form one *ti* body (*yì ti* 一體), or *ti* can even refer most broadly to all that exists within the heavens and earth as one corpus.21

*Ti* is perhaps best understood in organic and ecological terms. As Sommer elaborates in her study of *ti*, one of its earliest meanings was not the human body but rather was “plant vegetation,” as testified to in the variant for *ti* (休) meaning “root.”22 This early association with plants and plant reproduction is present in the way the *ti* body multiplies and grows. Vegetative propagation occurs through productive division into new plants that retain a part-whole or consubstantial relationship

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21 In the *Tian Xia* 天下 chapter of the *Zhuangzi*, the logician Hui Shi says “When there is care for all the myriad things, the heavens and earth are one body (*ti* 休).” 泛愛萬物，天地一體也。<citation>
22 Sommer sources the *Book of Odes* as an example of *ti* as plant vegetation and notes that plant forms in the *Odes* are signs for human emotion. Sommer, “Boundaries of the *Ti* Body,” p. 297.
with the parent plant, in contrast to the death of the organism that occurs when an animal is divided or dismembered. *Ti* bodies, like plants, can be divided from within while retaining their wholeness.

The continuity and mutual patterning between inner and outer, part and whole, which characterizes *ti* bodies supports the meaning of *ti* as “embody.” Sivin explains that this sense of *ti* also refers to an individual’s personification of something, for instance to an immortal’s embodiment of *dao* (*ti dao* 體道). As Sommer points out, immortals do not *shen*, *xing*, *gong*, or *qu dao*; they *ti dao* because the *ti* body provides the greatest erasure of boundaries between individual entities is, and thus allows for the possibility of forming a common body (*tong ti* 同體)—whether one person, one family, or one body politic—as well as embodying *dao*, *de*, or even the cosmos.  

*Ti* as embodiment also draws on the idea of organic systems implied in the idea of *ti*, as Cheng Chung-ying observes, for to embody something is to form an ecological system with what is embodied:

> To embody something is to form a system with the thing, so that the thing can be said to be a part of the whole reality resulting from the embodiment, or a person’s self becomes part of the resulting system… When we speak of the ecological system in nature today, we have reached the meaning of embodiment of the system of interdependence as conveyed by the notion of *ti* as embodiment.

To embody the cosmos, then, means that one is also embodied within it. As Cheng further explains, embodiment is linked to another meaning of *ti*: “to practice” or “implement.” A person becomes one *ti* with everything through embodiment practices; for example, a sagely person embodies *de* through virtuous practices and actions that are themselves bodily and therefore both rely on and

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24 Sommer, “Boundaries of the *Ti* Body,” 324.
influence the senses. Ren (仁) thus does not just mean having a virtuosic character, but is an ongoing embodied practice reliant on sensing as a skilled, trainable activity.

The relationship between \( t_i \) as the body of the senses and \( d_e \) as embodied virtue can also be understood through the association of \( t_i \) with ritual (礼). In the Liji or Book of Rites 礼记, \( l_i \) is compared to a “great body.” Sommer cites the following passage: “The great body (\( d_a t_i \) 大體) of ritual is embodied (\( t_i \)) in heaven and earth, is modeled on the four seasons, is gauged in the yin and yang, and accords with the human condition.”\(^{26}\) Sommer’s straightforward explanation of the relationship between \( t_i \) and \( l_i \) attributes their association to the ritual consumption of animals and plant grains, which are considered \( t_i \) bodies. Yet, the Liji passage indicates that there is more to the relationship than this, particularly in the description of the “great body” of \( l_i \) as itself embodied. That is, it is an embodied (\( t_i \)) body (\( t_i \)) arising from the patterns and processes of nature (including the timeliness of the seasons and the harmony of yin and yang) and according with humans such that they can cultivate their \( d_e \) and become ren. If not merely associated through social practices or by analogy, what is the deeper relationship between the \( t_i \) body and ritual?

Ames’ philosophical analysis of \( t_i \) bodies and ritual action explores a number of possible connections. First, according to the tradition, the Sage-rulers of old based the rules of ritual actions (\( l_i \)) on cosmological patterns in order that human conduct, like the human \( t_i \) body, might become a microcosmic version of these macrocosmic patterns. \( T_i \) and \( l_i \) are both embodied in part-whole relationships characteristic of such patterns. Moreover, \( t_i \) and \( l_i \) are both deeply relational with and contingent upon the ever-changing environment because there is no ideal physical form of \( t_i \), nor are

\(^{26}\) Sommer, “Boundaries of the \( T_i \) Body,” 299.
ritual forms static. Instead, as Ames says, “the kind of skills and faculties embodied are generated out of the situations with which they seek to integrate” such that the body is “a variable statement of meaning and value achieved in effort to refine and enhance human life within the changing parameters of context.” 27 The ritual actions of 里 can therefore be understood as embodiments or formalizations of cultural meaning and value, and so, in Ames’ comparison, be likened to a body of literature or corpus of music. But how is a 体 body, in its corporeality, also an embodiment of meaning and value?

In Ames’ explanation, just as a particular ritual action is understood in reference to its broader cultural tradition as a formalized body of rituals, in turn, meaning and value must be ritually enacted and embodied. But given that there is a specific designation for the body of an individual’s ritual actions (one’s 会 body), why is ritual instead compared to a 体 body? How does the most corporeal of bodies come to embody cultural meaning and value? One considerable response is that, in addition to sharing organic and ecological characteristics, ritual action and 体 bodies are entangled through sense—as both perceiving and meaning. The sensing body (体) is the primary body of acting and embodying, both of which are required for the realization of ritual meaning. While it would seem that other conceptions of the body, such as 会, 行 and 神, are equally necessary to meaningful ritual activity, the significance of the 体 body here is at least twofold. First, in ritual activity, the aesthetic engagement of the body heightens and alters sense perception while deepening the intimacy of sensing and meaningfulness. Second, both 体 bodies and ritual are characterized by part-whole organization, and multivalent, liminal activities, which contribute to the powerful effects

of ritual upon sensing. Together, these factors facilitate the embodiment of ritual meaning and indicate why the body of the senses serves as the “great body” of ritual.

What should be noted about the early Chinese conception of the senses themselves? To begin, in Warring States texts, the primary description of the senses is as “officials” (guan 官) that are ruled by the heartmind (xin 心). In the metaphor of the senses as officials, each sense holds an office with distinct capabilities. For example, the says,

Ear, eye, nose, mouth, and form (xing), each has its own connections and is not able to do what the other does. Now, these are called the heavenly officials. The heartmind dwells in the central space and governs the five officials. Now, this is called the heavenly ruler.  

Each sense’s unique perceptual connection to the world depends on its fondness for particular things, for instance the eyes are said to desire color just as the ears desire sound. Along with their attunement to specific perceptual targets, the senses also “discriminate” (bian 辨) along spectrums such as black and white, beautiful and ugly, clear and muddy, salty and sour, hot and cold.  

In addition to discriminating among qualities and having preferences, the senses are said to “know” or “realize” (zhi 知). In On the Epistemology of the Senses in Early Chinese Thought, Jane Geaney notes that according to Warring States texts such as the Xunzi and Mozi, the senses have their own knowledge. She cites the Mozi on this point: “…the body knows their comfort, the mouth knows their sweetness, the eyes know their beauty, and the ears know their music.” Geaney argues that the knowledge associated with the senses is neither sensation (as private knowledge of sense data)

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28 “耳目口形能各有接而不相能也，夫是之謂天官。心居中虛，以治五官，夫是之謂天君。”《荀子引得》，哈佛燕京學社引得特刊第 22 號，哈佛燕京學社引得編纂處。Xunzi Yinde (A Concordance to Hsun Tzu), Harvard-Yenching Institute Sinological Index Series. 17.11-12.  
29 目辨黑白美惡，耳辨音聲清濁，口辨酸鹹甘苦，鼻辨芬芳腥臊，骨體膚理辨寒暑疾養，是又人之所常生而有也，是無待而然者也，是騅桀之所同也。Xunzi, 4/44-45.  
nor is it indirect perception according to which the mind interprets the data, but rather is something akin to Wittgenstein’s idea of aspect perception. Instead of a model in which perception delivers sense data as raw material for subsequent inferences, aspect perception involves “seeing as,” or in the case of music, “hearing as.” To repeat an earlier example, Wittgenstein asked how we come to hear the ending of a song as an ending. To do so is not to hear a pattern of notes (an act of perception) and then subsequently interpret them as an ending (an act of cognition); rather, in one unified activity, hearing itself enacts or “realizes” (makes real) the sense of an ending. The senses therefore “know” by directly regarding things as this or that, and by enacting or making real the perception of them as such.

According to the description of sensing under examination here, cognitive processes do not mediate perceptual contact with the environment in a representational or inferential way, however this is not to say that perception is immune to cognition. If we are to maintain Geaney’s comparison of early Chinese views on sensing to Wittgenstein’s for the moment, it should be emphasized that he described aspect perception as an “echo of a thought” and “not a part of perception.”31 As for the latter, Wittgenstein distinguishes between perceiving properties and perceiving aspects, but not because of a diachronic procedure in which aspects are subsequently interpreted or inferred from the directly perceived properties of an object. Like contemporary proponents of direct perception
who reject the argument that we indirectly sense the world because only mental intermediaries such as sense data or impressions can be directly perceived, Ru philosophers (represented by Mozi and Xunzi) and Wittgenstein alike share the belief that perception grants us access to a meaningful world independent of secondary processes of interpretation. But can this meaningfulness really be located, and how directly is it perceived? After all, as Xi Kang argued, our perception that an object possesses a quality—such as a “sad” song—does not make it so. Is meaningfulness in the objects of perception? Or does it infuse or echo through sensing?

These questions can be asked of the Ru tradition through the idea that what is perceived in (or perhaps through) music is a matter of sensing the wind (fēng 風). Winds were associated with change, especially of seasons, and served more generally as a widely applied metaphor for the transformation of one state into another. Music was thought to affect people by influencing their winds - or what could be called their airs or customs:

Music is the joy of the sages. It can improve people’s heartminds.
It moves people deeply. It influences their winds and changes their customs.32

In the Xioojing, Confucius echoes this sentiment, saying: “For altering people’s airs (fēng 風) and changing their customs, there is nothing better than music.”33 The primary explanation for why music so easily changes people’s airs and customs is that music is carried by the wind—songs are also called “winds” or fēng 風—thus, the transformative power of music comes from winds affecting other winds.34 While the association of music and wind, like the relationship of speech and air, is

32 樂者聖人之所樂也。而可以善民心其感人深其移風易俗。Xunzi 20/22-23.
33 移風易俗，莫善於樂。Xiaojing 孝經, 廣要道
34 Geaney explains that music affects people’s winds through resonating qi (氣): “Music transforms the wind via the intake of qi through the senses. The resonance of the musical qi automatically alters the person who senses it, causing an
obvious, why are miens and customs also referred to as airs or winds? In addition to moving easily across spatial and temporal distances, the winds are invisible yet perceivable according to the character of whatever they encounter. Similarly, ways of being such as countenance, charisma, aesthetic bearing, and style are also perceivable and efficacious, yet enigmatic. They are sensed in the way one senses an atmosphere or the “tone”—or better yet, the “timbre”—of a place.

Perceiving a person’s virtue or character (de) through music is a case of sensing the wind in both of the ways described: listening to music via the physical medium of air and perceiving “airs.” What, then, is the relationship between feng (as both wind and song) and de? First, de is deeply aesthetic as seen in its association with persona and aesthetic comportment. (In addition to “virtue,” “excellence,” “power,” and “character,” de can be rendered in English as “charisma”). The aesthetics of de certainly indicate its potential relationship to the arts, but more specifically, suggest that one might sense the same kind of timeliness, resonance, and harmony in a person that can be sensed in music and nature. If de were not like winds, airs, and songs—“light as a hair” as Xunzi describes—it would not be perceivable across a range of domains and over distances both interpersonal and cultural, nor could it be embodied through the ethical-aesthetic ecology of the heavens and earth.35

2.2.2 Ecological Listening

The reflexive nature of the ecological process of embodiment involved in making virtuous music and becoming a virtuous person, and the aesthetics of sensing the wind (as both music and de) expulsion of similar qi. In other words, qi is the music that enters the senses as well as the wind that the music causes to emerge from them.” On the Epistemology of the Senses in Early Chinese Thought, 25.

35 Xunzi, 16/75. Here, Xunzi quotes from the Book of Songs: “De is light as a hair, but among the people few can lift it.” 德輶如毛，民鮮克舉之。He also describes how a person’s face becomes radiant and their sound can be heard from afar when their de and conduct have reached their utmost. 27/83-84.
further affirm the importance of the question: if music sounds the way feelings feel, do feelings feel the way music sounds? A yes here would certainly help explain why we find music meaningful and does seem to be both indicated in the Yue Ji and supported by the account of sensing available in the early Ru texts. But an adequate demonstration of the reciprocity between feelings and music could also use assistance from a more fully developed theory of perception, such as found in theories of ecological perception.

There are a number of elements in the ecological approach that are germane to the Ru account of music. These include the idea of affordances and a model of perception as self-tuning, resonant, and enacted through sensorimotor skills. Broadly speaking, proponents of ecological perception reject models in which perception occurs inside the mind as the internal construction of a representation of the external world in favor of perception as direct, non-inferential access to the world enacted by an exploring, embodied, ecologically situated being. They refuse the argument that we indirectly sense the world because only mental intermediaries such as sense data or impressions can be directly perceived. Because of the ways that a perceiver is a whole creature embedded and embodied in its ecology, environmental possibilities and human ways of life are inseparable, mutually entailing, and supportive of direct perception. Rather than asking whether the senses access the world, the ecological approach to perception asserts that sensing is access to a meaningful world.

Ecological perception occurs on the basis of environmental “affordances” with which we “resonate.” James J. Gibson first articulated the idea of affordances in his 1977 article, “The Theory of Affordances”:

The affordances of the environment are what it offers the animal, what it provides or furnishes, either for good or ill. I mean by it something
that refers to both the environment and the animal in a way that no existing term does. It implies the complementarity of the animal and the environment.\textsuperscript{36}

Affordances are perceived as already structured information in an environment and, more specifically, are directly sensed as possibilities for action. Affordances exist independent of perception—Gibson refers to them as “invariants” at times—yet they are relative to the different abilities of an actor. For example, different kinds of surfaces afford varying possibilities of support that are unique to each animal. A mouse may ride an elephant, but with the exception of Ganesha, elephants cannot ride mice.

Affordances are not just abstract physical properties. They must be understood relative to an animal’s body, behavior, and most provocatively, to the realm of social significance in which the animal lives.\textsuperscript{37} Nor are affordances purely phenomenal, for these ecological facts of the environment exist independently of our personal experience of them. Affordances are therefore neither subjective nor objective and, in fact, highlight the inadequacy of this dichotomy. Gibson seeks to avoid the descriptive gulf between ordinary physics and phenomenal experience through the practice of “ecological physics,” according to which affordances are “equally a fact of the environment and a fact of behavior,” “both physical and psychical, yet neither,” and point both ways to the environment and observer.\textsuperscript{38}


\textsuperscript{37}“The different substances of the environment have different affordances for nutrition and for manufacture. The different objects of the environment have different affordances for manipulation. The other animals afford, above all, a rich and complex set of interactions, sexual, predatory, nurturing, fighting, playing, cooperating, and communicating. What other persons afford, comprises the whole realm of social significance for human beings.” Gibson, “The Theory of Affordances,” 128.

\textsuperscript{38}Gibson, “The Theory of Affordances,” 129.
The meaningful environment we perceive through affordances is thus neither the phenomenal environment of our private or subjective consciousness, nor the purely physical world.

Importantly, to perceive an object is to perceive its affordances as possibilities for action. We immediately attend to what sensorimotor opportunities an object affords us, prior to any attempt at classification or interpretation. Gibson writes,

> The fact that a stone is a missile does not imply that it cannot be other things as well. It can be a paperweight, a bookend, a hammer, or a pendulum bob. It can be piled on another rock to make a cairn or a stone wall. These affordances are all consistent with one another. The differences between them are not clear-cut, and the arbitrary names by which they are called do not count for perception. If you know what can be done with a graspable detached object, what it can be used for, you can call it whatever you please.  

By locating perception in use and in sensorimotor skills instead of classifying objects according to common features, the theory of affordances avoids the “philosophical muddle” identified by Wittgenstein as the impossibility of specifying the necessary and sufficient features of a class of things to which a fixed name (“sad songs”) may be given. The problems facing the resemblance theory of music, in which the theory is weakened by an inability to adequately identify the constitutive features of sadness, illustrate this muddle well. We do not need to classify things in order to perceive what they afford. In this regard, sad songs are songs perceived as affording sadness without the need for a Kantian style judgment in which objects of perception are categorized under a clearly delimited concept of sadness.

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40 Alva Noë develops this point to radical conclusions in his work on enactive perception. He argues against “intellectualism” (the view that understanding subsumes concepts under judgments, thereby making perceptual understanding conceptual by virtue of this structure of judgment) by claiming that concepts are skills of access to the world like sensorimotor skills rather than intellectual entities. Instead of aligning anti-intellectualism with non-conceptualism, he provides a place for concepts as abilities in practical know-how. Alva Noe, “Concepts and Practical Knowledge.”
Following Gibson’s work, ecological theories of perception emphasize that sensing is not a process of constructing an internal model of the world based on unstructured perceptual stimulus (as in cognitive models of perception), but rather perceivers exist in a reciprocal relationship with their environment such that perception is a matter of exploring and picking up already patterned affordances. By virtue of their ecological relationship, perceivers and environments mutually specify and are adapted to one another. Sensing does not build a bridge to the world, but rather demonstrates that resonance with the world is already the case. Gibson writes,

Instead of supposing that the brain constructs or computes the objective information from a kaleidoscopic inflow of sensations, we may suppose that the orienting of the organs of perception is governed by the brain so that the whole system of input and output resonates to the external information.  

Or, in the language of the early Chinese texts, the five sense “officials” (guan 官), along with the governing heartmind, resonate (ganying) with the world. Similar to Xunzi’s description of how the senses “discriminate” (bian 辨), “know/realize” (zhi 知) and are “fond” (hao 好) of their objects of perception, Gibson specifies that the resonance of perception is not passive. It is a “self-tuning” activity in which the perceptual system “hunts until it achieves clarity.”  

Perception is fundamentally active, collaborative, and skilled, requiring both environmental stimulation and the attentive actions and reactions of a perceiver, including the movements of the eyes, head, hands, or body. The successful pickup of information reinforces the exploratory adjustments of the sense organs that made it possible, as well as the corresponding neural activity in the brain.

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Meaning is therefore not secondary to perception. We encounter an already meaningful world. Gibson writes,

> The perceiving of an affordance is not a process of perceiving a value free object to which meaning is somehow added in a way that no one has been able to agree upon; it is a process of perceiving a value-rich ecological object.\(^{43}\)

Gibson, echoing Wittgenstein’s description of the physiognomy of meaning, claims that the value of something “is clear on the face of it” and “has a physiognomic quality in the way that the emotions of a man appear on his face.”\(^{44}\) Again, these perceived values are not limited to the phenomenal aspects of experience and although they cannot be accounted for by ordinary physics, they are not bestowed by the act of perceiving alone. The two-way nature of affordances as facts about both the world and the self, and the concurrence of exteroception with proprioception, means that to perceive the world is to coperceive oneself (and others).

Gibson emphasizes that the meaning provided by affordances is “perceptual meaning,” not linguistic or symbolic meaning. The former relies on ecologically intrinsic relations, while the latter depends on a linguistic community with shared, extrinsic social agreements. Language, Gibson says, is therefore arbitrary in ways that perceptual meaning is not. The pickup of sounds is a “one-stage perceptual process” that is meaningful by being directly resonant, but understanding speech additionally requires symbolic cognition. This illustrates the difference between knowledge of the environment and knowledge about the environment, as Gibson points out, and is reminiscent of Wittgenstein’s suggestion that understanding music, like understanding a face, is intransitive when it is not a two-step, diachronic process of perception followed by interpretation.

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\(^{43}\) Gibson, “The Theory of Affordances,” 140.

Since the ecological approach describes the world as meaningful, does it place meaning in music itself? Further, if sad music is music that affords sadness in listeners, is sadness therefore a property of music? There have been a number of efforts to clarify whether affordances are properties and what kind of ontology affordances require, but for the purposes of thinking about music and adhering to the model of resonance as the basis of reciprocity between perceivers and environments, the best option may be Anthony Chemero’s suggestion that we think of affordances as relations rather than properties. Chemero takes Gibson’s work to follow in the tradition of William James’ radical empiricism, in which perception is direct because it includes the object of perception as well as our relations to the object. Following suit, Chemero claims that we perceive our relations to situations when we perceive affordances. More specifically, we perceive our relations to features rather than properties of situations. On this point, Chemero utilizes P.F. Strawson’s idea of “feature placing.” Feature placing does not predicate a property of an object, instead it is a recognition that a situation as a whole has a feature such as “It is raining.” Situations are not objects and features are not predicative properties, if they are properties at all. Only a creature capable of feeling sadness, living in a community that recognizes sadness in people and able to imaginatively attribute it to objects, can perceive that music affords sadness. This does not make sadness a

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property of music, rather music contributes to a situation that invites sadness—the word “affordance” is translated from gestalt psychologist Kurt Lewin’s term Aufforderung, meaning “invitation” or “exhortation”—as a listener’s emotional response and as a feature of the musical situation that minimally includes players, listeners, music, and social context.

2.2.3 Being Moved

Sadness need not be present in music as long as music affords sadness, and more broadly, if music affords feelings. Accordingly, one way to interpret the idea that music sounds the way feelings feel is that music affords feelings. But given that affordances are possibilities for action, in what sense are feelings actions? The theory of affordances works nicely when considering the relationship between music and dance—what is dance if not a display of the movement possibilities afforded by music?—but what is the sensorimotor basis of emotions?

To begin, ample philosophical, scientific, and experiential evidence indicates that emotions are embodied and have distinct physical characteristics. Even a brief consideration of the language in which emotions are described, such as “red-hot anger” or “drowning in sorrow,” reveals their embodied aesthetics. Amidst the wide-ranging work in philosophy on the embodied nature of the emotions, including (but not limited to) pragmatist, phenomenological, and enactive approaches, perhaps William James stated the matter most radically:

Our natural way of thinking about these standard emotions is that the mental perception of some fact excites the mental affection called the emotion, and that this latter state of mind gives rise to the bodily expression. My thesis on the contrary is that the bodily changes follow directly the PERCEPTION of the exciting fact, and that our feeling of the
James’ definition of emotions as wholly constituted by bodily changes is controversial, yet notwithstanding complex questions of whether and to what degree emotions are also cognitive (and in what ways cognition is embodied), it is difficult to deny the physiological nature of emotions as both felt and expressed. To be “moved” emotionally is concretely based in the bodily changes we experience, to varying degrees, as emotions.

Responding in part to James’ theory of emotions, Henri Bergson elaborated insightfully on the matter, claiming that while emotions are not fully reducible to the sum of sensorimotor sensations, their intensity is directly coordinated with muscular tension and movements. In Chapter 1 (“The Intensity of Psychic States”) of *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, he writes,

> Each of these states may be reduced, we believe, to a system of muscular contractions co-ordinated by an idea... There are also high degrees of joy and sorrow, or desire, aversion and even shame, the height of which will be found to be nothing but the reflex movements begun by the organism and perceived by consciousness.

The intensity and magnitude of feelings are made possible by corresponding bodily movements that range from subtle muscular tension to palpitations, trembling, crying, smiling, and various other reflexes and gestures. Bergson claims that if all traces of bodily action and sensorimotor movement

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47 William James, “What is an Emotion?” in *Mind*, Vol. 9, 1884, 189. Jesse Prinz develops James’ theory of emotions, arguing that, “emotions are perceptions (conscious or unconscious) of patterned changes in the body (construed inclusively).” “Emotions Embodied,” in *Thinking about Feeling*, Robert Solomon, ed., (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 45. Diverse contemporary work on the bodily nature of emotions can be found in the broader field of embodied cognition, including thinkers such as Antonio Damasio, Shaun Gallagher, Mark Johnson, and Alva Noë. In addition to James, John Dewey and Maurice Merleau-Ponty must also be credited with pioneering the embodied and enactive approach to emotions. On the Chinese side, Bongrae Seok’s recent book *Embodied Moral Psychology and Confucian Philosophy* presents a persuasive case for Confucian (Ru) philosophy as a unique model of moral psychology in which embodied emotions are the basis of virtue. (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2013).

are eliminated, all that will be left of an emotion is the bare idea of it without any intensity. *Contra* James, for Bergson there remains an “irreducible psychic element” in emotions; nonetheless, the idea has no discernible intensity without the accompanying motor sensations and movements. In fact, the bodily movements we experience as expressions of strong emotions are the means by which these emotions pass through different degrees of intensity.

In Chinese philosophy, a visceral passage from the *Mengzi* provides another apt description of the embodied nature of emotions and draws a connection between the most corporeal of bodies (the *ti* body), appropriate emotional responses, and virtue. In this case, it is the physical response of people who did not bury their parents properly:

> In great antiquity there were some who did not bury their parents. When their parents died, they took them up and threw them into a ditch. Later when they passed by them and saw foxes and wild cats eating them and flies and gnats eating them, their perspiration started out upon their foreheads, they looked askance and could not bear to look straight. Now the perspiration was not for the sake of other people. It was something at the bottom of their hearts that showed in their expressions. They immediately went home and returned with baskets and spades and covered the bodies.  

Elsewhere in the text, we hear that the appropriate cultivation of the five virtues of the heartmind shows as a certain glossy lustre in the face and is displayed in movements of the body. Reminiscent of the earlier quoted passage from the *Book of Songs* ("Although I posses no virtue which I can reveal to you, let us sing and dance"), Mengzi says of virtue, “The four limbs do not speak, but they convey it.” Thus, rather than the *gong* body of public ritual, for example, it is the *ti* body of embodiment that reveals the corporeal roots of virtue.

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49 *Mengzi*, 3A5.
50 *Mengzi*, 13.21/69/14 (7A21). Mark Csikszentmihályi notes that in the *Wuxing*, *Xunzi*, and *Mengzi*, there is a relationship between virtue (*de* 德) and one’s countenance having the warmth and lustre of jade. Sagacity is grounded in
In addition to the sensorimotor, bodily basis of emotions, their spatiotemporal character also shapes our sense of emotions as characteristic movements. We speak of being elevated by joy and crestfallen by disappointment not only because of the respective bodily sensations, but also because of the spatiotemporal aesthetics of each feeling. As playing music demonstrates, spatiotemporal understanding of many sorts, including aesthetic, existential, and objective, is essential to sensorimotor skill. Movement brings the spatiality of our body into being, Maurice Merleau-Ponty wrote, for in movement the body inhabits time and space and “actively assumes them, it takes them up into their basic significance which is obscured in the commonplaceness of established situations.”51 The spatiality of the body, as “an attitude directed towards a certain existing or possible task,” is thus not a “spatiality of position” like that of external objects, but rather it is a “spatiality of situation.”52

Consider, for example, how the sensorimotor and spatiotemporal characteristics of grace operate in Bergson’s description:

If jerky movements are lacking in grace, the reason is that each of them is self-sufficient and does not announce those which are to follow.
If curves are more graceful than broken lines, the reason is that, while a curved line changes its direction at every moment, every new direction is indicated in the preceding one. Thus the perception of ease in motion passes over into the pleasure of mastering the flow of time and of holding transformations in the physical body; it is manifest through the senses becoming more acute and the optimization of qi, or vital energy, and becomes apparent in the face taking on the qualities of jade. Mark Csikszentmihalyi, Material Virtue: Ethics and the Body in Early China, (Brill, 2004), 218.

**Mark Csikszentmihalyi, Material Virtue: Ethics and the Body in Early China, (Brill, 2004), 218.**

**51 Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, p. 102.**

**52 Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, p. 115.** Of course Heidegger was a forerunner of this idea with his descriptions of the spatiotemporal disclosure of being-in-the-world and the irreducibility of phenomenological space and time to idealist or empiricist accounts. Perception always occurs on the basis of purposeful, we could say meaningful, engagements that already disclose a world themselves. “Space is neither in the subject nor is the world in space. Rather, space is ‘in’ the world since the being-in-the-world constitutive for Da-sein has disclosed space. Space is not in the subject, nor does that subject observe the world ‘as if’ it were in space. Rather, the ‘subject,’ correctly understood ontologically, Da-sein, is spatial in a primordial sense.” Martin Heidegger, Being and Time, §111, 103.
Certain rhythms and motions produce the sense of spatiotemporal ease we associate with grace, and further, exact a physical sympathy through which we are able to anticipate coming movements. The spatiotemporality of grace grants us communication with a dancer’s sensorimotor experience. The charm of the physical sympathy that grace brings, Bergson notes, is pleasing in part because it suggests an affinity with moral sympathy. The movements of sympathy, what he calls “mobile sympathy,” experienced as grace display the meaningful intimacy of bodily movements and emotions through aesthetic feelings. In fact, the mutual aesthetics (both sensorimotor and spatiotemporal) of embodiment and emotions at work here may be described as the mutual affordances of the situation.

In the case of the Yue Ji, then, the corporeal roots of personal character are cultivated through features of the spatiotemporal, embodied aesthetics of music (and nature) such as harmony and timeliness, which afford like feelings through sympathetic resonance in listeners. The possibilities of embodying de through playing great or “virtuous” music, however, indicate that affordances are not unidirectional in the case of music. Feelings also afford music. As the Yue Ji describes, when the heart is “moved,” we generate sounds accordingly. But if music and feelings afford one another, then feelings are also features of situations and are not limited to internal states. How might this be explained?

The idea of qing (情), with its unusual semantic range including both feelings and situation, offers promise. According to the Yue Ji, when we are moved, qing (as feelings) take form in sound,
and when these sounds are composed or patterned, we call them music (or “airs”). This belief in the direct relationship between sound and feeling leads to the further claim that music reflects the state of affairs in a given culture and era. Qing as feelings thus become qing as situation or central characteristics. The Yue Ji makes this connection explicit by not only speaking of qing as feelings or sentiments, but also in its description of the qing of music and of nature. In one pertinent passage, sages are said to be those who can initiate (zuo 作) because they know the central character or qing of music and ritual, respectively described in the following passage as: music is the harmony of the heavens and earth, while ritual is their order. Understanding the sentiments of the people as well as the nature of music is essential to rulers seeking manage chaos and avoid revolt. Here, the influence between feelings, music, nature, and culture is drawn according to the shared aesthetics of qing, allowing for a direct relationship between them.

Objections to the idea that personal character can be heard in music usually assume that the qualities associated with character, such as emotions and ethical bearing, belong only to people and

(Singapore: The Institute of East Asian Philosophies, 1986), 59. Chad Hansen does concur with Graham that qing did not mean emotions or passions in the early period, since these Indo-European psychological concepts were introduced to China through Buddhism, but suggests that qing can be given a unified meaning as “reality feedback” or “reality input.” Chad Hansen, “Qing (Emotions) in Pre-Buddhist Chinese Thought,” in Emotions in Asian Thought: A Dialogue in Comparative Philosophy (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 183 & 196. Christoph Harbsmeier organizes the semantic range accordingly: “Factual: the basic facts of a matter,” “Metaphysical: underlying and basic dynamic factors,” “Political: basic popular sentiments/responses,” “Anthropological: basic instincts/propensities,” “Positive: essential sensibilities and sentiments, viewed as commendable,” “Personal: basic motivation/attitude,” “Emotional: personal deep convictions, responses, and feelings.” Christoph Harbsmeier, “The Semantics of Qing in Pre-Buddhist Chinese,” in Love and Emotions in Traditional Chinese Literature, ed. Halvor Eifring, (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 71-72. Michael Puett argues against seeking a basic meaning for qing, for its semantic breadth is precisely its importance, and instead favors attention to contextual analysis. See his essay, “The Ethics of Responding Properly,” also in Love and Emotions in Traditional Chinese Literature. Brian Bruya locates emotional overtones in early usages of qing without equating them to later conceptions of emotions. He emphasizes that, for the early Chinese, emotions were not private or subjective. The close association of qing with ganying (translated by Bruya as “mutual arousal and response”) helps explain their publicness and bridges the semantic gap between feelings and situation or facts. Brian Bruya, “Qing and Emotion in Early Chinese Thought,” in Chinese Philosophy and the Trends of 21st Century Civilization, Fang Keli, ed., (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 2003).

55 《禮記樂記》2.4. Cook, 46. Cook translates qing as “the nature of [ritual and music].”
thus cannot be transferred into or through music. Similarly, if qing are defined in terms of subjective emotions or feelings—people’s internal states—then we are drawn into debates as to how qing could also mean something like the facts of a situation or what is real or genuine. In both dilemmas, aesthetics are sorely underestimated. These objections do not fare as well when the relationship between sound and character described in the Yue Ji, and between the idea of qing as both feelings and situation, is primarily aesthetic. In Bergson’s description of grace, for example, the mobile sympathy arising from the aesthetic feeling of watching a dancer move in certain ways we call graceful gives rise to grace as a feature of the situation—an affordance—that is not confined to private feelings.

While the aesthetics of qing are underemphasized in much of the secondary literature, this is not true of certain primary texts. Michael Puett does notice that in the Xici of the Zhongyi (Yijing or Book of Changes), Fuxi is said to have created the trigrams “in order to characterize the qing of the myriad things.” In other words, qing can be rendered through aesthetic forms. Further, he cites a passage from the Huainanzi in which the qing that humans receive from tian are categorized as the relationship each sense organ has to aesthetic qualities: “Generally speaking, in what humans receive from Heaven, the qing of the ears and eyes relating to sounds and colors, the mouth and nose to fragrance and foulness, the flesh and skin to cold and warmth are all one.”

This correlates with a passage from the earlier Xunzi in which the relationship between the heartmind and emotions is likened to that of sense organs and their percepts:

Forms, bodies, colors, and patterns are differentiated by the eye.
Sounds, voices, clarity, muffledness, pitches, harmonies, and odd sounds are differentiated by the ear. Sweet, bitter, salty,

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bland, spicy, sour, and odd flavors are differentiated by the mouth. Fragrant, malodorous, sweet, pungent, ripe, putrid, and odd smells are differentiated by the nose. Pain, itching, cold, heat, smooth, rough, light, and heavy are differentiated by the body. Happiness, anger, grief, enjoyment, love, hate, and desire are differentiated by the heartmind.57

The comparison between sense perception and emotional perception highlights the embodied nature of emotions again, as well as the aesthetic fidelity between sense as perceiving and sense as meaningfulness. Qing are feelings sensed as both sentiments and sense perceptions, per the ecological nature of our situation and of sensing. And, if the heartmind is a sense organ similar to the usual five, then it too is embodied and perceives aesthetic qualities—in this case of (or more strongly as) emotions. If there is a unifying dimension to the various senses of qing that may be identified without asserting a unified meaning, it is the profoundly aesthetic nature of qing. Thus, if the sensorimotor and spatiotemporal characteristics according to which emotions are sensed are aesthetic, and not just situational (existential and phenomenological) or objective, we may affirm that music not only sounds the way feelings feel, but feelings feel the way music sounds.

As a result of the aesthetic and ecological dynamics between sound and feeling, sages were able to pattern (li 理) their qing through embodying music (and ritual). As Puett emphasizes, they were thereby able become “fully resonant” and “fully responsive.”58 An aesthetic, rather than cognitive or psychological, account of emotions explains how feelings are patterned by music, as well as expressed through or even in music, without violating the claim that only living, sentient

57 form, color, taste, sound, and odd smells are differentiated by the mouth. Fragrant, malodorous, sweet, pungent, ripe, putrid, and odd smells are differentiated by the nose. Pain, itching, cold, heat, smooth, rough, light, and heavy are differentiated by the body. Happiness, anger, grief, enjoyment, love, hate, and desire are differentiated by the heartmind.

58 Puett, “The Ethics of Responding Properly,” 59. Puett notes that in the Huainanzi, “The sage is not one who has mastered a body of transmitted teachings from antiquity, but is rather one who always acts properly insofar as he has brought his qing in accord with the proper patterns of the universe.” 62.
beings have feelings. Embodying timeliness and harmony (the *qing* of both nature and music) through playing certain kinds of music patterns one’s feelings, and in turn one’s *de*. Is this yet another version of the resemblance theory in which emotions and music share aesthetic forms, in this case as patterns? Although the mutual aesthetics of *qing*, *de*, and music are not wholly incompatible with resemblance theories, following the arguments in the previous chapter in favor of resonance rather than formal resemblance as the basis of fidelity among the senses of sense, the mutually patterns of feeling, character, and music—as ever changing configurations of *qi* or vital energy—operate through resonance rather than fixed forms. On this point, we may consider how timeliness also eludes form and measure through its specificity and can be distinguished from clocktime accordingly. Timeliness is “so hard to catch and so easy to miss” because it cannot be standardized or represented in a manner suitable to formal resemblance across instances; yet it is knowable and skilled, eminently so through being embodied. Timeliness resonates, while ordinary time does not.

The unity of situation and feeling enabled by the aesthetics of *qing* also provides for another kind of fidelity required for listening skilled enough to sense *de*: the fidelity of sincerity. Notably, the character for *de* (德) is nearly identical to the character for listening (聽). The only difference between the two characters is the presence of an ear radical in *ting* where a person radical occurs in *de*. The components shared in common by the characters suggest a way of understanding how *de* might be sensed in music: sincerity or directness (直) of the heart (心). Sincerity was not only central to Ru ethics, it was also regarded as a method of non-verbal communication. In the *Huainanzi*, for instance, jingcheng (精誠) or “quintessential sincerity,” operating on the basis of
resonance (ganying), served as means for a ruler to communicate non-verbally with both the heavens and the people. In the case of sensing someone’s de, sincerity or fidelity of heartmind is required of the perceiver as well as the perceived. And, as evinced in what Confucius taught and modeled, listening becomes skilled not only by way of the sensorimotor and spatiotemporal cultivation that music provides, but through the sincerity of attuning one’s ear.

2.3 Attuning One’s Ear: Musical Cultivation

The Master said: “At fifteen I devoted myself to learning; at thirty I took my stance; at forty I was free of doubt; at fifty I knew the propensities of tian; at sixty my ear was attuned; at seventy I could follow the desires of my heartmind without impropriety.

-Analects 2.4

A close reading of the Lunyu 論語 or Analects reveals that fully understanding Confucius’ major teachings on self-cultivation, harmony, ritual propriety, appropriateness, virtue (de 德), and becoming a virtuosic person (ren 仁) requires taking his statements on music into account.

Confucius’ emphasis on an “attuned ear” as a necessary step towards a trustworthy heartmind is not anomalous in this regard, as illustrated by the fact that the character for sage (sheng 聖) is inscribed with listening by the presence of an ear radical (er 聲), and heard in its homophony with the word for “sound” (sheng 聲). As one who attains the highest degree of ethical, aesthetic, and spiritual

59 According to Csikszentmihalyi, the metaphor of the sage’s “jade tone” that causes the metal bell to vibrate is key to understanding the resonant power of the sage’s sincerity (cheng 誠) and the transpersonal nature of sagehood. §6.3 of the Wuxing reads, “If one is sharp-eared then one can hear the Way of the Gentleman. If one hears the Way of the gentleman then one will have a jade tone. If one has a jade tone then one will give form to it.” Further, to “enact” this dao in a “timely” manner is equated with virtue. Mark Csikszentmihalyi, Material Virtue: Ethics and the Body in Early China, 162 & 183. As well, in the earliest use of qing (the Zhou Shu section of the Kang Gao chapter of the Shang Shu) we find: “Nature is to be feared because it assists the sincere. The qing of the people is entirely visible.” Quoted from Bruya, “Qing and Emotion in Early Chinese Thought,” 156.
development, the sage is not coincidentally characterized by extraordinary perceptual abilities—especially listening. For Confucius, an attuned ear is neither innate nor accidental: it is developed through attentive dedication to practices that cultivate an acute sense of listening and which attune a person in diverse ways, including emotionally, ethically, and socially.

While cultivating skilled listening and attuning one’s ear is not limited to musical practice, for Confucius, playing music of the right kind is irreplaceable in the ongoing ethical project of becoming virtuosic. The substantial benefits of playing music include cultivating harmony, deference, appropriate speech and silence, aesthetic sensitivity, a sense of wholeness, and perhaps most importantly, perceptual skill. Music also complements ritual by imbuing it with vital energies such as harmony, resonance, and timeliness that guard against wooden or perfunctory ritual, and by creating a sense of unification within which the distinct roles designated by ritual can be embodied and performed with appropriate feeling. Because music comes from “within,” the unity brought about by its harmony is particularly heartfelt.

Sincerity is at the center of the aesthetic and ethical self-cultivation advised by Confucius. An ethical act must be done with the right feelings, as in passage 3.4 of the Analects when Confucius advises that in rituals of mourning, it is better to express real grief than to focus on formal details. Similarly in 3.26, he criticizes those who obey ritual but without sufficient respect, who hold positions of power without magnanimity, and again, who follow mourning rites without truly grieving. Further, acting sincerely with the right feelings must be done in the proper measure. A sense of du 度 or degree is essential to developing the sense of appropriateness characteristic of both aesthetic and ethical virtuosity. The skills acquired in playing music hone one’s listening skills
broadly and finely, in particular through the combination of both requisite and idiosyncratic
sensorimotor and spatiotemporal practices. Again, these are not degrees or measurements that can
be standardized in formal rules any more than timeliness (or sincerity), but they are nonetheless
perceivable in the mutual aesthetics of feeling and music. They are, in Bergson’s language, the
heterogeneous intensities that feelings such as grace pass through.

In Analects 17.11, Confucius challenges instrumental understandings of music and ritual,
imploring his listeners to consider them more deeply:

To say ‘ritual, ritual’! Is this to speak of nothing more than jade and silk?
To say ‘music, music’! Is this to speak of nothing more than bells and drums?²⁶⁰

In pointing beyond the formal implements of ritual and music, what else is he referring to? Wang
Bi’s commentary on this passage reminds us that bells and drums are only the tools of music,
whereas harmony is its governing principle or central character (qing). In both the content and
rhythmic structure of questioning, Confucius calls for attention to the fundamentals of music that
instruct and cultivate the life of feeling. This simultaneously develops one’s ethical bearing because,
for Confucius, virtue requires appropriate emotions as both felt and expressed. The aesthetic
sensibilities of one who has embodied musical harmony are directly applicable to living
harmoniously in social and ethical contexts.

Notably, playing music harmoniously with others requires skilled listening to them, as
described of Confucius in 7.32: “…without fail he asked them to sing the song again before
harmonizing with it.” Both the activity and metaphor of harmony imply deference and attunement,
and thus listening, amongst the parts that include both the self and others. The self-tuning ability of

⁶⁰ Analects 17.11: 子曰：「禮云禮云！玉帛云乎哉！樂云樂云！鐘鼓云乎哉！」
our ecologically oriented perceptual system described by Gibson can be harnessed in music in order to train attention to others as well as one’s own authentic communication. The demands of musical aesthetics thereby become an ethical training ground for qualities of character or de—which is such as harmony, resonance, and timeliness—that cannot be transmitted as formalized ethical regulations.

Skilled sensing is all the more necessary to ethical deliberation and behavior because of the Confucius’ emphasis on context, particularity, situation, and appropriateness that is demonstrated in the example of listening before joining the harmony. Confucius models harmony (and harmonizing) as both a personal and communal process that, because the aesthetics of qing range across first, second, and third person, becomes a feature of the situation.61

Thus while it is said in the Yue Ji that music gives form to de, this does not mean that it is formalizable in music. Rather, it is sensed in the very aspects of music that exceed form such as tone, timbre, timeliness, and harmony. Considered in terms of language, an “attuned ear” is able to listen outside the limits of discourse, such as in Analects 17.19 when Confucius ponders whether to leave off speaking altogether. In response, Zigong wonders what teachings his followers will be able to pass on if Confucius is silent. His answer is: “Does tian speak? Yet, the four seasons continue and

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61 Arindam Chakrabarti addresses the perennial question of whose emotion is experienced when an audience relishes a work of art with the provocative answer that the emotions of aesthetic experience do not have specific owners. Although Chakrabarti focuses on the resources of early Indian philosophy (particularly Abhinavagupta’s rasa theory) to counter the assumption that subjective emotions must be personal, his suggestions offer something to consider regarding the claims of early Ru thinkers that de can be sensed in music. In Chakrabarti’s analysis, the “alchemy” of the heart—as “the imperceptible universal site of imagination that is full with vibrant feeling because it is void of objects”—resonating with a work of art transforms ordinary or “durable” emotions into aesthetic, personless sentiments. Aesthetic imagination, like moral unselfishness, releases the first person lock on feelings, freeing them to become features of artworks and situations more generally, and in the case of de, to migrate from belonging exclusively to people to becoming characteristic of music. This seems especially plausible given music’s own “emptiness” or lack of objects. Importantly, this alchemy does not occur because feelings are made imaginary by art, rather they are depersonalized such that they become, we might say, ecological. Arindam Chakrabarti, “Play, Pleasure, Pain: Ownerless Emotions in Rasa-Aesthetics,” in Science Literature, and Aesthetics, Volume XV Part 3 of History of Science, Philosophy and Culture in Indian Civilization, ed. Amiya Dev (New Delhi: Centre for Studies in Civilizations, 2009), 200.
the myriad things grow. Does tian speak?

Two passages earlier, in 17.17 (echoing 1.3), Confucius remarks that it is rare for clever or glib speech and an ingratiating appearance to be signs of being virtuosic (ren). The contrast between superficially appealing qualities and the aesthetics of virtue is also made with music in 3.25 when Confucius describes the shao music as both supremely beautiful and good, in contrast to the wu music, which is supremely beautiful but not as good an influence.

And in 7.14, he proclaims the mutual dangers of the wanton music of the state of Zheng and clever or glib talkers. We may surmise that, as in the Yue Ji, music that embodies the timely turning of the seasons and the harmonious growth of things, without indulging in insincere or shallow aesthetic delights, satisfies the ethical aesthetics Confucius favors.

Confucius’s recognition of the corruptive potential of speech and music is reminiscent of Plato’s famous suspicion of poetry and music. In Plato’s case, his worry about the influence of music was based on the idea that melodies imitate and represent human speech, and so are capable of arousing powerful emotions in people. For this reason among others, he was concerned to establish the primacy of philosophy as the highest form of mousike over the lower forms such as poetry and hymn. Confucius, on the other hand, advocated the proper use of music to cultivate the best of human character and nurture the functioning of the state; in other words, Confucius chose to utilize the power of music in service of refinement, rather than establish rational dominion over it through philosophy as Plato did. One reason for the difference is that in the Confucian account music does not represent emotions, rather music embodies them according to the mutual aesthetics of sound and feeling. Instead of forsaking the unique effects of music on character altogether, what

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62子曰。予欲無言 子貢曰。子如不言、則小子何述焉 子曰。天何言哉。四時行焉、百物生焉。天何言哉。
is needed is an adequately attuned ear that can hear sincerity and de in the resonant ecological aesthetics of playing music with others and that can thereby harmonize appropriately.

In Analects 3.23, Confucius brings together the skilled dimensions of listening with the transformative power of music:

The Master was discussing music with the Grand Music Master of Lu, and said: “This can be realized through music: begin by playing in unison, and then proceed harmoniously with sincere tone, clarity, and timely flow, thereby reaching culmination.”  

The movement between unity and uniqueness, deference and improvisation, brings music and its listeners (including other musicians) to the kind of consummation reflected in the changes of seasons and the fecundity of nature’s natality. Just as a musician must reach a level of mastery in order to navigate the possibilities of sound in a beautifully original, harmonious way, we grow our ability to navigate our own possibilities by cultivating fluency and virtuosity in life. In music, that is, we become aware of the delicate artistry of possibility – a single note in a melody creates the sensation of resolution or dissolution – and as well, we learn to identify this sensation in life, in ritual propriety, through affective attention to our relations. This unlocks the creative power (one of the meanings of de) between the individual, their world, and the cosmos. How one participates determines the path to becoming a virtuosic person (ren), showing as well the way aesthetic cultivation carries a fertile ambiguity between “how” and “what”: how we sing with others determines what we all become. Like playing music well, becoming ren or virtuosic is personal, public, resonant and communicative. The “re-“ (“back”) of “resound” testifies to the ecological

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63 子語魯大師樂，曰。樂其可知也：始作、翕如也。從之、純如也、皦如也、繹如也、以成
nature of perception and the unique relational role one has in the wholeness of public life and culture.

2.4 Conclusion: Imagination and Singing with Others

But what if I tell you: “Imagine a melody”? I have to ‘sing it inwardly’ to myself.

– Wittgenstein

Everything is here in me. There is no greater joy than, on introspection to find that one is truly sincere (chénɡ 誠). And there is nothing more immediate in striving to be virtuosic in one’s conduct (rén 仁) than making every effort to put oneself in the other’s place (shù 恕).

– Mengzi

What does it mean to call a song sad? Roland Barthes once opined that the adjective is the poorest of linguistic categories with which to describe music. And Merleau-Ponty drew insight from Cézanne’s claim that he could not paint adjectives, but rather only the things themselves, as they are, and then the adjectives would be apparent. If we enact the meaningfulness of music, say its “sadness,” in concert with the mutual aesthetics of qínɡ, and the mutual affordances of music and feelings, it should therefore be possible for to sense the recursive and resonant patterns of influence that give rise to this meaningfulness—most especially when 情 are sincere. And yet, however much we may sense music’s meaningfulness through affordances and environmental feedback, music remains contentless. The ecological aesthetics of qínɡ and dē, rather than supporting the idea that

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Wittgenstein, Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology, sec. 81, 16.

there meaning in music itself, in the end serve to prove that music’s meaningfulness is a matter of perceptual skill. Meaningfulness echoes through sensing from an incalculable array of sources (including cultural conditions, bodies, and nature) as a kind of aesthetic and existential proprioception. To speak of sensing sadness, whether in music or people, always relies on the perception of the aesthetics of what is so vaguely named sadness. The fact that music readily slips out of adjectives thus should cause us to take pause at applying those terms too easily to people as well.

This encourages imagination, both musical and moral. Gabriel Marcel wrote that a true listener recreates the music that she listens to, but not as a series of intellectual operations. This is the “magic” of music and the flesh through which it incarnates for us. When in Analects 4.15, the “one thread” that binds Confucius’ teaching is described as doing one’s utmost (zhong 忠) and putting oneself in another’s place (shu 恕), we should remember the way a musician or dancer’s movements resonate in their audience’s bodies as sensorimotor and spatiotemporal feelings that “move” us, as in the “mobile sympathy” of grace. In music, the imagination—or what Percy Bysshe Shelley called the great instrument of moral good—thus shows itself to be embodied in the ecological event of perception rather than a secondary cognitive or semiotic operation upon sensations. This is why, for Confucius, perception is ethical and music is such an incomparable practice of cultivating the senses and sensibilities that allow one to give their heartmind free reign.

What of the claim to perceive de through music, then? Taking into account the ecological resonance and responsiveness of nature, world, and perception, the resulting mutual aesthetics of qing, and the fidelity of skilled listening, the claim becomes more considerable. If it is still to be

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doubted, this is due to the tendency to objectify what is perceived and to deny the unstoppable, immeasurable movements of sensing. At times, the early Confucian philosophers were guilty of this themselves, yet as is often the case with the human condition, the failure to fully comprehend or follow one’s insights can be remedied from within. The timeliness, harmony, and resonance that cannot be revealed in the notes of sheet music, like the excellence of a virtuous person, show themselves in the “singing” of sympathetic imagination, skilled listening, and the feeling of a situation.67

67 Jesse Prinz writes, “In developing a theory of emotion, we should not feel compelled to supplement embodied states with meaningful thoughts; we should instead put meaning into our bodies, and let perceptions of the heart reveal our situation in the world. “Embodied Emotions,” 60.
“Without melody.—There are people for whom a steady inner repose and a harmonious ordering of all their capacities are so characteristic that all goal-oriented activity is repugnant to them. They resemble music that consists of nothing but long, drawn-out harmonic chords, without ever showing even the start of an articulated, active melody. All movement from without serves only to establish their boat at once in a new state of equilibrium on the lake of euphonic harmony. Modern people generally become extremely impatient when they encounter such natures, who become nothing, without our being able to say that they are nothing. But in certain moods, the sight of them arouses an uncommon question: why melody at all? Why isn’t it sufficient for us when life mirrors itself peacefully upon a deep lake?”

- Friedrich Nietzsche, Human, All Too Human: A Book for Free Spirits

Chapter Three returns to the theme that music is empty of meaning initially proposed in Chapter One, now considered in the context of Zhuangzi’s descriptions of the effects of listening and the relationship of music to naturalness and spontaneity (ziran 自然). For Zhuangzi, practicing progressively subtler listening quiets the self in order to free us from habitual judgments, dichotomous thinking, and the fool’s errand of chasing ultimate causes. Why does listening effect these changes? In answering this question, let us consider how listening is open and receptive. These characteristics of listening displace objective space and time, and in doing so, help guide us to what Zhuangzi calls “the pivot of dao”: the centerpoint of change that occupies no space and spends no time, and at which all things effortlessly transform in their self-emerging spontaneity. Arriving here through the openness of listening and emptiness of music, we become nothing without being nothing, like Nietzsche’s one “without melody,” and like Zhuangzi’s free and easy wanderer who roams with dao, but without goals, agendas, or destinations.

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3.1 Listening as Emptying: Fasting the Self

A remarkable passage from the early Chinese philosophical work the *Zhuangzi* (莊子) presents the unique challenge of learning to listen to the music of *tian* 天 (nature, sky, heavens).

Here, at the opening of the pivotal *Qiwulun* 齊物論 (Discussion on Smoothing Things Out) chapter, Ziqi has been discovered in a trance of sorts—“having gone beyond himself”—while listening to the piping of *tian*.

Ziqi of Nanguo reclined elbow on armrest, looked up at the sky and exhaled, in a trance as though he had lost his counterpart. Yancheng Ziyou stood in attendance. “What is this?” he asked. “Can the frame really be made to be like withered wood, the heartmind (*xin* 心) like dead ashes? The man reclining here now is not the man reclining yesterday.” Ziqi said “Good question, Yan! Just now I lost myself, did you know that? You hear the pipes of people, don’t you, but not yet the pipes of earth. Perhaps you hear the pipes of earth, but not yet the pipes of *tian*?

The passage continues by describing the practice of listening to the windy sounds of the earth that draw one into an increasingly silent and receptive state:

Ziyou responded, “Dare I ask you what this means?”

To this Ziqi replied, “When the Great Clump blows forth its vital breath (*qi*), it is called the wind. As soon as it arises, the hollows of the ten thousand things sound furiously. Can’t you hear them, long and drawn out? The trees of the mountain forest are riddled with openings—like noses, mouths, and ears…With a gentle breeze comes a faint harmony, while a powerful gale brings a grand harmony. And once this fierce wind has passed, the myriad hollows are emptied into silence again.

Ziyou said, “So the piping of the earth means the sound of these hollows. And the piping of humans is the sound of bamboo panpipes. What, then, is the piping of *tian*?”

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2 All translations of the *Zhuangzi* are mine and are based on 洪業主編《莊子引得》哈佛燕京學社引得特刊第20號, *Zhuangzi Yinde [A Concordance to Chuang Tzu]*, Harvard-Yenching Institute Sinological Index Series, Supplement no. 20 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956). This passage occurs at 2.1-7. A note on the translation of *xin* 心: I translate *xin* as “heartmind” here, although it is also commonly rendered as “mind” or “heart,” depending on the context. For the classical Chinese philosophers, there was no clear separation between cognitive and affective activities; *xin* both thinks and feels.
Ziqi responds that the piping of *tian* blowing through the myriad things enables each thing to arise uniquely as itself (*shi qi zi ji* 使其自). The source of the piping—“Who does the sounding?”—remains unanswered; or, more likely, unanswerable. How does listening to the music of *tian*, as another example of sensing the wind, lead to an experience of things in their naturalness or self-arising spontaneity (*ziran* 自然) and why does Zhuangzi advocate this practice?

For Zhuangzi, listening to sound and music function as practices of emptying the self—or as he describes it in a later passage, “fasting” the self—in order to move beyond the boundaries of conventional thought with its epistemological and linguistic fixations. To be clear, there is no essential or autonomous notion of self in early Chinese philosophy; instead, self is a locus of complex, dynamic processes integrated with the environment. A self can be understood in its particularity with reference to the larger whole of its world but remains ever embodied and inextricable from the wider field of its relationships. Consequently, Zhuangzi’s descriptions of fasting or losing the self speak to the attenuating of frozen distinctions and forms that isolate us from our natural reciprocity with all things and hinder our perceptual sensitivity to change. As Zhuangzi counsels, the source from which things arise can never be fixed, and this lack of determinate cause guarantees that transformation will always undermine naming, or judgments of the form “that’s it, that’s not” (*shifei* 是非). In fact, anything can be “it” or “other” and the matter of whether something is or is not depends on one’s position or perspective—as he puts it, whether one is “here” or “there.” Zhuangzi therefore emphasizes that things are “such” from where they are “so” (*ran yu ran* 然於然), and are “not such” from where they are “not so” (*bu ran yu ran* 不然於不然). What’s more, there is a place where relative distinctions such as it and other, and presumably here and there, are not opposites at all: a place Zhuangzi calls the pivot of *dao* (*dao shu* 道樞).
Zhuangzi’s advice for reaching the pivot of dao, where one “roams free,” is to quiet the heartmind through progressively subtler and open listening. This guidance is interestingly reiterated by Confucius in the Renjianshi 人間世 (In The Human World) chapter where he instructs Yan Hui on how to transform with all things:

Unify your attention (zhì 志). Do not listen with the ears, rather listen with the heartmind. Then, do not listen with the heartmind, but with the vital breath (qì 氣). The ears stop at what they hear. The heartmind stops at what its thoughts tally. As for the vital breath, it is empty (xū 虛) and awaits the arising of things. Only dao 損 gathers emptiness. This emptiness is the fasting of the heartmind.³

Considering this passage alongside the opening scene in which Ziqi loses himself listening to the piping of tian 天 suggests that the progression from listening to the music of humans, to that of the earth, and then to tian, is a movement from listening with the ears, to listening with the heartmind, and then with qì as the our vital breath or energy. Only by listening with the open, receptive, and resonant responsiveness of qì can the self—with its judgments, preferences, anthropocentricism, and egoic machinations—be quieted enough for the singular becoming of things to be audible through the piping of tian. In this way, listening to the music opens the inner space needed to directly experience things in their naturalness as ziran 自然, or spontaneously so of themselves. Gathering “emptiness,” through receptively open listening, then, is a way of making space and releasing fixed forms.

For things to be ziran means that their origins are obscure and complex, but their arising or unfolding spontaneity does not imply that they pop into existence or change without influence.⁴

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³ 若一志，無聽之以耳而聽之以心，無聽之以心而聽之以氣。聽止於耳，心止於符。氣也者，虛而待物者也。唯道集虛。虛者，心齋也。Zhuangzi Yinde, 4.26-28. Here I have chosen to translate xū 虛 as “empty,” but note that alternate translations such as “space,” “tenuous,” and “insubstantial” have their merits in various contexts as well. The character depicts a gap between two mountains.

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Rather, for Zhuangzi, there is no conclusive source or final cause of things to be discerned beyond the rhythms and patterns of emergence that mark them. He describes the arising of things as being like “music coming out of emptiness (xu),” and as unceasing change without a known “soil from which they sprout.” He cautions that as tempting as it may be to speculate about a supreme cause, such a cause has no manifest form (xing) as evidence of its existence. If there is a grander force at play that makes everything “sound,” such as the piping of nature, there is no form or sign besides the sounding that is indistinguishable from what it animates. Since xu is a tenuous emptiness, and not an absolute void or nothingness, ziran is not ex nihilo spontaneity; rather it is aesthetic and perceptual spontaneous unfolding akin to sounding of music out of silence.⁵

Zhuangzi’s analogy of penumbra and shadow offers an alternative to defining dependence and causality in terms of fixed grounds or first causes. In one of the last passages of the Qiwu Lun chapter, the penumbra asks the shadow why it constantly moves about. The shadow responds, “Do I depend on something to be as I am? Does what I depend on in turn depend on something to be so? Do I depend on snake’s scales and cicada’s wings? How would I know why it is so? How would I know why it is not so?” Even the penumbra, seemingly dependent on the shadow whose motions in turn depend on something else, is said to transform “mysteriously” or “darkly” (xuan). In his commentary on this passage, Guo Xiang describes the insufficient reason at work in change: “Hence

⁴ In “The Rehabilitation of Spontaneity: A New Approach to Philosophy of Action,” Brian Bruya offers an extended analysis of ziran, including a pertinent explanation of how the resonant continuum of qi comprising all things in existence prohibits the metaphysical breaks needed for fully autonomous spontaneity. The self-caused action of ziran, then, is “never divorced from a wider, interactive context; it is always assumed to persist within an organic web of mutual influence, and because of this one cannot conceive of an egoistic or deviant form of Daoist self-causation. There is no sense, in a Daoist context, of either an atomist or an individualist perspective of agency.” Philosophy East and West 60, no. 2 (April 2010): 213.

⁵ John Berger has written, “The moment at which a piece of music begins provides a clue to the nature of all art. The incongruity of that moment, compared to the uncounted, unperceived silence which preceded it, is the secret of art.” John Berger, “The Moment of Cubism” in John Berger: Selected Essays, ed. Geoff Dyer (New York: Pantheon Books, 2001), 92.
of all things involved in the realm of existence, even the penumbra, there has never been one that did not lone-transform in the realm of dark vanishing (xuanming 玄冥).” The infinite regress of the search for an unmoved mover or transcendent principle of nature leads only into shadows—shadows that reveal things as naturally emergent through their own continual becoming. Ziran is thus not only understood as spontaneous, but natural and genuine.

Why does listening to music draw our senses away from a world of discrete causality to one of protean change? Two interconnected reasons, both of which quiet or fast the self, stand out. First, listening to sound and music aid us in letting go of fixed forms of thinking and feeling, especially judgments of the shi/fei variety (“this/not this” and “that’s it/that’s not it”). Second, this transformation proceeds through spatiotemporal shifts. Progressively emptier and more receptive listening displaces objective spacetime in favor of a musical spacetime compatible with the spontaneous, authentic self-arising of all things. Both movements can be traced by following the sonic progression described by Zhuangzi, from listening to the music of humans, to the earth, and finally to the music of tian.

3.2 The Piping of People: Musical Subjectivity

Zhuangzi begins with listening to the music of people, surely in part because it is easier to recognize than the music of the earth or tian. But the music of people also grants passage into the heart of subjectivity, and that is exactly where Zhuangzi thinks our progression toward becoming one with all changes must originate. The self must lose itself, its “counterpart,” as he says, in order

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6 Zhuangzi Yinde, 2.93-94. In Guo Xiang’s commentary on the penumbra and shadow dialogue in the Zhuangzi, he explains, “If we search for that which [each thing] is dependent on and seek out what [each thing] comes from, this searching will lead to an infinite regress, and in the end we will come only to the lack of dependence (wudai). Thus the principle of lone-transformation (duhua) becomes clear.” Translated by Brook Ziporyn in The Penumbra Unbound: The Neo-Taoist Philosophy of Guo Xiang (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 101.
to roam with *dao*. Music provides doubly in the initial ethical and epistemological quieting of the self that must occur. On the one hand, music’s lack of determinate content undermines our nearly irrepressible urge to reify, whether it be meaning, logical distinctions, morals, measurements, or perhaps most tempting – our sense of self. On the other hand, music’s very lack of content stimulates our imagination deeply. These twin actions of music, in which we are both freed from meaning and yet imaginatively encouraged toward it, alter the presumed boundaries of the self such that we recognize our fluidity with the world.

Unlike Nietzsche, Kant and Hegel make rather strange philosophical bedfellows with Zhuangzi. Nonetheless, some of their observations regarding the relationship of music to subjectivity help towards deciphering Zhuangzi’s ideas about the effects of listening to music. As the structures that support the ordinary view of ourselves as fixed forms persisting through space and time, identical to our thoughts and feelings, are weakened through listening to music, subjectivity without a strong subject emerges as a match to the meaningfulness of music without objectifiable meaning.

### 3.2.1 Kant: Animating the Imagination

For Kant, an aesthetic idea is a presentation of the imagination that prompts a great deal of thought but to which no determinate thought (no concept) is adequate. In exceeding every determinate thought this presentation also surpasses the expressive possibilities of language. Despite the inadequacy of concepts to aesthetic ideas, the two are nonetheless conjoined; an aesthetic idea is paired with a concept that it exceeds, in an imaginative activity that thereby expands the concept in
an unlimited way. The failure of the concept to satisfy the aesthetic idea animates the mind according to what is felt yet unnamable.\(^7\)

Listening to music engages the presentation of aesthetic ideas, but because these ideas are not determinate concepts, and given that creative imagination is the primary activity at play, aesthetic ideas can only ever be intimated. They remain, in Daoist parlance, \(\text{xuan} \) 玄: obscure yet profound. Despite the distance from determinate concepts, the free activity of the imagination will continue to seek the discovery of aesthetic ideas in a way that draws the understanding beyond itself and the limits of language.\(^8\) For Kant, music communicates the sense of an aesthetic idea which expands the thought of the listener to the degree that the listener, provoked to think more than can be conceived or expressed, experiences the pleasure of the harmony of her mental powers roused by the beautiful form of the work. And as our minds are changed, animated by indeterminacy rather than determinate concepts, we may imagine that the boundaries of the self also become less definitive.

While likely to agree with Kant that music does not represent anything and is free of the sort of determinate concepts that can be expressed in language, Zhuangzi would also side with Mendelssohn in questioning whether the meanings of words are as certain as we assume. As Zhuangzi says, we believe language “says something” and is not just “blowing breath” yet what it

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\(^7\) In Chapter 4 (“Music and Imagination”) of his book *Transfigurements: On the True Sense of Art*, John Sallis offers a novel reading of Kant’s assessment of music in his *Critique of Judgment*. Kant’s indecision about whether music is a fine art has traditionally been interpreted as a weak point in his aesthetic theory and even as a failure of his personal aesthetic sensibility. But what Sallis provocatively demonstrates is that these aporias attest to the “force and persistence” with which Kant ventures to think about music, and not so much to a problem with his theory. Specifically, does Kant’s indecisiveness about music hinge on the relative indeterminacy of the concept in music and thus its failure to fulfill the requirements of art set forth by his theory of aesthetic ideas? Or, is music fundamentally different from the other fine arts because it animates the mind in an incomparable way? On the latter, Sallis quotes Kant’s description of the asymmetry of feeling and name at work in the aesthetic idea as a presentation “that lets us add to a concept the thought of much that is unnamable \([\text{viel Unnennbares}]\) but the feeling of which animates our cognitive powers and connects language, which otherwise would be mere letters, with spirit.” John Sallis, *Transfigurements: On the True Sense of Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 66.

\(^8\) By way of example, Louis Chinn’s *Melancholia* (Track10) animates our imagination without delivering definable musical ideas.
says is rather indeterminate. Can we prove that saying is any different than the musical sounds (yin 音) of fledgelings? Dao is hidden by determinations of true and false, just as language obscures the reality of change by relying on “that’s it” and “that’s not.” In addition to criticizing fixed discriminations for the limited perspectives they encourage, Zhuangzi finds their borders impose unnatural boundaries that hinder our experience of the pivot of dao in favor of marking out territory in terms of discrete concepts, opposites, and measurable items.

As a consequence of fixing distinctions and “tallying,” the heartmind becomes clogged, such as in the case of Hui Shi who could not conceive of a purpose for the giant gourds that he grew. Too big to be ladles and too unstable to hold water, he could not imagine another use for them and so smashed the gourds to bits. Why didn’t he think to go floating down the Yangtze River in them, Zhuangzi asks? Because Hui Shi’s imagination was limited by a heart “overgrown and entangled” with the weeds of shi/fei, with presumptions about what things are or are not, and various other notions of propriety. His concept of what a gourd is used for prevents free consideration of other purposes or even the usefulness of uselessness (a theme explored in detail elsewhere in the text). In contrast, in many of the passages in the Zhuangzi depicting great skill, the adept is described as having fasted or forgotten the self. For example, master engraver Qing reveals that the secret of his craft is fasting his heartmind of egotistical concerns, self-consciousness, and preconceptions about the object of creation before beginning to carve. By the time he is ready, he has even forgotten his body and limbs. Only then can his body attain its peak capabilities and creative powers. Butcher

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9 Zhuangzi Yinde 2.23-25. Elsewhere, Zhuangzi says that names are only the guests of what is true. 「名者，實之賓也.」Zhuangzi Yinde 1.25.

10 Zhuangzi Yinde, 1.35-42. 「則夫子猶有蓬之心也夫.」

11 Zhuangzi Yinde 19.54-19.59. Other examples include Carpenter Chui who draws perfect circles and squares not by verifying his drawings with his heartmind, but by forgetting "that’s it, that’s not" and allowing his fingers to follow the
Ding gives a similar explanation of his virtuousic ox-carving, saying that he drops his perceptions and allows himself to be guided by the natural patterns of the animal. His blade stays perfectly sharp because it is as if he is carving air or “nothing.” Zhuangzi describes these actions musically: “each slice of the blade hitting its musical mark, now in time with the dance of the Mulberry Forest, now with the music of Jingshou.”

Given that the fasting of the heartmind is enacted through increasingly open and receptive listening, we should not be surprised to find listening to sound and music offered as a venerated practice of attenuating that which limits free wandering with dao, or to find adept’s actions described in musical terms. Not only can sound and music focus listening with unparalleled intensity, the quickening of the mind caused by the absence of determinate concepts, in Kant’s language, not only draws the imagination and understanding toward an infinite horizon, but consequently also weaken the fixed distinctions that normally inscribe the self. Similar to the way the forgetting of the body, as an object of self-consciousness, can free the body to its full capabilities, or the forgetting of language gives rise to meaningfulness, the fasting of the heartmind frees the self to a more authentic resonance and greater responsiveness with the world.

3.2.2 Hegel: Displacing Space

Hegel also addressed how music’s lack of determinate content affects the self and subjectivity. Music’s lack of content, its presentation of nothing but itself (unlike, for instance, a landscape painting), its impermanence as an art of “self-cancelling tones,” and its effacement of surface as such, all allow music to carry us into the depth of subjectivity such that this depth transformation of things. As a result, his “Magic Watchtower” (A.C. Graham’s translation) is unified and unobstructed. 19.62-64.

12 Zhuangzi Yinde 3.3-4.
resounds. In particular, Hegel emphasized that the effect of music on subjectivity is spatiotemporal. The object-free inner life comes to resound through music as objective spatiality is removed and the self is freed to coincide with what it is in its bare subjectivity: time.

In Hegel’s *Aesthetics*, his account of the progression of one art to the next includes the claim that although there are similarities between music and the other arts—especially architecture with which it shares an externality of form and content, use of mathematical proportions, and distance from mimesis—music’s unique liberty from space and matter sets it apart. Hegel’s account of music is rooted in considering how, in the transition between arts, the move from painting to music involves the effacing of surface. While painting reduces the spatial dimensions of sculpture to a flat surface, music eliminates the objective spatiality of the artwork altogether. Consequently, the work no longer persists over and against the subject, and we are thereby drawn back into subjectivity.

This analysis of music hinges on Hegel’s understanding of tone. In being produced by the double negativity of the Aufhebung, tone vanishes of itself, he says, and annihilates its own coming-to-be with a characteristic instability.

The cancellation (Aufhebung) of space therefore consists here only in the fact that a determinate sensuous material sacrifices its peaceful separateness, turns to movement, yet so vibrates in itself that every part of the cohering body not only changes its place but also struggles to replace itself in its former position. The result of this oscillating vibration is tone (Ton), the material of music.\(^\text{13}\)

Yet even in their ephemerality and effacement of surfaces, tones still require stable, spatial objects for their production, and more profoundly, these objects specify both sonic quality and character. Timbre therefore testifies to how resonance both liberates tones from objects while also binding them together in a necessary intimacy, or what we could again describe as musical nearness. That is

to say, the sense of a tone—its sonic character and possibilities for both sensing and making sense—is very near to the inner vibration or resonance of the sensible object, but without being spatially extended or dimensional. The resounding born of the *aufhebung* of space testifies both to its dependence on and freedom from spatial origins. Music’s “free unstable soaring” is carried by the inner life rather than by objects persisting in external space.

Is Hegel’s assessment of the sonic displacement of space correct? It is tempting to resist the idea that sound is not spatial because of the way we sense it coming from the place where an instrument is located, spreading through the surrounding space, echoing and resounding in patterns that seem to create audible spatialities. But while these spatialities of sonic distances offer perceptual cartography, and warrant the comparisons between music and architecture, as sonic they nonetheless retain an insubstantiality or emptiness of substance. Tones, lacking in physical extension and dimension, vanish as quickly as they come to be in physical space, continuing to sound only in the innermost depths of the self. According to Hegel, the result is that three-dimensional space is drawn into the temporal point of now that coincides with pure subjectivity.

Time, for Hegel, exhibits the same dialectical process as subjectivity: the now posits itself as other and then cancels its otherness in restoring self-unity, just as the subject makes itself an object, then cancels this objectivity so as to recover its subjective unity. In both cases, there is nothing truly objective that can be distinguished from the subject—no concrete other to establish the determinateness of the subject—hence, the subject coincides with time by being nothing but the positing of itself as other and the *Aufhebung* of this otherness. Because Hegel thinks time is the element of tone and identifies time with subjectivity, tone can grasp the self in its “barest existence,” penetrate its depths, and thus let the elemental in us resound.
The “peculiar power of music,” he explains, is an “elemental one” in which the self is not just gripped in one part of itself through specific content; instead, music gets ahold of the center of one’s spiritual existence. This “empty self, the self without any further content” is fitted to the absence of content in music and the ideality of listening, which rather than portraying a world of objects, together cause the inmost self to resound to its depths. In listening to music, the ear does not attend to a practical relation to objects, but instead listens to the result of the inner vibration of the body through which the breath of the soul can be heard. Thus, Hegel says that music gets ahold of the individual uniquely, as “this” person. The singularity of subjectivity, it seems, is characterized more by an uncanny emptiness than concrete determination and matched more purely with the “ever-flowing stream of sounds” of music’s movements than the stillness of objects.\footnote{Hegel, \textit{Aesthetics}, 891 & 906.}

Displacing the world of relatively static objects in favor of the flows of moving transformations is essential to Daoist skill and to one of the most important images of the \textit{Zhuangzi}: the “free, far, and easy wandering” (\textit{xiao yao you} 逍遙遊) that travels beyond the conventional world, with its epistemological and linguistic bias towards fixed distinctions and perspectives, to merge with the flows of unceasing change. While this transformation involves activities of emptying and displacing, forgetting, and even cancelling (to borrow Hegel’s term), it goes much further than what can be accomplished with negation alone. Along with \textit{xu} as “empty” or “tenuous,” \textit{wu} (無 “absent,” “without,” or “nothing”) is pivotal to reaching the distances possible in free wandering, including surpassing the logic of negation at work in Hegel’s \textit{aufhebung}.

A few words of caution about these terms is in order. Some of the most difficult ideas to convey in English cluster around “not,” “nothing,” and “nothingness.” Usually, concepts that
involve a *not* are understood according to negation, largely as a result of the logical (and metaphysical) contradiction of being and non-being. In the simplest of terms, there is “A” and “not A.” This formulation privileges “A” by defining what is other according to the absence of “A.” However, in the Chinese tradition, and especially in Daoist texts such as the *Zhuangzi* and *Laozi*, there is no absolute ontological status accorded to something and nothing, or being and non-being. These philosophies which recognize process and transformation as the only constants (*chang* 常) strategically employ negation to portray complex, seemingly paradoxical ideas, to indicate meaning (or meaningfulness) outside language, and as an opportunity to evoke the creative generosity of absences and “no-things” or perhaps better, “not-things.” This is an advantage available to an aesthetic tradition, such as Chinese philosophy, that is harder to establish in more logocentric traditions in which voids are not fertile.\(^{15}\)

\(\text{Wu, as absence, can result from removing something or simply mean that something is not there or not happening. But in its more philosophically important sense, }\text{wu is not just the result of negation. Wu has creative force, but neither as things or beings, nor as non-things or non-beings, for then these absences would not be real.}^{16}\text{ For example, let us reconsider Xi Kang’s description of music as }\text{wu xiang 無象, or “without image.” Music lacks objectifiable content and meaning.}

\(^{15}\text{In Roger T. Ames’ glossary to *The Blackwell Sourcebook in Chinese Philosophy*, he emphasizes the gerundive sensibility of all things (“a verbal noun, a thing in process”) in Chinese philosophy, and notes how the substance and essence ontology of European languages obstructs translation from the Chinese philosophical world. Given this serious difficulty, translating the Chinese idea of }\text{wu into English is all the more problematic because its target term has traditionally been “not,” “nothing,” “there is not,” and “nothingness.” The glossary does not give a full entry to }\text{wu alone, instead it is treated along with you 有, forming the binomial youwu. A range of meanings better than the metaphysical dichotomy of being and non-being are offered, including presence and absence, and determinate and indeterminate. These pairs evoke what must be drawn out in a successful translation of }\text{wu: its creativity. Nonetheless, even in these translations, there remains an ontological privileging that marks wu in terms of negation. A quick illustration of this bias is the choice to not translate you and wu as overdeterminacy and determinacy respectively. This is not easily resolved, but we might consider here Mendelssohn and Nietzsche’s point that language is both overdetermined and vague in comparison with music.}

\(^{16}\text{I owe this formulation to Arindam Chakrabarti’s clear distinctions between absence and negation in “The Unavoidable Void: Nonexistence, Absence, and Emptiness.” Denying and negating are actions we perform, whereas the fact of an absence is not something manifested by these linguistic and cognitive acts. In *Nothingness in Asian Philosophy*, eds. JeeLoo Liu & Douglas Berger (New York: Routledge, 2014), 6.}
(especially as emotion), but not because these things have been negated. Further, as we saw, music can be empty of meaning—meaning is not there—without being meaningless, just as it can be meaningful without being full of meaning. The absence of meaning in music is not nihilistic, at least in part because music’s meaningfulness cannot be negated. Music’s lack of meaning, then, is integral to its creative force. Similarly, although Zhuangzi describes dao as *wu wei* 無為 (“without doing”) and *wu xing* 無形 (“without form”), and the free and unfettered wanderer also as *wu wei*, we cannot roam with dao by negating actions and forms.  

Fasting the self by removing certain perceptual fixations or thought structures does not result in a negated self, but in a more responsive and open dynamic with the world. It is this openness that is *wu*.  

To some degree, Hegel did recognize and deploy the creative power of “nothing” with the productive work of negation in the *aufhebung*, and would argue that the dialectic is not reducible to the presumably simpler, either-or, negation of binary logic. Like Zhuangzi, Hegel questions whether contradictions function as assumed. For Hegel, contradictions are self-undermining and resolvable only in another category, stage, or moment that can overcome the contradiction while still accommodating the previous contents. This dialectic is both progressive and cumulative; what is negated is reintegrated in a process that not only mediates loss, but also results in the next higher stage of freedom and knowledge. The dialectic begins with negation, but ends with preservation and

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18 Martin Heidegger, as well, represents a subterranean lineage in the Western philosophical canon of those who attend to issues of “nothing.” His investigation of *das nichts* or “the Nothing” in “What is Metaphysics?” is generally revered or reviled by philosophers as either a profound meditation on the relationship between something and nothing, or as utter nonsense. Rudolph Carnap objected to Heidegger’s treatment of the Nothing on the grounds that it was an example of the meaningless utterances of metaphysicians, and because in speaking about “nothing,” one turns it into an object. We need only look to the Zhuangzi to both find a deft treatment of the essence of this quarrel over speaking about nothing and to recognize the hypocrisy of the logician’s stance against the metaphysician.
unification in the activity of *Aufheben.* \(^{19}\) Thus Hegel says that space is cancelled in music and preserved *as* cancelled. The initial moment of negation is only a part of what he calls the “labor of the negative”: the real work of the negative, the eventual reversal in which the negation is negated, is to reconstitute the world. For Zhuangzi, in contrast, *xu* and *wu* are liberatory without being progressive. There are no higher levels of reality to be attained teleologically, only fetters to be lost.

Further, although Hegel’s descriptions of the sonic displacement of space offer something to our understanding of the effects of listening to the music of people, his explanations remain within the framework of “it” and “other” – the very distinction that is equalized and smoothed out in the practices of listening advised by Zhuangzi. For example, Hegel claims that time is the result of the now positing itself for itself—othering itself—only to in turn negate itself. As soon as a now is posited, it ceases and passes over into another now. Time is therefore a succession of now points that are no longer or not yet. Even as he characterizes time as becoming, Hegel formalizes it as the negation of negation—or what he calls “punctuality.” Although objective space is displaced in sound, time retains a formal and abstract character structured by an it-other relationship. In contrast to Hegel’s metaphysics, the fasting of the heartmind through listening to music releases oppositional, dialectical structures, and *both* objective time and space. Then we find that it is not just that tone causes the elemental depths of the self to resound because of the connection between subjectivity and time, but in the musical spatiality opened by the more sonorous aspects of sound in tone, timbre, and silence, we find an audible universe. \(^{20}\)

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\(^{19}\) *Aufheben*: “We mean by it 1) to clear away or annul…2) to keep or preserve…the double use of language, which gives to the same word a positive and a negative meaning, it is not an accident, and gives no ground for reproaching language as a cause of confusion. We should rather recognize in it the speculative spirit of our language rising above the mere ‘either-or’ of understanding.” G.W.F. Hegel, *Logic*, 142.

\(^{20}\) “Now for the first time we can establish firmly the ultimate significance of rhythm, harmony, and melody. They are the first and purest forms of movement in the universe and, viewed from the real perspective, are the mode in which material things are equal to ideas. The cosmic bodies float on the wings of harmony and rhythm. That which one calls
3.2.3 Bergson: Musical Duration

A more suitable aid to deciphering Zhuangzi’s ideas about listening to music may be Henri Bergson. In particular, Bergson’s theory of time as duration (*durée*) shares similar features with Zhuangzi’s philosophy of freedom and change, and in the absence of an explicit theory of space and time from Zhuangzi, provides options for thinking about the spatiotemporal shifts involved in open, receptive listening to music as a fasting of the heartmind. In Bergson’s diagnosis, our understanding of freedom is hindered by a common and fundamental mistake regarding time. By thinking of time in terms of spatial qualities, we not only mischaracterize time, we are also led to mechanistic and deterministic theories of causality. De-spatialized time is revealed as duration: pure heterogeneous change, a qualitative multiplicity that cannot be made discrete without losing its temporal nature. Duration is change without necessary or even determinate cause and, as such, it not only coincides with consciousness, but also with human freedom.

In the opening lines of the preface to *Time and Free Will*, Bergson writes, “We necessarily express ourselves by means of words and we usually think in terms of space. That is to say, language requires us to establish between our ideas the same sharp and precise distinctions, the same discontinuity, as between material objects.”\(^{21}\) Here we find the crux of Bergson’s misgivings about applying spatial concepts to time. Space is structured by discrete breaks, perhaps most fundamentally between place and occupant, made possible by the fact that space is an extensive, homogenous medium, whereas time is indivisible by virtue of being an intensive, heterogeneous continuity. The structure of language obfuscates these differences, and given the intimacy of language and thought, centripetal and centrifugal force is nothing other than harmony and rhythm, respectively. Elevated by the same wings, music floats in space in order to weave an audible universe out of the transparent body of sound and tone.” Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling, *Die Philosophie der Kunst*, 1802-3, *The Philosophy of Art*, trans. Douglas W. Stott (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 117.

\(^{21}\) Bergson, *Time and Free Will*, xix.
perpetuates thinking in which time is rendered in spatial terms. One far-reaching result of
spatializing time is that we are led to think of action in terms of causality—as one discrete thing
causing another—and thus to that familiar family of philosophical problems including free will,
determinism, and first and final causes.

Bergson’s response to our “obsession with space” is to consider time on its own without
intrusion from spatial concepts. At the beginning of *Time and Free Will*, he begins the process of
separating time from space by distinguishing between intensity and extensity. We mistakenly
consider intensities as magnitudes, Bergson argues, for example in asserting differences of quantity
between internal states. Can we really understand the statement “The pain in my knee is twice as bad
as yesterday” in an exact sense? By what means can we answer the doctor’s request to rate our pain
on a scale of one to ten, with ten being the worst pain we’ve ever felt? The idea that such
comparisons are measurable is reinforced by the common sense belief that sensations, feelings, and
efforts can grow and diminish. For example, my happiness has increased now that you are here. But
when a magnitude increases or decreases, the lesser value is contained in the greater. How can a
more intense sensation contain one of lesser intensity? The possibility of arranging an ascending or
descending series depends on relations of container and contained, yet a greater pain or feeling of
happiness does not contain the lesser. Intensities, such as feelings, do not have relations of
containment and therefore cannot be superposed on one another.

For Bergson, the mistaken assimilation of intensity to magnitude evades the difficult task of
distinguishing between the extensive and measurable, and the intensive and non-measurable. If
lesser quantities are contained within greater, then quantity is divisible, that is, extensive. An
inextensive quantity, he claims, is a contradiction. Yet we persist in our belief in intensive magnitude,
not noticing how we translate the intensive into the extensive in order to measure it, to tally it, as
Zhuangzi would say. For instance, we picture a greater intensity of effort as a spring that will expand to occupy a greater space. Likewise we imagine sadness as a contraction and happiness as an expansion. Or we measure time and temperature, both intensive, with extensive tools such as clocks and thermometers. In all of these cases, intensity is spatialized through its representation in extensive terms.

We tend to solidify our impressions, that is, to spatialize them, in order to express them in language. Bergson writes that, “we confuse the feeling itself, which is in a perpetual state of becoming, with its permanent external object, and especially with the word which expresses this object.” For example, the flavor of a candy that I liked as a child tastes unpleasant to me now. I speak as if my taste alone has changed, while the flavor has remained the same—I solidify the sensation—but in reality there are neither identical sensations nor multiple tastes. In a confused attempt to explain change, taste and sensation are turned into objects (things) that can be isolated, named, juxtaposed, and compared. Yet in the human soul, Bergson says, there are no objects, only processes. If we do not perceive that every sensation is altered by repetition, that is to say if we do not perceive change, this is because we habitually interpret sensations through the extensive properties of the objects we take to be their cause and the words that translate them. Perception is so influenced by language that words trick us into believing in unchanging sensations, even altering the quality of our experience altogether. To repeat an earlier question, do we hear sadness in songs before being told they are sad?

In a passage reminiscent of both Zhuangzi and Nietzsche, Bergson summarizes:

In short, the word with well-defined outlines, the rough and ready word, which stores up the stable, common, and consequently impersonal element in the impressions of mankind, overwhelms or at least covers over the

22 Bergson, *Time and Free Will*, 130.
delicate and fugitive impressions of our individual consciousness.  

This is analogous, he says, to the way we halt the fleeting duration of the ego by projecting it into homogenous space. In separating out the heterogeneous moments of duration that permeate one another seamlessly, by spreading time out into space, we drain lived, felt experience of its vitality and trade its uniqueness for “lifeless” states that can be translated into words—the “impersonal residue” of the impressions felt by society. A “veil” is thereby drawn between the durational flow of consciousness and the stable boundaries of the self, Bergson says. There are strong social incentives for having an inner life characterized by parts and states that can be distinguished, isolated, and communicated in words to others. Zhuangzi’s unusual, often outcast characters are living case studies of the tension between these social incentives and the fugitive path of a free and easy wanderer.

The veil is lifted when consciousness is de-spatialized to reveal its unbroken flow as duration. Bergson refers to durational consciousness as “our own presence.” How might this happen? Pure duration or unalloyed time is “the form which the succession of our conscious states assumes when our ego lets itself live, when it refrains from separating its present state from its former states.” This does not require complete absorption or amnesia regarding our former states, rather through a judicious forgetting of these states as discontinuous, they form an organic whole with the present. This happens, for example, when we “recall the notes of a tune, melting, so to speak, into one another.” Even as the notes succeed one another, we perceive them in each other and as a totality comparable to a living being. As proof, Bergson offers the example of disrupting a musical rhythm by dwelling too long on one note. It is not the length of the note per se that sounds wrong, rather it

24 Bergson, *Time and Free Will*, 100.
is the qualitative change in the whole of the musical phrase. This example demonstrates the possibility of succession without fixed distinctions and a mutual penetration or interconnection of elements that cannot be isolated without abstraction. The clean-cut distinctions and mutually exclusive concepts necessary for the faculty of abstraction imply the intuition of a homogenous medium—or space, for Bergson. Lacking these requirements for abstraction, music provides an opportunity to efface spatiality in favor of duration.

In *Duration and Simultaneity*, Bergson again uses the example of music to portray duration. He writes,

A melody to which we listen with our eyes closed, heeding it alone, comes close to coinciding with this time which is the very fluidity of our inner life; but it still has too many qualities, too much definition, and we must first efface the difference among the sounds, then do away with the distinctive features of sound itself, retaining of it only the continuation of what precedes into what follows and the uninterrupted transition, multiplicity without divisibility and succession without separation, in order finally to rediscover basic time. Such is immediately perceived duration, without which we would have no idea of time.\(^{25}\)

Listening to a melody invites our perception of duration, but we succeed only if we are able to shift our perception from melody’s definite features to its unbroken continuity and perpetual transition, that is, to its immediate movement or free mobility. Just as we first learn to listen to the music of people before progressing to the music of the earth and of heaven, melody provides an initiatory opportunity to shift from the world of objective spatiality, with its clear and distinct boundaries, toward duration. The shift in consciousness that allows us to perceive duration is itself a kind of movement, but not through extensive, homogenous space. Instead, the shift moves as music does: as an intensive, qualitative multiplicity.

The question of how to experience duration unalloyed by space is critical for Bergson because he defines freedom as mobility, but of duration rather than as movement through extended space. The series of confusions regarding intensity and extensity, and quality and quantity, not only result in an admixture of space and time that obscures duration, they invade the very continuity of our psychic states and corrupt “our feeling of outer and inner change, of movement, and of freedom” at their very source. Consequently, we find it difficult to imagine change without causality and limit our sense of freedom accordingly. But for Bergson, the model of causality in which juxtaposed states cause distinct effects is based on the illegitimate spatialization of time and refusal of duration. Because freedom lies in duration, and not in spatialized, homogenous time, determinism presents a false challenge to freedom. In a passage reminiscent of Zhuangzi’s descriptions of adepts who have fasted their heartmind, and Xi Kang’s guqin player with the tranquil heart and skilled hands, Bergson writes, “Freedom is the relation of the concrete self to the act which it performs” and we are free “when our acts spring from our whole personality, when they express it, when they have that indefinable resemblance to it which one sometimes finds between the artist and his work.”

While Bergson draws an analogy between freedom and artistic expression, and finds a precise example of duration in music, he does not elaborate upon the connection between music and freedom. Nonetheless, his description of the free self uses the same language as his explanation of duration in music. Just as tones melt into one another, below the self with its well-defined states, there is another self “in which succeeding each other means melting into one another and forming an organic whole.” We are generally content with the more superficial self, with “the shadow of the self projected into homogenous space” rather than the fluid self. He writes,

27 Bergson, *Time and Free Will*, 172.
Consciousness, goaded by an insatiable desire to separate, substitutes the symbol for reality, or perceives the reality only through the symbol. As the self thus refracted, and thereby broken to pieces, is much better adapted to the requirements of social life in general and language in particular, consciousness prefers it, and gradually loses sight of the fundamental self.\(^29\)

Language cannot get hold of the deeper self without halting its mobility and making it into “public property.” But while the fugitive impressions of the fluid, free self are solidified by language, they are arguably liberated by music. In the immediately perceived, lived duration of music, consciousness is released from the neat distinctions of homogenous, extended space. The self with its fixed states dissolves into the deeper self of perpetual change. This self is without any state but change, which is no state at all. This self, as Nietzsche put it, becomes nothing without being nothing.

How, then, do our actions have an “indefinable resemblance” to a self that is nothing but change? As we inquired in Chapter One, how are we to understand resemblance without distinct forms or something that can be compared? Does resemblance smuggle in the very spatial qualities Bergson wants to exclude from duration? Bergson himself notes that one consequence of duration is that any degree of perceived identity between two things must be superficial, and in truth, impossible. This led G. Watts Cunningham to remark that the concept of duration is a “monstrosity before which reason stands helpless and dazed.”\(^30\) A process of pure change is impossible for the intellect, by its nature, to grasp; for change to be comprehended, there must be an element of identity or homogeneity running through the process. Change without identity is wholly irrational; if it can be understood at all, it must be “divined,” says Cunningham. But for Bergson, this charge of unintelligibility only serves to further his stance that we are under the spell of space. The intellect, he writes, is most at home “among inanimate objects, more especially among solids...our concepts

\(^29\) Bergson, *Time and Free Will*, 128.
have been formed on the model of solids...our logic is, pre-eminently, the logic of solids” and consequently is “incapable of presenting the true nature of life.”

Once again, we find that the problem with construing resemblance as similarity between forms is that it introduces representation into a perceptual process that operates more as resonance. Bergson’s example of music, then, by providing a precise illustration of both duration and freedom, also strengthens music’s role in subverting the logic-chopping habits of the intellect, as Zhuangzi calls them, including the habit of thinking of resemblance in terms of representation or “solids.” Freedom is oneness with my actions such that we have an enigmatic resonance rather than formal resemblance.

In music, as the piping of people, the lack of determinate content and fixed distinctions diminishes the boundaries of the self by animating the imagination (Kant), displacing objective space (Hegel), and revealing duration (Bergson). Music thereby provides an initiatory experience of freedom and spontaneity in which we begin to forget or fast our habitual perceptions and their associated thought structures. This is also possible because durational consciousness moves as music does, and because the open receptivity of listening does not reify or break the qualitative, heterogeneous flow of experience. If the music of people is easier to recognize than that of the earth or tian, and so provides an alluring entry into the fasting of the heartmind, this is at least partly due to the ease with which we perceive melody—the most discursive, narrative, and traditionally meaningful of the musical elements. If melody is paradigmatic of human music, then Zhuangzi’s urging to listen beyond the piping of people is clearer, for melody, as Bergson described, remains too structured by distinctions to fully express the free mobility of change.

And although Zhuangzi would likely delight in the reason taunting monstrosity of duration, given his fondness for the strange and joyful loosening of the fetters of rationality, it is hard to

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31 Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, xxi.
imagine he would leave unquestioned Bergson’s alliance to the assumption that space is extended and dimensional, and the consequent restriction of duration to time. At the pivot of dao, how distinct is the intensive from the extensive, or time from space? Why does Zhuangzi describe listening, and freedom, in the language and imagery of space? Bergson claimed that although we believe that we can translate the intensive into the extensive, and thus compare two intensities based on the relation between two extensities, the nature of this operation is difficult to determine. Yet, if in fact this is translation and not substitution, then what is held in common by intensity and extensity—and possibly time and space—such that we can move between them?

3.3 The Piping of the Earth: Musical Spatiality

“We work on the other side of time.” – Sun Ra

Zhuangzi is generally read as decentering and subverting language and knowledge, especially as they are structured by opposites or fixed distinctions. For these and other reasons, such as the easy association of change with time, it is not difficult to apply Zhuangzi’s critique of static structures of thought to a rejection of quantified time in favor of living time. What may be less obvious, likely because it is not explicitly discussed much in the text, is that returning to our native spontaneity and responsiveness requires spatial shifts as well. The images of free and easy wandering, emptying the heartmind, and the pivot of dao—centerpieces of Zhuangzi’s philosophy—all involve liberation from static, homogenous, and extended conceptions of space. In fact, if there can be said to be Daoists, their namesake expresses this radical sense of space. Dao, as path or way, is a spatial image

32 In the opening scenes to the 1972 science fiction film, Space is the Place, musician Sun Ra commands a spaceship towards Earth to free African-Americans. The medium of transport (redemption) will be music. Upon his arrival, he announces the end of time and explains, “We work on the other side of time.” At one point in the film, Sun Ra complains of life on Earth: “I hate your positive, absolute reality.” The aural textures and explorations of musical spatiality in Ra’s music have become iconic examples of the sonic disruption of fixed systems of music, society, and consciousness, as well as symbolic of Afro-futurism.
independent of physical roads extending from here to there (although this is one of its many meanings). As an aestheticized path or way, *dao* is not constrained by the limits of physical space, and as *Zhuangzi*’s skill passages show, physical space is not limited by our anaesthetic conceptions of it. Reading *Zhuangzi*, we might wonder why Bergson’s critique of applying spatial concepts to time cannot be applied to space, too. Must space be homogenous, quantifiable, and extended? *Zhuangzi*’s fondness for presenting space (and time) unbound by perceptual habits and physical limits cannot simply be dismissed as “wild talk” or “nonsense,” as his interlocutors try to do, for the transformations required to wander free and easy with *dao* are unavoidably spatiotemporal.

3.3.1 **De-Spatializing Space**

The opening passages of the *Zhuangzi* tell us that the little birds who flit from tree to tree cannot understand the great distances of the giant Peng bird that flies thousands of miles in a single flap of its wings, nor can the cicadas that live for one summer understand the time of the Mingling tree for whom a single spring is five hundred years. These different scales of space and time are both relative and dependent; for example, the Peng bird’s enormous wings require ninety thousand miles of air beneath them. Even Liezi, who is said to have ridden the winds as his chariot for fifteen days, still depended on something to carry his weight. But what about the person, *Zhuangzi* asks, who is “true to both the heavens and earth,” rides the changes of the six energies (*qi*), and wanders without limit? Do they depend on anything? *Zhuangzi* responds to his own question with the saying: “The utmost person is without self (*wu ji* 無己), the spiritual person has no merit (*wu gong* 無功), and the

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33 Scale is both relative and limited, as observed by Jonathan Swift in *Thoughts on Various Subjects*: “Elephants are generally drawn smaller than life size, but a flea always larger.”
sage is nameless (無名).” This person, like Nietzsche’s one without melody who becomes nothing without being nothing, becomes "wu" by no longer depending on tallied judgments, valuations, or the arbitrariness of fixed distinctions of any kind—including spatiotemporal. What, then, is the spacetime of unceasing change and free wandering?

We can likely understand “riding the changes” in terms of duration, but what should we make of Zhuangzi’s idea of wandering? (And note that “riding” is spatial, too.) He cannot just mean traversing physical spaces without end, although sages certainly wander in that way too, so what is the space of free and easy rambler? Once again, the progression from listening to the music of humans, then the earth, and finally tian provides a means for understanding. With the music of people, listening starts to become more open and receptive as objective, extended spatiality is effaced and we are drawn into our inner space; but this leaves something rather important unexplained: if music is non-spatial, why do we hear space in it? Can it be that we merely transpose properties of extended space onto sound in yet another example of spatializing time? But unlike clocks, or even metronomes, music itself is non-representational and thus not a translation of time into space. Without addressing the complicated and tangential issue of what kind of reality musical space has, let us consider Zhuangzi’s description of listening to the piping of the earth as an account of musical space that is not imaginary or otherwise unreal despite the absence of physical extension.

To begin, listening to the music of the earth is another case of sensing the wind. The piping of the earth, as Ziyou summarizes, is the sound of the wind (qi) blowing through its many hollows. Like the wind blowing through the holes in trees of the forest, all the things in existence—notably

34 Zhuangzi Yinde, 1.19-1.22. 「至人無己，神人無功，聖人無名。」
35 Whole genres of music, dub for example, are built on the idea of music’s spatiality. On Track 11, Twilight Circus Sound System’s “The Ride” sounds the characteristic depths heard in dub’s musical spatiality while luring the ear into riding the sonic changes into the echoes of outer space.
depicted as empty or hollow—sound as vital energy blows through them. Each sounds uniquely according to the shape of its empty space. Although the sounds are described as wild and whirling as they roar, whistle, sigh, shout, boom, and wail, they create harmony: “A breeze brings a light harmony, and a gale bring a grand harmony.”\textsuperscript{36} In harmony, simultaneous sounds are heard as a unity of particulars. The agreement of elements in harmony results from the fact that even a single note is a unity of tones—harmonic overtones, to be specific. In the language of musical spatiality, harmony is depicted as the vertical element that complements the horizontal elements of melody and rhythm. A triadic chord, for example, utilizes the harmonic overtones or “partials” present in the root note by mimicking the same distance between frequencies. In this way, a certain harmonic structure permeates the sound, creating a holistic effect that is not reducible to its parts. Harmony emerges as a moving shape in which we hear heterogeneity without discreteness.

Despite the fact that we describe music in terms of its vertical and horizontal elements, music is considered neither extended nor extensive, and thus non-spatial. According to Bergson, sound is intensive but rendered into extensive terms such as “lower” and “higher” because we associate sounds with the bodily effort required to make them. He writes,

\begin{quote}
Forget what you have learnt from physics, examine carefully your idea of a higher or lower note, and see whether you do not think simply of the greater or less effort which the tensor muscle of your vocal chords has to make in order to produce the note?\textsuperscript{37}
\end{quote}

The effort with which we pass from one note to the other is discontinuous, he claims, leading us to picture these successive notes as points in space that are reached by crossing an empty interval. This is reflected in the intervals we establish between notes in a scale. Further, the verticality of sound, or referring to sound as ascending or descending, is because high notes resonate in the head, and

\textsuperscript{36} Zhuangzi Yinde, 2.7. 「泠風則小和，飄風則大和。」
\textsuperscript{37} Bergson, \textit{Time and Free Will}, 45.
deeper notes in the chest. We have transposed the spatiality of the body onto sound. Sound would remain “pure quality” if we did not include the muscular efforts which produce it. This is endemic of a broader tendency in which we confuse the cause (extensive) with the effect (intensive).

Granting that music is intensive, particularly in its sonority or resonance, and not materially extended, does that make it non-spatial? In the piping of the earth’s hollows, sounds create a whole that cannot be de-spatialized without losing the shape that makes it harmonic and harmonious. Pluck a guqin string and there is a complex wave of harmonics from the root note that cannot be explained in temporal terms alone. One cannot account for the unified simultaneity of musical particulars without space, nor can we explain the space-like sounds that emerge through dissonance. Our inability to describe harmony and dissonance in purely temporal terms is not necessarily due to the pervasive spatial pollution of our ideas diagnosed by Bergson. Another explanation may be considered: space need not be homogenous, quantitative, or materially extended. Admittedly, musical spatiality may be a queer kind of space, with continually moving boundaries and indivisible without leaving something undivided. As Zhuangzi comments, “Dao has never had borders…To ‘divide’ is to leave something undivided; to ‘discriminate between alternatives’ is to leave something which is neither alternative.”

But the asymmetry and heterogeneity that animate the changing shapes of musical space should not in principle disqualify it from being considered as space. When Bergson argues that extensive causes obscure the intensive nature of their effects, such as when we sing, he fails to consider how the reverse may be true as well. The supposedly extensive muscular actions are themselves the result of aesthetic sensations, and therefore are intensive in origin. It may well be that the so-called extensive world is built on intensities—or at least, following Zhuangzi, any

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fixed conceptual distinctions between the intensive and extensive, as well as quantitative and qualitative, are to be questioned in the interest of finding their pivot. We can draw a distinction between counting (extensive) and rhythm (intensive), for example, but any musician is aware of the tenuousness of such a line.

3.3.2 Musical Space as \( W_u \): Distance and Shapeliness

At this point, let us say that the piping of the earth attunes us to musical space as distance. Zhuangzi’s example of the earth’s hollows show how sound comes forth from bounded spaces to be met at a distance by the bounded space of the ear. The hollows and the ear must be open and receptive for sound to occur. But while acoustics rely on physical, extended distances, in music itself, space as stable location is ambiguous or absent, replaced by moving distances. There are still boundaries, but they are fluid and unfixed. Musical spatiality as distance is \( W_u \) space; it is space without substance, matter, or extended things, shaped according to insubstantial, invisible, and changing sounds or “winds.” The poem *Mountains and Rivers Without End*, by Gary Snyder, captures what I have in mind:

“old woman mountain hears
shifting sand
tell the wind
‘nothingness is shapeliness’”

As with music, the sands move with winds that give shape through becoming things. Shapeliness—perhaps the spatial analogy to timeliness—arises from the distances of movement, as in a dance creating its own “where.” In “Where Is a Dance?” Eliot Deutsch writes that the movements of a dance create a space intrinsic to the dance, a space that is “a field of meaningful vitality” deriving its

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meaningfulness from the rightness or appropriateness of its spacing.\textsuperscript{40} The shapeliness of movement is the space; there is no separation of place and occupant. (Likewise, the pivot of \textit{dao} is not a place that something occupies.) Consequently, shape is not equivalent to form as something essential, separable, objectifiable, or externally imposed, and there are no final shapes because shapeliness always presents according to its spatiotemporal dynamics. Resonance, for example, has a shape (the “temporal envelope”) but this is a not a form that can be measured, quantified, or attached to matter in a hylomorphic manner. Instead the shape of resonance can be described as Deutsch describes dance: “it creates spatial relations that themselves give rise to the conditions it consequently realizes.”\textsuperscript{41}

Sensing opens and becomes more receptive in listening to the music of the earth because space has not just been effaced, it has been transformed into distance and shapeliness. As a result, we feel as if we are in the music and the music is in us. If the music of people draws us into the depths of the self such that we find how it coincides with time (as duration), the music of the earth turns us inside out such that we experience ourselves as spatial (as the moving shapes of distance). By learning to hear space without extension, we not only hear musical spatiality, we also hear inner space—but not as an analogy to the supposedly more real or objective external space of the physical world. Along with the different possibilities of musical and inner space comes a different freedom. The fixed distinctions fasted by Zhuangzi’s free wanderer include those that generate opposition between internal and external space (\textit{neiwai} 内外). Listening, now further emptied and opened by the music of the earth, has also become more spacious.

In the passage in which Kongzi describes the fasting of the heartmind to Yan Hui, he remarks,

\textsuperscript{40} Eliot Deutsch, “Where is a Dance?” in \textit{Essays on the Nature of Art}, 47. In the space of a dance, “Quantitative, measurable space gives way to qualitative spacing.”

\textsuperscript{41} Deutsch, “Where is a Dance?” 47.
“To not leave footprints is easy, never walk on the ground is hard... You have heard of using wings to fly. You have not yet heard of flying by being wingless.” There are no footprints in musical space; traces disappear here as quickly as they do in shifting sands. And so in learning to navigate musical spatiality through listening to the piping of the earth, one comes to understand how to move less restricted by form and more as the winds. We can, in fact, move perceptually in music in ways similar to how we move in physical space—a skill dancers draw upon—but rather than contending with the limits of physical extension, in musical space, it is time (and memory) that create firmer boundaries. Although memory arguably carries the music as a whole, the fading and leading temporal edges of sound set certain limits on where we can direct our listening. Still, as listening becomes more open and receptive through fasting the heartmind, the distances of musical space expand and deepen, bringing us closer to what Zhuangzi calls “galloping while sitting still.” Then, not only will we travel without moving, to wit, freely wander, we may well find “the knot where all threads join.”

3.4 The Piping of Tian

Yan Hui learns from Confucius to empty his heartmind by listening, losing his preconceptions, judgments, and agendas, and ultimately, himself. When he succeeds in the fasting of his heartmind, he observes, it is as if he had not yet even begun to exist. Rather than crippling, this loss of self allows him to harmonize with the unceasing transformation of all things. Zhuangzi does not tell us explicitly what the piping of tian sounds like in what is surely a deliberate omission (or perfect accident). But, less cagey than Zhuangzi, and admittedly engaged here in “making the

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42 Zhuangzi Yinde, 4.30-4.34.
uncommon common” by speaking about music in language, we can gather together some threads of what the piping of tian means.

While so far, when not leaving it untranslated, I have rendered tian 天 as “heavens” or as “nature,” its many other meanings help illuminate Zhuangzi’s provocation to listen to the piping of tian; in particular, the senses of tian blend aesthetic, ethical, natural and supposedly supernatural dimensions: the sky, the heavens (as the correlative counterpart to the earth), celestial phenomena, what is inborn, weather, climate, an ethical source, spirit, the force of circumstances, and very importantly, time. The multivalency of tian challenges the idea of nature as metaphysically distinct, for example, from art. (In fact, the concept of tian evinces the way questions that were addressed through metaphysics by Plato’s descendants were treated aesthetically by early Chinese thinkers.) Tian was therefore not understood as a transcendent source or pure domain ontologically immune to culture. In addition to quieting the epistemological and linguistic noise of the self, then, we may say that listening to the music of tian attunes us to the invisible and ambiguous, the shadowy and penumbral. The result is not just a sensitization to the aesthetics of nature, but to nature as aesthetic.

In considering how to listen to the music of tian, then, art cannot be denaturalized in virtue of being cultural. This is not to naturalize art (a metaphysical gesture that treats nature as a principle or domain that can be applied) as much as it is to aestheticize nature. In so doing, the sometimes quite subtle tendency to render nature as transcendent and as having strictly definable boundaries with the unnatural is lessened. Like tian, the many meanings of wind (feng 風)—including physical winds, songs, and “airs” as aesthetic bearing—highlight the liminal boundaries of nature and culture. Winds were associated with change, particularly of the seasons, and served as a widely applied
metaphor for protean transformation. Together with sound and qi, wind formed a closely bound conceptual web attested to in the idea of the music of nature.43

If perception reciprocally and reflexively reveals the self, as the ecological approach has suggested, and if sensing is direct and not a matter of internal representations or cognitive information processing, then how might the perception of what is very distant, dark, and subtle (xuan) affect our sense of self? For example, while human music easily affords a familiar range of activities, such as ways of dancing or feeling emotions, what of the music of tian? As Zhuangzi emphasizes, it is not easy to hear the music of tian, and even less so to hear who or what blows through the pipes or causes the shadow and penumbra to dance. Although we may hear the sounds of nature, for example, our perceptual system is habituated to music as humanly produced. This sensory bias—which Zhuangzi identifies as rooted in our obsession with differentiating labels and categorizations—lead the worldly self to expect the music of nature to sound like human music. Yet, learning to sense the wind (in its many senses) can be undertaken as a skilled practice of quieting the self through attunement and resonance with the subtlest, most “darkly mysterious” music. As skilled, perception requires boundaries. If this seems to conflict with the idea that listening is open, it is only because we hold on to the assumption that a limit is a limitation, rather than a condition for the possibility of openness and reception. Learning to sense these ever finer relationships between limits and openness, and timeliness and shapeliness, is key to unlocking Zhuangzi’s advice to listen to the piping of tian.

43 Erica Fox Brindley suggests that the longstanding association of sound with the winds and qi in early China was supported by the belief that qi (as wind, breath, or ethers) creates acoustical harmonies. Sound could therefore be considered a manifestation of the movements of wind, air, and breath. Further, the idea of qi as the “breath of the cosmos” was easily translated into the metaphor of sound as the “voice of nature.” Brindley, Music, Cosmology, and the Politics of Harmony in Early China, 83.
If human music that embodies the timeliness of nature can cultivate de, how can we extend the idea of tian as time to the timely music of tian itself? In the Zhuangzi, listening to the piping of tian affords the experience of the natural spontaneity of things as they show themselves to be uniquely “what they are from where they are so.” The emptying of the self induced by this listening also reveals our lineage in the great emptiness or space (da xu 大虛); a lineage that is better conceived in terms of timeliness rather than linear time. In a later passage from one of the outer chapters (Tiandi 天地 “Heavens and Earth”) of the Zhuangzi, these ideas come together through a description of the great beginning:

In the great beginning there is nothing, no presence, no name…. Out of that, one emerges but is still formless. When things grasp it as the means by which they are generated, it is called de… Out of the rhythms of stillness and action, things are born. As they fulfill the patterns from which they are generated, they are called forms. Each formed body shelters spirit, with its own unique characteristics called its nature (xing 性). In training our nature, we return to our de. When de is at its utmost, we accord with the great beginning. Becoming like the great beginning, we are emptied. Emptied, we become great and can join the singing of birds. When we have joined the birds, we merge with the heavens and earth. Our joining is a wild blending… This is called dark virtue (xuan de 玄德) and it accords with the great current.¹⁴

Can this passage be read as a description of timely transformations rather than as an historical account of events in linear time? There are a number of elements that encourage such a reading. First, de sources from that which is formless but efficacious; immeasurable (unlike linear time) yet with generative potency. Second, shapes or shapeliness emerge from rhythms rather than repetition. Third, our individual “natures”—as our endowed tendencies—can be trained in ways that cultivate our de to the point of becoming like the great beginning or the paradigmatic timely moment. Further,

¹⁴ Zhuangzi Yinde, 12.37-41. A note on the translation of xuan 玄德: I translate xuan de as “dark virtue,” although “profound potency or power” would also be an apt translation for this passage. Virtue is not meant in a strongly moral sense here.
becoming timely like the great beginning allows us to be emptied into nature, as when we listen to
the piping of tian. Through this, de becomes xuan ("dark," "profound," "deep," and "mysterious")
like spontaneous resonance, and like the invisible, enigmatic, and timely winds that bring the
changing of seasons, blow through the myriad things, and animate the shadow and penumbra. The
timely moment of the great beginning has now become the timeliness of the great current following
and flowing with things in their self-arising and natural spontaneity (ziran).

Along with the timely moment, there are at least two additional senses of timeliness here that
help explain how listening to the music of tian affects one’s de and sustains free wandering. First, in
timeliness we access nature’s memory. For example, in listening to the music of nature, we sense
nature’s memory by hearing the timely rhythms that gave rise to the forms we recognize as the
myriad things. Each thing, in continually generating its own great beginning (its perpetual self so-ing
and spontaneity) acts its own timeliness. And so hearing the music of nature blowing through
each of the myriad things affords sensing nature’s memory of each thing in its timely singularity as
well as nature’s ongoing memory of its transformative power as it perpetuates itself through
timeliness.

Second, timeliness as the opportune moment, as access to nature’s memory, and as the great
beginning together suggest that timeliness is also temporal natality. This is perhaps circular, for what
is timeliness if not a birth of temporality? It is an irruption into linear, measurable, homogenous, and
thus predictable time. At best, the timely moment may be tenuously anticipated through skilled
perception of rhythms, seasons, cycles, and resonance with the various patterns or affordances of
nature’s memory; yet following Zhuangzi, the causal origins of timeliness, if there are any, remain
shadowed. In addition, timely action is natal by breaking the mere repetition of past patterns, most
especially those of time, in favor of action based on nature’s memory of the great beginning.
Experientially, this is why timeliness can be experienced as sudden or spontaneously so of itself, as well as a dilation in which the past, present, and future lose their linear bounds as nature’s memory of the great beginning resonates through them.

The word Zhuangzi uses for “penumbra” (wangliang), in addition to meaning “there are not two,” is also a pun meaning “the spiritual presence of deceased natural forms.” While this is one way to describe the lingering influence of the patterns that give rise to things, in nature’s memory its forms are not truly deceased as long as they are remembered through the perpetuation of the great beginning. (After all, “to die” (wang) is a homophone with “to forget” (wang) in Chinese.) Sensing the music of tian not only affords direct access to nature’s memory, we also experience nature’s memory of its own great beginning—as it is continually propagated through the natality of all things in their natural spontaneity or timeliness. It is, in this regard, a never-ending beginning.

The emptying of the self through the piping of tian, back into spontaneity and timeliness, also reveals the aesthetic character of the interdependence between humans and nature. For the early Greeks, Mnemosyne (Memory) was the mother of the Muses. In giving birth to timely music, nature’s memory also acts as a great beginning and muse to itself and to all those able to quiet their heartminds enough to hear its music. Likewise, in answering the question of who or what blows through the pipes of nature causing each thing to be itself, let us consider Zhuangzi’s answer that things are “so of themselves” to be a description of each as its own muse, each as a unique timbre. Following this interpretation, instead of the metaphysics of first and final causes, transcendent laws

45 Citation
of nature, and time, we have the aesthetics of natural spontaneity, patterns as cultivatable tendencies, the timeliness of musical space, and the shapeliness of musical time.

And, finally, if de at its utmost accords with the great beginning, then the cultivation of de through the practice of listening to the music of tian reminds us that the great beginning is present. Further, listening to the timely music of tian, as a deftly skilled act of perception, trains us to hear the opportune moment, nature’s memory, and the ongoing silent arrival of change. Moving beyond linear, calculable time through these means is accompanied by the release of extended, discrete space. All of this is possible because listening has become sufficiently open and receptive; the noise of the tallying heartmind has been quieted. The piping of tian can now be said to nurture our xuan de or “dark virtue”: our profound powers of conjuring and transformation that can only accord with the emptiness of the great beginning and the great current by releasing extensive space and time. 46

Conclusion: Musical Wandering and Free Spirits

While Zhuangzi lived two thousand years before Nietzsche, he would certainly count among Nietzsche’s fellow free spirits. And so, having considered Zhuangzi’s musical practice of quieting the egoic, calculative self in order to become a “free and easy wanderer” with dao, we may also return to Nietzsche’s admiration of one who is “without melody,” who becomes nothing without being nothing, nothing but “long, drawn-out harmonic chords.” If melody is the aspect of music closest to language and concepts, and thus the common world of self-expression, and taking into account Nietzsche’s praise for the way music remedies the exile of existence by taking him away from

46 Some of these conceptions of space and time, for example those of contemporary science, were not part of either Zhuangzi’s milieu or concern. (Although the Mohists did hold something of a quantitative or objective conception of space and time). The spatiotemporal shifts required to become a free and easy wanderer were different for someone of Zhuangzi’s era than for us. This is of no consequence to the point that the transformations Zhuangzi describes are spatiotemporal and uniquely so. It may be that his concern with “tallying” existence is more relevant than ever.
himself as though he had “bathed in some natural element,” then to be without melody is not to be unmusical, but quite the opposite—it is to be so deeply musical that one attains distance from the striving of the self.47 This is a distance of musical spacetime in which one leaves perceptual and epistemological habits behind to become a free wanderer. This distance cannot be generated out of the fixed positions of objective space and time, nor can it be heard without open, receptive listening.

Within yourself, no fixed positions:
Things as they take shape disclose themselves.
Moving, be like water,
Still, be like a mirror,
Respond like an echo.
Blank! as though absent:
Quiescent! as though transparent.
Be assimilated to them and you harmonise,
Take hold of any of them and you lose.48

47 “Music … frees me from myself, it sobers me up from myself, as though I survey the scene from a great distance … It is very strange. It is as though I had bathed in some natural element. Life without music is simply an error, exhausting, an exile.” Nietzsche, “Letter to Köselitz, 1/15/88,” in Twilight of the Idols, vii.
“Sounds and tones, clear and muddy, modes and harmony, and strange sounds are differentiated by the ear...Speech and causes, happiness and anger, sadness and joy, loves, hates, and desires are differentiated by the heartmind.”

-Xunzi, 22.17-19

“Do not listen with the ear, but listen with the heartmind.”

-Zhuangzi, 4.27

According to the preceding chapters, listening can be characterized in three central ways: as intimate, skilled, and receptive. Notably, each of these characteristics displays key features of direct sensing, which is to say they do not rely on inference or other mental intermediaries such as representations. The lack of objectifiable meaning in music makes the directness of listening more obvious. In music, because it is meaningful without meaning, we experience listening more clearly. Listening itself does not become an object of perception or contemplation; instead, listening is the direct experience in which we understand its features. Taken together, the directness of listening and the absence of meaning in music suggest an argument for the direct meaningfulness of listening to music. The aim in what follows is to detail this argument in enough sufficiency that we are not surprised by where it leads: listening to music is a kind of thinking, a musical thinking.

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1 聲音清濁、調竽、奇聲以耳異... 説、故、喜、怒、哀、樂、愛、惡、欲以心異. Xunzi Yin De, 22.17-19. 无聽之以耳而聽之以心, Zhuangzi Yin De, 4.27. As we saw in Chapter 3, Zhuangzi goes on to advise listening with qi 氣.
4.1 The Direct Meaningfulness of Listening to Music

In contemporary philosophical matters, the idea of directness most often appears in discussions of perception. Debates between direct and indirect theories of perception are the central ground for such discussions. Roughly speaking, theories of direct perception hold that sensing is non-inferential awareness of what we perceive, whereas theories of indirect perception claim that we only have direct contact with intermediaries such as sense data, sensations and mental impressions, or more strongly, with representations. Gibson’s account of ecological perception stands as one of the most notable theories of direct perception and, while still controversial, continues to influence the ideas of a number of contemporary thinkers working to show that perception and cognition are embodied, enactive, embedded, extended, and affective.\(^2\) There is much consonance between these theories and the working assumptions of the classical Chinese philosophers whose ideas have figured into the account of listening to music developed here. I say assumptions because they began from positions similar to those in contemporary theories of direct perception without developing the kind of detailed arguments and proof required in traditions in which mind-body dualisms, idealism-realism splits, or radical separations of thinking, body, and affect have predominated.

As a result, early Chinese philosophers did not take access to the world to be a significant issue. Some were concerned that perception could be distorted through excess, emotions, and habits—as seen in Zhuangzi’s advice to fast the heartmind—and there were complex epistemological debates about what could be known, but ideas comparable to direct, embodied, enactive, embedded, extended, and affective perception and cognition were in circulation. Distance between things was the basis for relationship rather than separation. There was a presumed

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\(^2\) Pioneers in enactive and embodied perception and cognition include Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Shaun Gallagher, Andy Clark, Alva Noë, Susan Hurley, Antonio Damasio, and Francesco Varela, just to name a handful. More recently, based on work in neuroscience and philosophy of mind, the adjectives have been expanded to “4 EA”: enactive, embodied, embedded, extended, and affective.
continuity between body and world, inner and outer (內外), and unity of thinking and feeling that granted a basic immunity to some of the familiar contemporary problems regarding sense data or accuracy of representations. This is not to say that a theory of direct perception needs no justification, and there are resources within the Chinese tradition that are useful to such an enterprise, but for here and now, I will not address contemporary debates about direct perception nor adopt all of the definitions for “direct” as they occur in these debates. The focus here is much more specific: how does the directness of listening couple with the absence of meaning in music to generate the experience of music as directly meaningful?

4.1.1 How Do Intimacy, Skill, and Open Receptivity Make Listening Direct?

Each of the three characteristics of listening developed so far demonstrates a way of sensing music directly. Listening was first shown to be intimate: immediate, intensive, and intransitively sensed. Ganying 感應 (“mutual resonance”) served as the explanatory model for the intimacy of listening, including the spatiotemporal immediacy of music, and the fidelity of sensing as perceiving and sense as meaningfulness in music. This eliminated the need for representation or formal resemblance between music and other forms of meaning, such as emotions, in order for music to be meaningful.

Why does the intimacy of listening make it direct? First, listening to music is intimate because it is immediate. Prior to or aside from any signs, images, or meanings that we might mediate the music through, we have an immediate sense of it. The normally pre-reflective background of experience moves to the foreground of sensing through the sonority of music, for example in intensity and timbre, which are immediate sensations that exceed or elude formalization. Sonority
provokes the immediate immersion of a listener in the qualitative feeling of the sound, and thus to an intimacy with the more affective aspects of sound. Listening to music is therefore an immediately embodied and personal experience without analysis, judgment, or interpretation. We can, in a secondary manner, subject music to such intellectual procedures, but they remain unnecessary (and at times a hindrance) to the sense of meaningfulness without meaning in music’s immediate presence. The absence of objectifiable forms of meaning in music contributes centrally to the immediacy of listening to it, and in doing so, alerts us to the way that listening more generally is also immediate. Once attuned to this character of listening, we may notice it in non-musical settings.

Listening to music is also immediate because we are directly immersed in sound. We are perceptually surrounded. Simultaneously, due to the unmediated nature of the experience, the feeling of the music seems to be in us. Thus, even though sounds come to us at an acoustic distance, we experience a lack of distance with the music due to feeling as if we are in the music as much as it is in us. The initial explanation offered for the immediate, immersive character of listening to music in Chapter One was that music activates the mirror neuron system and arouses patterns of bodily changes that at least partly constitute the feeling of emotions. The direct feeling of these changes in our bodies makes them embodied and spatiotemporally immediate.

This explanation of the embodied immediacy of listening to music was further developed into the proposal that music and feeling, or sense, resonate. The resonance between music and feeling—or, the resonance of sensing—was detailed according to the idea of *ganying* ("mutual resonance") found in Chinese philosophy and music. Rather than patching up ontological disjunctions between things (especially subject and object), *ganying* accounts for intrinsic and reciprocal relations through the mutual responsiveness of phenomena. Further, in contrast to a stimulus-response or simulation account of perception, the suggestion that sensing is a resonant
activity mitigates the serious difficulties in explaining formal resemblance between external stimuli (music) and internal responses (feelings). In part, this is because the spatiotemporality of ganying makes action at a distance not only possible, but also immediate and direct. Consequently, if listening to music can be understood as resonance between sensing as perceiving and sensing as meaningfulness, then such listening maintains the twofold fidelity of being true to and being true that characterizes ganying.

Finally, the intimacy of listening to music is direct because it is intransitive. Extramusical sources of meaning are not necessary to perceiving and understanding music. Listening to music as meaningful requires nothing other than the music; there is no separate meaning as an indirect object of perception translated through representation, images, or other mental media. Returning to Wittgenstein’s illustration of intransitivity, the proper response to “How do you think this melody should be played?” is just to whistle it in a certain way, “and nothing will have been present to my mind but the tune actually whistled (not an image of that).”\(^3\) With nothing needed mediate our understanding of it, music’s meaningfulness is direct; it is not a process that accompanies the perception of music.

Along with being intimate, listening is skilled: it is enacted by an organism reciprocally embodied in its environment. The way we are embodied is crucial to the directness of listening as skilled. All of the early conceptions of the body in Chinese philosophy display degrees of reciprocity with the environment that make a pure distinction between the internal and external impossible, but none more so than body associated with the senses - the \(ti\) body. The continuity, mutual patterning, and resonance between inner and outer, and part and whole, that characterize the \(ti\) body allows it to mean both “body” and “embody,” as well as “practice or implement.” \(Ti\) bodies are

\(^3\) Wittgenstein, *The Blue and Brown Books*, 166.
something we have, but are also something we do. Further, because our body forms an ecological system with what it senses and embodies—in effect forming a common body (tong ti 同體)—access to the world is direct and in no need of supplementary processes of interpretation, inference, or judgment. In fact, the senses themselves are said to “know” (zhi 知) as, for example, in Mozi’s statement that the ears know music. The senses know by directly contacting things and by enacting the perception of them.

In addition to being embodied, listening is skilled because it is ecological. Supplementing the ideas found in Chinese philosophy with aspects of J.J. Gibson’s work and enactive perception theory, listening has been described here as the self-tuning activity of a whole creature exploring affordances for perception on the basis of being embedded and embodied in its ecology. Sensing does not occur inside the mind as the internal construction of a representation of the external world; instead, sensing is access to a meaningful world enacted through sensorimotor skills. We listen to music just as we sense the world, that is, through the skilled exploration afforded by our direct contact with things. All listening involves a primary level of skill by virtue of being enacted through sensorimotor skills; furthermore, as skilled, sensing can be cultivated—“attuning one’s ear” as Confucius put it—such that people can become “skilled listeners” (shan ting cha zhe 善聽察者) to varying levels. This is important because the directness of listening alone does not guarantee accuracy (of recognition or understanding) but greater skill improves it.

Lastly, the third characteristic of listening that contributes to its directness is receptivity. As Zhuangzi described, such listening is “empty and awaits the arising of things.” To call listening empty does not imply that it is passive or inert, rather it describes an open way of listening that does not grasp for meaning or message, avoids epistemological bias, and attends to how things change.
When perception is direct, cognitive processes do not mediate perceptual contact with the environment, but it is important to notice that this does not necessitate that perception is wholly immune to cognition and emotion. Zhuangzi’s advice to empty the heartmind in order to listen with more openness, receptivity, and thus directness, reflects an awareness of how perception can be altered by habitual patterns of thinking and feeling. As with skill, all listening is open and receptive to a degree that can be expanded through cultivation or contracted through inflexible habits such as adherence to fixed distinctions and judgments.

Empty listening is an open receptivity to things themselves—as Zhuangzi put it, in their “self so-ing”—and in this regard is an orientation with similarities to Edmund Husserl’s description of phenomenology as a return to things themselves, as they give themselves in experience from themselves. This comparison can be extended to suggest that listening to music operates as a phenomenological reduction. In a passage reminiscent of Zhuangzi, Husserl tell us that in the natural attitude, I am conscious of the world as “simply there for me…whether or not I am particularly heedful of it, and busied as I am with all of my considering, thinking, feeling, willing, and wanting.”

This world is always already value-laden in terms such as beautiful, ugly, pleasant, and unpleasant, and is full of objects with established status, such as friends, enemies, servants, superiors, strangers and relatives. As a result, the world given by the natural attitude is phenomenologically impoverished. In order to allow things to appear in their richness, as they give themselves, this attitude must be radically altered through the phenomenological reduction, which brackets our assumptions about the existence, value, and knowledge of things.

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However, listening as I am characterizing it does not enact a phenomenological reduction akin to Husserl’s idealist formulation of it, which transforms the experience of the world into the thought of the world by withdrawing into consciousness. Instead, following Zhuangzi’s intimation to listen to the piping of tian, the open receptivity of listening to music is more usefully compared to Merleau-Ponty’s claim that art enacts a phenomenological reduction when it allows our intentional ties to the world to appear and, therefore, to no longer covertly obscure direct experience. Rather than withdrawing inward, through receptive listening we open out into the world—a world revealed as “strange and paradoxical,” rather than meaningful only according to the dictates of human consciousness.5

Open and receptive listening is importantly connected to spatiotemporal shifts as well. The prime example of these shifts so far has been that in listening to the music, listening becomes more open and receptive as objective, quantifiable forms of time and space are lost in favor of intensive, durational spacetime. Musical spacetime is experienced directly and immediately because it cannot be made discrete, and thus discontinuous, without losing its specific character. Consequently, we cannot analyze the continuous, heterogeneous change experienced in open, receptive listening to music according to a causal model that relies on discrete parts. The spacetime of music allows us to perceive music directly without any intermediaries needed to unify and translate discontinuous elements of perception such as stimulus and sensation. The more open and receptive our listening, the more directly we experience the intensive, durational spacetime of music as it continually changes.

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5 “The best formulation of the reduction is probably that given by Eugen Fink, Husserl’s assistant, when he spoke of ‘wonder’ in the face of the world. Reflection does not withdraw from the world towards the unity of consciousness as the world’s basis: instead it steps back to watch the forms of transcendence fly up like sparks from a fire; it slackens the intentional threads which attach us to the world, and thus brings them to our notice. It, alone, is consciousness of the world, because it reveals the world as strange and paradoxical.” Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, xv.
For these reasons, the fasting of the senses and the heartmind recommended by Zhuangzi can be understood as a way to cultivate direct perception. Quieting or emptying the self, in particular through letting go of habituated ways of knowing, thinking, and perceiving, opens the inner space necessary to encounter things as naturally presence themselves (ziran 自然). One of the notable consequences of the liberatory practice of open, receptive listening, then, is that we experience the relationship of interiority and exteriority (nei wai 内外) as co-emergent, and thus more as a living continuum than a boundary. The relationality of my zi or “self” of ziran is inclusive rather than exclusive, making my “so-ness” or ran the result of the entirety of my relationships. Zhuangzi’s mysterious suggestion that listening to the piping of tian will reveal all things as ziran, then, is an indication of how we become the world through open and receptive listening.

4.1.2 Music: Meaningless and Meaningful

Our experience of music’s meaningfulness depends on the dynamic between listening and the absence of meaning in music. One could say that music is both meaningless and meaningful. While peculiar and philosophically intriguing, this statement is not contradictory. Why? Music is meaningless because it lacks the kind of meaning usually attributed to words and language, and the concepts that are expressed by them. More generally, music lacks any kind of objectifiable meaning; thus even to say music is meaningful is not to imply that it is full of meaning. In what way is it meaningful, then? Music, I have gathered, is meaningful because of the alchemy between the directness of listening and the directness with which music conveys itself due to its combined resonance and lack of meaning. More specifically, music’s meaningfulness occurs as we listen due to the sonority of sound, mutual resonance between music and feelings, and musical spacetime.
Meaningfulness cannot be translated into meaning that can be defined, although attempting to do so is nearly irresistible.

Another way to describe music’s meaningfulness is as xuan 玄: profound, abstruse, and inexpressible in language. We have seen xuan used to describe de 德 (as virtue or power) in the Zhuangzi, but its most considered treatment is found in the works of the philosophers who have been loosely grouped under the heading of Xuanxue, including Xi Kang. The various and controversial translations of Xuanxue—including “Mysterious Learning,” “Dark Learning,” “Obscure Learning,” and “Inquiry into the Profound”—indicate the difficulty of the concept xuan, but notably, the challenge it poses to language is precisely one of its meanings. Prior to its more philosophical usages, xuan referred to a dark color and to that which is hidden or distant. Xuanxue thinkers subsequently adopted it in a variety of philosophical contexts, especially to convey the inexpressible profundity of dao and the abstruse, yet fecund workings of wu 無 (especially as “indeterminate”).

He Yan 何晏 (195-249 C.E.) and Wang Bi 王弼 (226-249 C.E.) have been mutually credited as progenitors of Xuanxue and for bringing wu into mainstream philosophical discourse based on their interpretations of the Laozi and Zhuangzi. Both He Yan and Wang Bi advocated “treasuring nothing” (gui wu 貴無) and “taking wu as the root” (yi wei wu ben 以為無本). According to He Yan, wu is that by which things come to fruition and become what they are. Rather than from nothing,

6 “Neo-Daoism” is another common translation of Xuanxue. However, I have left it out of this list because while Xuanxue philosophers certainly focused on the Laozi and Zhuangzi, they were equally enamored with the Yijing, gave credence to the Lunyu (Analects), and considered Confucius to be a sage. Moreover, Neo-Daoism does not linguistically match Xuanxue or any other Chinese term at the time.

7 For example, according to the Shuowen jiezi 說文解字 lexicon compiled by Xu Shen 许慎 in 100 C.E., xuan denotes “black with dark red” (hei er youchi se 黑而有赤色) and “hidden and distant” (you yuan 幽遠). In the Yijing 易經 (Book of Changes), the color of tian 天 is said to be xuan.
nothing comes to be (*ex nihilo nihil fit*), for He Yan, from nothing all things come to be as they are.8

Put another way, from indeterminacy, determinacy emerges. Like *dao*, *wu* remains obscure, mysterious, and unnameable—in other words: *xuan*.

Beings depend on *wu* in coming into existence, in becoming what they are. Affairs on account of *wu* come to fruition and become what they are. Now, one tries to speak about *wu*, but no words could describe it; name it, but it has no name; look at it, but it does not have any form; listen to it, but it does not give any sound. Then, indeed, it is clear that *dao* is complete. Thus, it can bring forth sounds and echoes; generate qi-energies and things; establish form and spirit; and illuminate light and shadow. What is dark obtains its blackness from it; what is plain obtains its whiteness from it…The round and the square obtain their form, but that which gives them their form itself does not have any form. The white and the black obtain their name, but that which gives them their name itself does not have any name.9

By using *wu* to convey *dao*, He Yan was able to describe *dao* as “full and complete” (*quan* 全) as well as “not having anything” (*wu suo you* 無所有) without contradicting himself. *Dao* is able to operate with total creative generosity only by virtue of its fullness, completeness, and nothingness. If *dao* could be assigned fixed reference or otherwise objectified, its profundity and natality would be limited, inscribed, and diminished. Like music, *dao* is meaninglessly meaningful; by not having meaning or any other objectifiable content, music and *dao* have a completeness or fullness that encourages and assists meaning without ever becoming or claiming it. Its meaningfulness lies in this. Just as that which gives form does not itself have form, music shows how meaning depends on meaningfulness.

8 In his investigation of *das Nichts* (“the Nothing”) in “What is Metaphysics?” Martin Heidegger adds a twist on the classic formulation *ex nihilo nihil fit*, claiming that it contains another sense: *ex nihilo omne ens qua ens fit* (“From the Nothing all beings as beings come to be”). Only through the Nothing do beings accord with their ownmost possibility and “come to themselves.” Heidegger, “What is Metaphysics?” in *Pathmarks*, trans. David Farrell Krell, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 95.

In a similar vein, Mou Zongsan once described *dao* as both nothing (void of things and names) and concrete. When these two ways of *dao* come together as one, they are referred to as *xuan*. Counter to what we might expect, fixed reference or meaning that can be objectified is not more concrete than meaningfulness that cannot be decoded. Instead, concreteness is found in the absence of formal meaning. Just as Mendelssohn and Nietzsche emphasized that music does not elude language because it is too vague, but rather because it is too definite, particular, and uncommon for words, *xuan* refers to the profundity that is unique to the oneness of concreteness and emptiness. We should notice that this is an inversion of the more common associations of definite, concrete, and particular with what can be defined, analyzed, and expressed. But if we add the adjective “direct” to the queer unity of absence and concreteness that *xuan* refers to, it becomes clearer why a lack of meaning engenders the profound meaningfulness of particularity. In this understanding, concreteness is particularity as it directly conveys itself in its ongoing, processual becoming. Naming and other formal specifications are abstract and vague in comparison, and furthermore, introduce intermediaries and indirectness into what are really processes of *ziran* or the spontaneous self-presencing of things.

Hence, the twin sense that music is both deeply personal and universal arises from the fact that it is both concrete and empty of meaning. Gabriel Marcel spoke to the philosophical tension born of this when he wrote, “Nowhere better in music can one understand that the universal cannot be reduced to what is valid for a thought in general.”\(^{10}\) In whatever way we might construe the possibility of ideas in music, they are not Kantian concepts (predicates for judgments), for music simultaneously defies intellectualization by offering itself directly, concretely, and without the dictates of what Marcel called “discarnate reason.” The alchemy through which we experience music

\(^{10}\) Marcel, *Music and Philosophy*, 125.
as meaningful is catalyzed by its lack (un) of meaning in such a way that it conveys meaningfulness directly, yet abstrusely (xuan) when we attempt to capture it with devices of language and intellectualization. Taking together the directness with which music conveys itself and the directness of listening as intimate, skilled, and receptive, we have the direct meaningfulness of listening to music.

4.2 Xin 心 as Sense Organ

The direct meaningfulness of listening to music helps advance the ongoing inquiry into how we can understand the claim that music sounds the way feelings feel, and vice versa, without reverting to a theory of formal resemblance or representation. This advancement can be enhanced by considering the possibility that the heartmind (xin 心) functions as one of the sense organs. As is often and importantly noted, the heartmind both thinks and feels, but are these ever the same activity? That is, is it ever the case that thinking is feeling and feeling is thinking? More specifically, are thinking and sensing ever the same activity? The evidence that the heartmind is a sense organ in its own right gives reasons for answering these questions affirmatively.11

As mentioned previously, in the Mengzi and Xunzi, the heartmind is described as the ruler of the senses. It dwells in the “central space” (zhong xu 中虚) and governs the five senses, depicted as “officials” (wu guan五官). While the five senses are said to “know” (zhi 知), for example the ears know music, it is the heartmind that thinks (si 思). The Mengzi says, “Thinking is not the office of

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11 Geaney argues that while the texts do not provide us with sufficient evidence to decisively conclude that the heartmind is a sense, there is a very strong case for the view that the heartmind is not radically distinct from the senses. On the Epistemology of the Senses in Early Chinese Thought, 84.
the eyes and ears…the office of the heartmind is thinking.”

Another special function of the heartmind that is distinct from the five senses is that it confirms or verifies what the senses know (zheng zhi 徵知). It cannot do this without the senses, but nonetheless verification seems to be a capability reserved for the heartmind as the “office” that thinks and adjudicates—or as Zhuangzi put it, “tallies” (fu 符). How could the heartmind verify what the other senses know if it did not also sense on its own?

While the heartmind has abilities the other senses do not, the same can be said of each of the senses in comparison with one another. They cannot “trade offices” as the Xunzi says; they do not know the same things or in the same ways. One of the main pieces of evidence for taking the heartmind to be a sense is its appearance in lists of the different senses. For example, the Xunzi names the heartmind along with the other five senses as engaging in differentiation; whereas the ears, for example, differentiate sound, tones, modes, and harmony, the heartmind differentiates speech and reasons, happiness and anger, sadness and joy, loves, hates, and desires. The heartmind not only detects and distinguishes emotions, but language and reason as well. If the ears recognize the sounds of speech, it is the heartmind that senses these sounds as speech and, notably, their meanings. Put differently, the heartmind senses (perceiving) sense (as meaning). The question remains whether such sensing can be considered thinking or if perceiving meaning is separate from thinking.

4.2.1 Does Xin 心 Listen?

Additional evidence for the sensing ability of xin is found in the fasting of the heartmind passage in the Zhuangzi, where it states that we can and should listen with the heartmind. (Notice

12 Mengzi, 6A15.
also that here, in the context of progressively subtler and direct sensing, the heartmind does not see, smell, or touch—it listens.) Elsewhere, in the *Xunzi*, we are again advised to listen with the heartmind, specifically with a “learned heartmind” (*xue xin 學心*).\(^{13}\) In addition to following various threads of textual evidence, another way to approach the question of whether the heartmind senses is to assess whether it shares in the characteristics of listening that have been identified here. Is the heartmind intimate, skilled, and receptive in a manner comparable to listening? If so, can we infer that the heartmind senses in at least one way?

For the sensing of the heartmind to qualify as intimate, it must be immediate, intensive, and intransitive. A case for all three can be made via a coupling of the earlier argument that listening takes place through resonance and the evidence that the sensing of the heartmind is resonant. Rather than operating diachronically and through mental intermediaries, as in mind-as-container or stimulus-response models of perception, resonance (as *ganying*) is synchronic, immediate, and mutually responsive. Not only does the concept of mutual resonance have much to offer an investigation of listening and music, it is hard to think of a better model with which to understand the heartmind. For one, the heartmind operates according to the resonant dynamics of *qi*, and further, the spontaneous responsiveness, open awareness, and optimal covariance of a skilled and tenuous (*xu*) heartmind with its environment display the telltale activity of *ganying*.\(^{14}\)

From the start, in Xi Kang’s “Sound Has Neither Sorrow Nor Joy,” the resonance of the heartmind was attested to from both sides of the debate. For Xi Kang, resonance with music moves

\(^{13}\) *Xunzi Yinde*, 22.46.

\(^{14}\) There are many passages in a wide range of early Chinese texts that paint a picture of the heartmind as resonant, even when the technical term *ganying* is not used. For example, the heartmind is described in the language of “mutual response” (*xiangying 相應*) and “feeling or sense penetration” or “open to and affected by” (*gantong 感通*). Huaiyu Wang has recently argued that *gantong* is one of the original meanings of *ren*. If correct, this lends credence to the translation of *ren* as “human-heartedness.” See “Ren and Gantong: Openness of Heart and the Root of Confucianism,” *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 62, no. 4 (October 2012): 463-504.
the heartmind to release its sentiments; for the Guest, resonance between a musician and listener allows the musician’s thoughts feelings to be understood directly. And while Xi Kang rejected the predominant belief of his time that music bears emotions, he held that when the heartmind of a musician is tranquil and empty, the music and player mutually resonate and respond. This is the way in which we can express ourselves, so to speak, directly through music, and not through intermediaries, formal, resemblance, or content. Similarly, in the skill passages of the Zhuangzi, an open, resonant heartmind is key to the sensitivity and responsiveness of non-coerced actions spontaneously coordinated with circumstances. The dynamic resonance of the heartmind exemplified in Xi Kang and Zhuangzi’s examples is possible because xin is not just heart and mind, it is situated body-heart-minding.\(^\text{15}\) Consequently, as Zhuangzi puts it, “to let the heartmind roam with other things as its chariot, and by trusting the force of circumstance nurture your center, is the farthest one can go.”\(^\text{16}\)

As resonant, the sensing of the heartmind is also intensive. In “The Intensity of Psychic States” (Chapter Two of Time and Free Will), Bergson used the intensive examples of aesthetic feelings such as grace, and emotions such as joy, to launch his argument that immediate, durational consciousness is intensive. Like temperature and resonance, aesthetic feelings, emotions, and immediate consciousness are all qualitative, heterogeneous multiplicities that cannot be assimilated to a magnitude without being lost in translation into extensity.

Finally, the sensing of the heartmind is intimate because it is intransitive. On this point, we may directly borrow Wittgenstein’s arguments regarding intransitive understanding. According to

\(^{15}\) I owe this more accurate formulation of xin 心 to Roger Ames. To leave the body out of our understanding of xin is to obscure some of the most key features of its functioning, and further, to risk misaligning it with erroneous conceptions of the mind as separate from the body, and both as delineated from the environment. Xin is not just part of the body, either, it is embodied and, consequently, challenges an agent/action dualism.

\(^{16}\) Zhuangzi Yinde, 4.52-53. I have borrowed the phrase “the farthest one can go” from Graham’s translation.
Wittgenstein, understanding is intransitive when there is no secondary process or source of meaning required; for example, understanding a song requires nothing but the song itself. I need not think of anything else in order to understand what I am sensing; in this regard, my understanding is unmediated. Intransitive understanding is not limited to music, either. In addition to other aesthetic objects such as paintings, Wittgenstein discusses posture, facial expressions, atmospheres, and rule following all as candidates for intransitive understanding, and there are undoubtedly many others.

My understanding of a rule, or a role (to give a Confucian example), cannot really be conveyed except through examples, modeling, and showing; likewise a rule or role can only be learned through practice that depends on non-intellectual responsiveness in various situations. As Wittgenstein put it, we cannot understand a rule simply by giving more rules for its application. Nor can I understand my roles through descriptions of them. Despite not being intellectual, intransitive understanding is nonetheless still a kind of understanding, and as such, belongs to the heartmind as the seat of understanding and sensing meaning.

The point that practice is an expression of intransitive understanding leads nicely into the second characteristic to evaluate of the heartmind: skill. The strongest evidence that the sensing of the heartmind is skilled comes from the insistence, across Daoist and Ruist traditions alike, that the heartmind can be cultivated, including through aesthetic, ethical, bodily, and intellectual practices. In the Zhuangzi, for instance, a heartmind unskilled in the practice of attenuating itself is the major obstacle to ziran and the life of a free and easy wanderer. As well, before mastery of the bodily and aesthetic arts can be attained, one must develop a skilled heartmind through fasting, attunement,

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17 Roger Ames offers a thorough elaboration of this point within his reading of Confucian ethics as “role ethics.” For example, he writes, “Whatever we call virtue, then, is nothing more or less than a vibrant, situated, practical, and productive virtuosity. What this means is that ren is not a specific virtue that can be named and analytically isolated as being defining of one’s character any more than what it means to behave in a consummately human way can be stipulated and replicated without reference to a specific situation.” Confucian Role Ethics, 181.
perspectival flexibility, and spontaneous and adept responsiveness to both the environment and one’s own thoughts and feelings. As exemplified in the story of Engraver Qing, the skilled heartmind that is requisite for virtuosic performance is developed through practice. On the Ruist side, we heard in the Yue Ji how the heartmind is “moved” (gan 感) by external things such that it can be aesthetically trained to both perceive and respond with great sensitivity, efficacy, and fidelity. This kind of skilled sensing reaches its pinnacle in Confucius’ ability to hear music and know someone’s virtuosity (de). While the prospect of hearing de with just the ears has been controversial, and perhaps even unconvincing, it becomes more viable if we consider that it is the heartmind instead that senses or “hears” someone’s de. After all, virtue is the very kind of thing that the heartmind senses.

By granting that the heartmind senses in its own right, and does not just interpret sensory information from the other senses, we sidestep one way that a theory of perception needs an account of intermediaries such as sense data. The relationship between the heartmind and other senses still needs to be explained, but it is not bound to models in which the mind generates internal representations of the external world. Gibson’s ecological theory of perception attempts a similar maneuver by positing that perceivers exist in a reciprocal relationship with their environment such that sensing is the skilled exploration of affordances for action. The brain, as Gibson describes it, does not construct objective information from an inflow of sensations, rather there is a coordinated, unified orientation of the brain and sense organs such that the whole system resonates with the environment it is mutually specified and adapted with.

18 For one of the most detailed discussions of the cultivation of a capable heartmind we can look to the recently excavated Guodian text, the Xing Zi Ming Chu 性自命出.
While the whole system of sensing, including the brain, is skilled, Gibson does not go so far as to assert that the brain is a sense organ. Nor is this my suggestion. Simply put, the heartmind is not the brain. Not only is the heartmind embodied as a system that includes the physical heart, whole body processes, and both cognitive and affective activities, it extends into the world and is embedded in it through sensory-affective dynamics as well as somatic-aesthetic reciprocity. Since the heartmind is not limited to the physical body as a container, the sensory skills of the heartmind are not limited to what arises internally. If we are able to perceive an already meaningful world directly, as ecological accounts of perception tell it, then the heartmind must also make direct contact with the world. In other words, instead of a model in which the senses contact the world and then feed information back to the mind (brain) to build a sufficient picture, the heartmind skillfully makes contact with the world in coordination with the senses. One potential way to understand this is that the heartmind emerges from the harmony of the senses; to say that it governs the senses, then, means that it is common and central to all the senses, but does not exert top-down rulership. The senses together, including the heartmind, form an ecology.

The possibility that the heartmind can be emptied to its native, open receptivity lends support to the idea that the sensing of the heartmind is not limited to an inner sense. As the *Zhuangzi* describes, listening can become progressively subtler and spacious, and as listening becomes emptier, the heartmind releases the presumptions and epistemological habits obstructing its clear, open receptivity with the world. The fasted heartmind is, in other words, a listening heartmind in two ways: the heartmind senses the world by listening and we listen with the heartmind. This two-way capacity resolves the potential incompatibility between listening as receptive and as skilled.
4.2.2 Concepts as Access to the World

If the sensing of the heartmind is limited to inner sense, then we might explain thinking as sensing a thought. But since I am suggesting that the heartmind is not limited to internal sensing and is able to contact the world without representation, how should we understand the relationship between thinking and sensing? It seems that these two activities must be brought together, and fortuitously, xin already does this. To say that xin both thinks and feels is incomplete and misleading if we take that to mean that thinking and feeling can be cleanly cleaved from one another. More accurately, xin is both cognitive and affective because its thinking can be a kind of feeling and its feeling a kind of thinking.

Alva Noë has argued that the line between perception and thought is not sharp, but appreciation of this continuity is obstructed by the “distorting influence of the representation-idea in the theory of mind” in which we suppose that concepts are representations of the world.¹⁹ This over-intellectualizes both perceptual experience and the intellect itself. Intellectualism supposes that concepts operate primarily in judgments (to understand something is to subsume it under a concept through judgment) and perceptual experience has the structure of a judgment (to perceive something is to represent it as falling under a certain concept). If there are practical and perceptual modes of understanding, they are derivative of the judgmental mode. As an alternative to intellectualism, Noë follows closely the etymology of both the English term “concept” and the German word for concept meaning “to grasp” (begriff), to propose a non-representational understanding of concepts as taking ahold of what is. Concepts are practical techniques and tools of access. Consequently, the space of thought and the space of perceptual consciousness are access

This is not to say that we exist in an isolated or solipsistic distance from the world that we secondarily gain access to through concepts. Rather concepts offer distinct ways or styles of access that are possible because we are always and primarily ecologically constituted with the world.

One of the benefits to such an approach is that skilled action, including perception, does not have to be non-conceptual in order to be non-intellectual. That is, we can be critical of over-intellectualizing perception without excluding concepts from the skilled activity of sensing. Taking inspiration from Wittgenstein’s suggestion that concepts are abilities rather than mental representations, and Gibson’s provocation that the real task of perception is not how we get from inside to outside, but from here to there, Noë argues that concepts are skills of access like sensorimotor skills. Presence, or showing up in the world, is something we achieve in diverse ways and degrees according to various means of skillful access including concepts. Wittgenstein noticed that when we take skillful use to be a genuine sign of understanding concepts, we allow that concepts can have immediacy and non-reflective familiarity. Taken together with the idea of presence, when the heartmind senses a song as sad, the concept of sadness is immediate, non-representational access to the music. It is how one perceives it. The problem, as we have seen, is that we are subsequently tempted to say what the music is or that the music is sad. But again, the ability to get the song right and not call a dirge “happy” depends on our skillful, situated presence in a certain form of life. It depends on how we are in the world.

To speak of these matters in terms of Chinese philosophy, ziran, as our protean and spontaneous self-presencing, expresses our particular fluency in the world. Listening with the heartmind is not an intellectual activity in that it is not judging or discriminative thinking, but this does not necessitate that such listening is non-conceptual. It is certainly can be non-representational

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and thus ideally matched with music as a non-representational art. But the motivation to fast the heartmind of intellectual obstructions or “tallying” is freedom to “roam” more intimately with existence and its myriad things. The point is deeper, richer, and more creative access, as well as greater vituousity in all that we do. Zhuangzi does not address whether our intellectual skills can ever become more effortless and spontaneous with a fasted heartmind, but we can speculate that this possibility would likely require not only practices of thinking as listening, but also cultivating listening as a kind of thinking.

4.3 Listening to Music as Thinking

One might ask, what are the benefits in establishing that the heartmind listens or that listening is a kind of thinking? Why not stick to a model in which the senses perceive and the heartmind interprets, judges, calculates, imagines, feels, and so forth? Aside from the difficult explanatory puzzles that this model yields, taking the heartmind to be a sense in its own right, and listening to be thoughtful, offers a more specific advantage to the question here of how music is meaningful. If it is true that the heartmind listens and listening thinks, then we have an opportunity to consider a question both enchanting and philosophically significant: is listening to music a kind of thinking?

4.3.1 Can Listening Think?

In the Xunzi, we find a passage that expresses the unity of thinking and sensing and the perceptual capability of a clear heartmind: “If the heartmind is not engaged, then black and white may be right before one’s eyes and not be seen; thunder or drums may be at one’s side and one’s ears will not hear them. How much more so with one whose heartmind is occupied with
something!” The ears, for example, cannot hear music without the heartmind, but an occupied heartmind will obscure hearing (“What did you say?”) and occupied hearing will blunt the heartmind (“I can’t even hear myself think”). Further, can a heartmind think when it is too full to listen? Adept listening requires that we balance the heartmind’s tendency to store (zāng 臧) things with its emptiness (xū 虛). The Xunzi says, “Not allowing what has been stored to damage what is to be received is called emptiness.”

Emptying the heartmind, then, does not just quiet its noise or rid it of obstructing thoughts, it helps us achieve fidelity in the unified activity of sensing as perceiving and sense as meaningfulness.

But what of the claim in the Xunzi that the senses do not think, that thinking belongs to xīn? If the senses do not think in the intellectual mode of judgment, logic, and tallying, then this claim does not undermine the possibility that listening is a kind of thinking. That is, if concepts can operate outside of the intellectual mode, and are present even in sensorimotor activity, then we can agree that listening does not think intellectually in the way the heartmind does without conceding that it is altogether non-conceptual and non-thoughtful. Like xīn, listening is both affective and thoughtful. Just as listening with our ears requires the sensing of the heartmind, following the model of Confucius in Analects 2.4, we can only give our heartmind free rein once our ears are attuned. This is, I think, a way of saying that we must learn to listen with our heartmind and think with our ears. We can embrace cross-modal sensing between the heartmind and ears without collapsing their “offices” into one another.

If the kind of thinking that I am attributing to listening is not of the intellectual sort—what we might call higher order cognition (propositional, representational, analytic)—in what ways is it

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21 Xunzi Yinde, 21.4-5. 心不使焉, 則白黑在前而目不見, 雷鼓在側而耳不聞, 惱於使者乎.
22 Xunzi Yinde, 21.37. 不以所已臧害所將受謂之虚.
One answer is that it is conceptual, in Noë’s sense of concepts as skilled access to the world, and thus thoughtful. But in closer alignment to the central themes here, listening is a way of thinking when it is meaningful. For example, when listening to music, the fidelity of sensing as perceiving and sense as meaningfulness is not the result of correspondence between perception and thinking, rather it arises through the mutual resonance of the heartmind, listening, and music. Because the heartmind can listen, it can coordinate with the listening of the ears in mutually sensing and making sense of music. When listening is meaningful, sensing makes sense, or thinks, we could say

But can listening think without the heartmind? This is something of an impossible question since the Chinese philosophical model of the body and senses does not accommodate radically separating sensing and thinking. Yet, Chinese philosophers speak of “bodily knowing” ti zhi 體知 and “bodily understanding” ti hui 體會, or say that the senses “know” zhi 知 and take “meaningful things” yi wu 意物. The use of this vocabulary does not imply that it is really the heartmind that knows, rather genuine knowledge and understanding are attributed to the body and to the five senses (the ears “know” sound). Further, while listening with the ears might not be wholly separable from the activity of the heartmind, we have seen that certain habits of the heartmind such as judgments and fixed distinctions can be loosened, and strong desires and emotions can be eased and harmonized, so that listening becomes more intimate, skilled, and receptive, and therefore, more directly meaningful. If meaningful activity qualifies as thinking, then shouldn’t the meaningfulness of such listening count as a kind of thinking?

The distinction developed here between meaning that can be formalized and meaningfulness that cannot bears now on the idea that listening is a kind of thinking. Thinking does not need to represent the world, whether through categories, prototypes, or other formalizable structures, nor
does meaningfulness need an objective form. Like the other senses, the heartmind is intimate, skilled, and receptive and therefore capable of experiencing meaningfulness without objective meaning. As well, listening thinks when it is meaningful, for example in accessing and understanding music, but not because it reasons or cogitates in a propositional or analytic manner. Meaningfulness does not just belong to the thinking and feeling of the heartmind, as I have endeavored to show, it belongs to listening as well.

4.3.2 Thinking in Music

Listening to music presents a special case of listening as thinking because of the unique contributions music makes to our experience of meaningfulness. These contributions come in many ways. First, because music is sonic, it has a close proximity to language. For certain philosophical purposes, I have encouraged distancing music from language, and discouraged taking language to be the indisputable bearer of meaning by which all other meaning is evaluated. However, music has an undeniable closeness to language for many reasons, not the least of which is the vocal-auditory roots of both. Since one of the primary philosophical purposes for asserting that music is not a language and should not be evaluated according to linguistic models of meaning was to indicate how language is musical, we can now acknowledge the sonic origins of both music and language.

In addition, like music and emotions, music and thinking share aesthetic and sensorimotor patterns. It may be easier to notice the relatively more dramatic bodily aspects of our emotions, but thinking is also embodied. The sounds we make not only reflect our emotions and moods, but also our thoughts. Likewise, many of the characteristic patterns and qualities of music, such as harmony, melody, rhythm, timeliness, and shapeliness, can be sensed in the movements of thought. The frequency with which philosophers compare the flow of consciousness to music, especially to
melody and rhythm as we saw of Bergson and Husserl, is born of phenomenological observation. The enticing suggestion that there are musical ideas or that music says something arguably comes from the shared aesthetics of music and consciousness and the resulting feeling that we can think in music. Wittgenstein was fond of such a position, remarking in many places on thinking in music and comparing music to thought with statements such as: “The strength of the thoughts in Brahm’s music” and “Here it is as if a conclusion were being drawn.” Yet, we cannot paraphrase these thoughts or conclusions anymore than we can articulate what music says. As Wittgenstein so strongly emphasized, music conveys itself. In this regard, then, music shows us a space of thinking.

Music also has a meaningful affinity with thinking because listening (as sensing) operates through resonance and music is an especially complex resonant phenomenon that transacts directly with the listening of both the ears and heartmind. For example, timbre and harmonic texture are easily and directly experienced, but difficult to objectify because they tend to convey the way a sound is rather than what it is. The multidimensional sonic attributes of resonance therefore provide an especially productive aesthetic ambiguity by offering authentic access to things. In other words, in bypassing objectifiable meaning—in exceeding form—resonance heightens our sense of music’s meaningfulness, and thus our thinking. As Kant put it, in exceeding the bounds of the concept, music animates the mind in an unprecedented manner. Given that thinking is also a kind of feeling, as in the activity of xin, and because resonance causes music to feel the way feelings feel and vice versa, we are also encouraged to experience how music feels the way thinking feels.

Lastly, returning to Gabriel Marcel’s idea that a true listener recreates the music she listens to, thinking in music occurs to some degree whenever we listen to music. The more intimate, skilled,
and receptive the listening, the richer this process of recreation will be. As Marcel emphasizes, though, listening as singing back the music in thought is not series of intellectual operations.

I have had the occasion to write elsewhere that there is no creation that is not at the same time an instigation to create, and in fact, the true listener recreates the music he listens to. But this does not at all mean that he accomplishes for his own sake a certain collection of linked intellectual operations, for example, after the fashion of an apprentice mathematician who re-works a demonstration. Or, more exactly, this interpretation not only does not exhaust the act of appreciative apprehension, it also conceals its specific value.24

Through this process, music addresses itself directly to we creatures of the flesh, as he puts it, and incarnates. This is the “magic” and the “very flesh” of music. Thinking in music via true listening, then, is another display of the simultaneous concreteness and voidness of music’s meaningfulness, as musically embodied thoughts.

4.3.3 Caesura: An Objection

At this point, we must pause for an objection. I have moved somewhat quickly from the idea that sensing and making sense, or perceiving and meaningfulness, have fidelity or a direct relationship to the more controversial suggestion that direct sensing is thoughtful, at least in the case of listening to music. With the exception of Gibson’s work, and Noë’s to a very limited extent, I have not engaged contemporary debates regarding direct perception or relied heavily on their models of perception and thinking, however a potentially significant objection to my account can be drawn from these discussions. To the extent that sensing is direct, is it not less thoughtful? Doesn’t immediate, unmediated experience put greater distance between perceiving and thinking? The more directly I experience something, the less I am thinking about it or exploring its meaning. Examples

24 Marcel, Music and Philosophy, 101.
in which there is a lag between immediately sensing something and beginning to think about it are easy to come by, such as hearing thunder, seeing a flash of light, sensing a presence behind me, or for that matter, hearing the first moment of a piece of music. Why, one might protest, am I conflating perceiving and conceiving, sensing and understanding, and most strongly, listening and thinking?

In response, I would like to embrace this objection, but with several crucial points of clarification. Indeed, I am making the counterintuitive case that listening to music is an example of thinking as direct experience. Not only is listening to music direct and meaningful, it is thinking because it is direct experience. However, at no point has the claim been that listening to music is thinking about it. Conversely, I have drawn the distinction between thinking about music, which is indirect, and thinking in music as directly listening to it. The objection that sensing cannot make sense, that perceiving cannot conceive, takes higher order, intellectual cognition as the paradigm for thinking. The demonstration that the intimacy, skill, and receptivity of listening result in its direct meaningfulness carries the additional benefit of showing that thinking (as a meaningful activity) need not be held to the intellectualist paradigm. Thinking as the direct experience of music should not be confused with thinking about the experience or about listening. Once again, this activity is intransitive.

Furthermore, as I have argued by drawing on both Daoist and Ruist insights, direct sensing is more, not less, concrete and particular. Music’s meaningfulness is not too vague for language, rather language is too general for music. By virtue of being more particular and idiosyncratic, direct experience is more meaningful. But again, this is not to say it has more meaning that can be parsed out for analysis in the intellectual styles of thinking such as judgment and analysis. Music’s meaningfulness, and therefore thinking as direct listening to music, is xuan: profound without
objects of profundity. It is indirect sensing, rather than direct, that stands at a greater distance from the kind of thinking as sensing that I am describing.

In addition, the direct sensing made possible by the intimacy, skill, and receptivity of listening is also the experience of our native reciprocity and continuity with the world. From this we can certainly think about the world, explore meaning, make judgments, and philosophize. I challenge neither the existence nor importance of these ways of thinking, and acknowledge that they are related to the kind of thinking as direct sensing that we find in music, just as meaning and meaningfulness are neither the same nor wholly separate. However, if we accept without question the models of sensing and thinking that maintain an essential division between the two, we also adopt assumptions about constitutive separations between body and world, and self and other, that are far from proven. As a consequence, the resources of a tradition such as Chinese philosophy, in which these assumptions never gained hold, will be out of reach or at least misunderstood. If I have conflated thinking and sensing, then, it has not been to confuse or muddle them, but rather to bring them together alchemically.

4.4 Musical Thinking

Thinking, as we have noted now, is often taken to be a process of formulating, directing, and organizing thoughts in words—the kind of intellectual operations that Marcel contrasts with true listening. Listening to music can and does prompt thinking in this linguistic conception. But this is not musical thinking—and not just because music can be distanced from language, but because thinking can as well. While language and music both share a privileged relationship with meaning, albeit from opposite ends—language is presumed to have meaning while music’s meaningfulness must be proven—it is sound that unites music and language, and thought to both. Whereas in
language, we tend to consciously focus on the supposed meanings of words more than on its more musical aspects such as rhythm and tone, in music as well as musical thinking, these non-semantic yet meaningful features come to the fore of awareness.

What is musical thinking, as distinct from listening to music as thinking or thoughts in music? For one, it happens when the musical features of thinking generate the meaningfulness of our thoughts more than their contents alone. As Nietzsche remarks, “even the wisest among us occasionally becomes a fool for rhythm, if only insofar as he feels a thought to be truer when it has a metric form and presents itself with a divine hop, skip, and jump.” Recalling now the dramatic claim in the Yue Ji that only in music can no falsehood be done, musical thinking is thinking that cannot be true or false according to the dictates of language or logic. Instead, like logic, it shows a space of thought; but unlike logic, the space of musical thinking is shaped by qualitative, heterogeneous, and immeasurable motion that does not provide for structures such as contradiction. Perhaps just as time and space are better understood as timeliness and shapeliness in music, musical thinking is characterized by aesthetic qualities such as dissonance rather than contradiction. Unlike contradiction, which threatens meaning, dissonance can be meaningful.

Much philosophical thought takes place in the space of musical thinking. In concluding that art and philosophy are one, Noë insists that, “pretensions of philosophers” notwithstanding, philosophical arguments are ultimately aesthetic and never end with a Q.E.D. While Noë emphasizes the transformative symmetry between conversations about philosophy and about art

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26 On Track 12, *A Warming Glow* by Brad Park, dissonance is deployed with distinct meaningfulness.
27 “This troubled Plato in the *Meno* and it has continued to puzzle philosophy all along. Philosophy—and again the same is true of art—is always troubled by itself, always seeking better to understand its project. We can see our way clear of this by recognizing the value of philosophical conversation, like aesthetic conversation about a work of art, consists not in arrival at a settled conclusion, but rather in the achievement of the sort of understanding that enables one to bring the world, or the art work, or one’s puzzles into focus. This is the transformation we seek, in philosophy and in art.” Noë, *Varieties of Presence*, 128.
that arises from the way they both bring the world into focus, musical thinking as I am describing it offers another kind of access to things by showing the aesthetics of thinking rather than just speaking about them. The musicality of an insight, for example, grants direct understanding of not only the content of the insight, but also the nature of an insight itself. When a thought strikes a chord, not only is our understanding of whatever we are contemplating deepened, as well we are shown something distinct about the aesthetics of thinking itself. One’s skill in thought, then, surely benefits from such listening with the heartmind.
CONCLUSION

Persona: by Sound

“The same dream came to me sometimes in one form, and sometimes in another, but always saying the same or nearly the same words: Make and cultivate music, said the dream. And hitherto I had imagined that this was only intended to exhort and encourage me in the study of philosophy, which has always been the pursuit of my life, and is the noblest and best of music.”

– Socrates

With the important exception of song, silence is solicited strongly by music, not merely due to the practical demands of listening, but because of the unique way that music’s emptiness defies language while drawing us closer to sense in what may be called musical nearness. In speaking about music, then, can we heed Nietzsche’s admonishment that in comparison to music, words shamelessly make what is “uncommon common” by addressing music through another art? Before concluding, we might pause to remember how music was a philosophical practice, and philosophy an art, in Ruist and Daoist traditions alike, and that φιλοσοφία (philosophia) was originally μουσική (mousike), an art governed by the Muses. And with due deference to the silence required to listen, apologies are offered to music in advance.

Reprise

The commonplace experience of finding music meaningful has presented us with an array of philosophical problems, notably the question of how an art supposedly without content or signification seems to bear meaning. In challenging our understandings of meaning and sensing, music exerts a fundamental kind of pressure on philosophy. This was seen in the way that Kant and

Hegel each struggled with the peculiar challenge music posed to their systems of aesthetics, or to be more exact, to the metaphysical assumptions of their aesthetics. It was also witnessed in the importance that Confucius accorded to music in becoming a virtuous person, and in Zhuangzi’s exaltation of music and listening as means to free ourselves from a calcified and habituated heartmind. The disruptive and countersystemic force of music, its eccentricity as a work of art, and its status as liminal case of meaning, all render music duly appropriate to philosophy at its borders, whether between metaphysics and aesthetics, or between Greece and China.

The question of musical meaning has been undertaken here with the proposal that music’s lack of objectifiable content is one key to its perceived meaningfulness, and therefore music’s meaningfulness cannot be evaluated in comparison to language. However, at no point has it been said that musical and linguistic meaning differ in kind. As tidy as such a solution might be, and as much as it might relieve us of the unique sense of failure when describing music with words, singing has served to remind us of the sonic-auditory origins of human communication and the possible musical roots of language. Do the meanings of words change if we sing them rather than speak them? The dictionary meaning is certainly not altered, but the meaningfulness of what is conveyed does change. How?

Mendelssohn maintained that words retain an inherent ambiguity no matter how much explication they are given, yet we can all understand a song. This dramatic and counterintuitive idea is based on the claim that the mechanisms for mutual understanding in language, such as grammar and vocabulary, are general and therefore vague. By conveying its utter particularity, that is to say itself, music says the same thing to everyone in a manner unique to that person because of how they listen. As a consequence of this double particularity of both the music and listener, we find music extraordinarily meaningful and, quite strikingly, to be simultaneously universal and personal.
The other key to music's meaningfulness has been found in listening. Certain characteristics of listening—intimacy, skill, and receptivity—come together with music’s lack of objectifiable meaning to produce our experience of music as meaningful. The tensions between the different features of listening, like the tension between music’s lack of meaning and its meaningfulness, amplify our sense of musical meaning. As intimate, listening is immediate and intransitive. Does this not strain against the idea that listening is skilled? And moreover, how can listening be intransitive (immediately understood) and skilled (consciously cultivated) when it is empty (open and receptive)? These tensions threaten to become contradictions if we hold there to be a clear and structural separation between internal and external, and if we make music the bearer of meaning as a circumscribable, representable form. Guided by the way that resonance (as ganying) functions to create a non-representational fidelity of sensing as perceiving and sense as meaning, and by the various challenges to the distinction between what is internal and external to us (nei/wai) brought by Chinese and ecological accounts of sensing and the body, the three features of listening were shown to enhance rather than oppose one another. Direct resonance between listeners and music allows the intimacy of listening to serve as a basis for cultivation and skill. We become more skilled through more direct contact with things; we know them as we know ourselves, and thus come to embody what we sense, such as timeliness and harmony. For the same reason, increasingly skilled listening is correlated to more open and receptive listening. Skill, of the kind associated with virtuosity and mastery require a silence that is inhibited by the inflexible habits of body-heart-mind and the mediations of intellectualism in which perceptions are judgments.

In addition to the three features of listening, and the manner in which meaning is absent in music, the characteristic spatiotemporality of music facilitates the fidelity of sense at the heart of music’s meaningfulness. This fidelity has been shown to operate, not by correspondence,
resemblance, or representation, but through resonance across the distances between the senses of sense at play—both our sensorium and capacity for making sense—when we listen to music. In the aesthetics of music, sense in its many senses draws near with itself. The possibility of musical space has been especially important in making the point that perceiving and meaning are closer than philosophers often assume. With the idea that musical space is intensive, heterogeneous, and durational—rather than extensive, homogeneous, and static—the reciprocity between the space of thinking and feeling and the space of music could be drawn. In turn, the Chinese philosophical understanding of the heartmind could be expanded upon to argue that thinking listens and listening to music is a kind of thinking. Together, these turns formed a mutual aesthetics based on the shared spatiotemporality of music, thought, and feeling.

**Music as a Philosophical Practice**

The music of philosophy is not a static achievement but a possibility of answering song or reflective resonance, that is also what Heidegger named thinking. For thought of this kind, we need less the promise of novelty…than to learn to listen – for the possibility of harmony is the possibility of reticent or open attunement. This takes us back again to the musical ideal of Greek antiquity where no one speaks who does not also at the same time listen and where the key to ethical virtue is not the imperative of law but measure or fittedness – attuned to the music of the heart, the music of life, but above all attuned to the singular possibility of attunement itself: the backstretched connection.²

Having reached the idea that listening to music can be a way of thinking, can we extend this to say that music is a philosophical practice? Here, I do not mean to ask whether we can think philosophically about music. We do, and it yields rich problems and questions with which to grapple,

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novel ideas to consider, and answers previously unthought. Rather, the question now is: can we do philosophy in music? This, I have asserted, is a unifying idea shared by Ruists and Daoists. In both traditions, the consequences of this position can be traced and examples abound of Chinese philosophers for whom playing music was an imperative for contemplation, self-cultivation, insight into nature, communicating profundity (suan), and developing virtue (de). Reprising Xi Kang’s arguments against emotions in music now, it becomes clearer that his insistence on music’s distance from the vagaries of human meaning were motivated by a higher purpose for music: attuning the heartmind to nature’s dao, change, and what he called the great harmony (da be 大和). Through music, people could reach “vast comprehension and great illumination” that was not possible in the more limited victories of understanding brought by logical analysis and textual debate. Again and again, we find Chinese philosophers who suggest that music brings possibilities of understanding, expression, and transformation that are not available in language or traditional philosophical argumentation (“Although I have no virtue to reveal to you, let us sing and dance”). Notably, they do not claim that discussing music is what brings such benefit, it is the listening to and playing of music. Aside from the major examples of this position we have found in Xi Kang, Confucius, and Zhuangzi, what other evidence do we have that music is a philosophical practice?

There are several significant examples that have been gathered here. First, in Chapter One, the discussion of whether music itself bears meaning or whether meaning is restricted to the listener yielded a problem that could well be described as a musical analogy to the paradoxical Euthyphро cycle.¹ In Plato’s Euthyphro, we find a supposedly circular definition of piety that leads Socrates to ask, is what is pious dear to the gods because it is pious, or is it pious because it is dear to the gods? In other words, is what is pious something objective (and therefore loved by the gods), or is it

¹ My thanks to Arindam Chakrabarti for identifying and naming this example.
subjective (and pious only because the gods love it)? Similarly, in first examining answers to the question of how music is meaningful, we saw the objectivist claim that music itself has meaning that we can discover and the subjectivist claim that music is meaningful only insofar as we find it to have meaning. In the first case, meaning belongs to music, and in the second, it belongs to us. Is a song itself happy or is it happy because I feel happy listening to it? The resolution to this opposition was not found in the debate between Xi Kang and his Guest, nor between contemporary expressionist and arousal philosophies of music; it is found in the experience of music itself. In the mutual resonance (ganying) between music and listeners, music’s meaningfulness is simultaneously objective and subjective. It would not be meaningful without the listener, yet it is not the listener’s meaning alone that constitutes music’s meaningfulness. This is why I have suggested that we would be mistaken to call a dirge happy, yet dirges do not contain or even express (as objective meaning) happiness. Confucius is keen to this dynamic, as evidenced by the importance he places on ren as cultivated virtuousity in the art of appropriateness and significance (yi 義), rather than appealing to abstract virtues such as courage or justice.4

The second example of music as philosophy also comes from the way resonance structures our experience of music, as well as its unique spatiotemporality. When we listen to music, and even more so when we also play it, we feel as if we are simultaneously in the music and it is in us. The reciprocity between inner and outer (nei/wai) is directly experienced. For Ru philosophers such as Confucius and Mencius, the unity of inner and outer, and situation and feeling, allowed sages to pattern (li 理) their qing through embodying music. One ear becomes attuned, to borrow Confucius’ phrase, and de is cultivated through music itself, not through philosophically analyzing it.

4 Roger Ames describes this as, “Ren is both antecedent and an outcome.” Conﬁdian Role Ethics: A Vocabulary, 182.
The practice of music as philosophy also has distinct implications for how we do philosophy in other ways. Specifically, it yields support for the place of aesthetics in cross-cultural or comparative philosophy. If Mendelssohn is right that we may remain confused about one another’s meaning in language, while all understanding a song, how might we apply this insight to philosophy? I don’t think we should take Mendelssohn’s suggestion to mean that we will interpret the song the same way (this is just empirically not true), but in conveying itself directly, the musical artwork attains a level of communication that may not be possible in the hermeneutic struggles over language and defined concepts. Such challenges are all the more acute in cross-cultural and comparative philosophy. If we can do philosophy through music, and likely other modes of art as well, does this not recommend both art and aesthetics as vital methods for philosophizing across borders?5

**Persona**

“Music coming out of emptiness” is how Zhuangzi describes the depths from which the human heartmind (xin 心) arises. As well, music’s own emptiness—its lack of content and resistance to objectification and signification—allows the self to resound through it, as well as to be emptied or quieted into an elemental silence. Through music, sense in its many senses may be transfigured into a nearness with itself in which sensing and meaning have a fidelity or being true that is not dependent on correspondence, reproduction, or a metaphysical opposition between the sensible and the intelligible. The fidelity of musical nearness, the truth of music that breaches the constraints of

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5 Tracks 13 and 14 are offered in consideration of this question. Track 13 is *Yekirmo Sew (A Man of Experience and Wisdom)* by the great Ethiopian jazz legend, Mulato Astatke. Track 14 is *Variations* by contemporary American-Chilean electronic musician Nicolas Jaar, from his album *Space is Only Noise if You Can See*. Jaar credits Astatke as a central influence on his sound. What communication can be heard between these two musical works composed across space, time, and culture?
metaphysics by permitting no falsehood, also raises questions about our persons. Who resounds through music? Who listens in musical nearness?

Music is exemplary in its resistance to meaning that depends on signification, conceptualization, and representation. The relative absence of these sources of meaning in music allows it to convey itself uniquely as music, in its sonority. As essentially sonorous, music offers sense as resonance and, as such, the possibility of a musical nearness between perceiving and meaningfulness. This occurs, for instance, when the lack of content in instrumental music allows the self to resonate through sound, or when the indeterminacy of concepts in music animates the imagination, or when the prosody and timbre of language draw us to song. If the distances between the various senses of sense in musical nearness are structured by resonance, then rather than depending on either metaphysical or physical conceptions of proximity, they shift and change through the openness and liminality of sense attested to, for instance, in our silent, listening response to nature and music. The sonorous aspects of sound contribute to the emergence of unique spatialities—architectural possibilities not wholly bound by objective space and matter—in which we also resound.

The displacement of spatial objectivity, in which surfaces and stable forms are disrupted by resonance, also coincides with a shift from sight to listening. In apprehending the form and appearance of things, sight tends to disclose what something is, in contrast to listening, which is oriented to how things sound. There is as well, I might add, not just a shift away from the metaphysics of objects in the move from vision to listening, but also a challenge to the metaphysical
reign of the intelligible, and thus intellectualism, operative in visualism and its pretensions to objectivity.\(^6\)

One result of the absence of a sensible-intelligible opposition at the beginnings of Chinese philosophy was that phenomena were generally understood in terms of correlative dynamics such as showing and hiding, saying and silence, light and shadow, and determinacy and indeterminacy. Nature was therefore thought to retain a hiddenness or fertile darkness (\(xuan \, 旋\)) that in its very withholding provokes the naturalness, spontaneity, and self so-ness associated with \(ziran\). The philosophers whose thinking gathered around \(xuan\) were not surprisingly also followers of Zhuangzi, who saw that, through dynamics of penumbra and shadow, nature evades being determined by humans. While Zhuangzi calls us to nature—no other text of philosophy comes to mind, save Zarathustra, with such a varied cast of creatures and elements from the natural world—he also continually acknowledges nature’s resistance to human meaning. In the very phrasing of his suggestion to listen to the pipes of nature, Zhuangzi reveals the difficulty of the task with the provocation that we have “not yet” heard the piping of \(tian\).

Like the great tone without audible sound, the piping of \(tian\) cannot be heard with ears attuned only to meaning rendered in form. I am reminded here of Wallace Steven’s poem, Of \(Mere\, Being\):

\[
\text{The palm at the end of the mind,} \\
\text{Beyond the last thought, rises} \\
\text{In the bronze distance.}
\]

\(^6\) Perhaps not coincidentally, we find an intriguing concern with listening in the work of Nietzsche and Heidegger as they attempt to think the end of a certain history of metaphysics. Among many possible examples, there is Heidegger’s statement of existential spatiality in The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic in which he suggests that we must learn to hear into the distance to know those who are near, and his claim in “The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking” that the clearing [\(lichtung\)] in which things can show themselves is open, not only for shining, but for resonance and echo as well. And, how can we not mention Nietzsche’s call for hearers rather than readers of his work? Even more pointedly, Thus Spoke Zarathustra—that bellwether text of the end of Plato’s metaphysics—is a story that “may be reckoned as music; certainly a rebirth in the art of hearing was among its preconditions.”
A gold-feathered bird
Sings in the palm, without human meaning,
Without human feeling, a foreign song.

You know then that it is not the reason
That makes us happy or unhappy.
The bird sings. Its feathers shine.

The palm stands on the edge of space.
The wind moves slowly in the branches.
The bird’s fire-fangled feathers dangle down.⁷

In these words, we hear again of the silence of nature. It is not the beauty of the scene alone that silences us, but as echoed in Zhuangzi’s sensitivity to listening at its limits, the silence of nature itself gives us back to ourselves.

Who, then, is it that listens in musical nearness? Who resounds through music? We could consider the self in terms of persona, in its many senses, but especially as “to sound through” and as “mask or character,” harking back to the masks worn in Greek theater. The one who sounds through music sounds beyond herself—but not into a metaphysical beyond. Instead, music’s emptiness or freedom from concepts and objects offers a closeness of sense to itself by which it transfigures and resounds, thus allowing us to sound through the masks of our personae in an achieved musical nearness with them. Fidelity, as the resonant truth of music that breaches the systematic constraints of philosophy, thereby offers philosophy an internal aesthetic rebellion, and to us the distinctly alchemical possibility that we might become like birds who sing for the sake of singing, or philosophers who listen and think for the sake of each. The fecundity of resonance engendered by music’s emptiness also enables a synaesthesia of sense according to which we can sensibly understand a blue note, a warm tone or a wicked bass line, as much as we can hear the high mountains and flowing water in Bo Ya’s song and become zhi yin (知音): one who knows the music.

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Musical Selections

1. Bach, Prelude and Fugue No. 10 in E Minor
2. Tim Crowe, Howling Calm
3. Li Xiangting, Liu Shui
4. Blind Willie Johnson, Dark was the Night, Cold was the Ground
5. Bob Dylan, Love Minus Zero/No Limit
7. Stars of the Lid, A Meaningful Moment Through a Meaningless Process
8. William Basinski, Disintegration Loops
9. Lo Ka Ping, Water Spirit
10. Louis Chinn, Melancholia
11. Twilight Circus Sound System, The Ride
12. Brad Park, A Warming Glow
13. Mulatu Astatke, Yêkêrmo Sêw (A Man of Experience and Wisdom)
14. Nicolas Jaar, Variations