

1828260

Student Cover Sheet and Reflection on Feedback Form

University of Birmingham – School of Philosophy, Theology and Religion

Taught Programmes Essay/Assignment

Cover Sheet 2019-20

To be included as the first page of all work submitted for assessment

Required Information:

Module Title:	Philosophical Project (20 Credits)	
Module Level:	LH	
Student ID (SRN)	1828260	
Essay/assignment title:	How does music express emotion? An Investigation and extension of Stephen Davies 'Appearance Emotionalism' Theory	
Confirmed Word Count:	4991	
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How does music express emotion? An Investigation and extension of Stephen Davies

‘Appearance Emotionalism’ Theory

1. Introduction

Within the field of ‘aesthetic philosophy’, the genre of music poses many interesting questions due to its unique qualities. Music is unlike many forms of art. Its physical form consists of vibrations, it has no visual elements. Additionally, the interpretations of music seem to differ between cultures and even individuals. Despite having no visual form and the varying interpretations of music, it seems largely accepted that music is able to express emotions in some form. The sombre piano notes of Gary Jules “Mad World” seem to express the emotion of sadness, while AC/DC’s “Back in Black” seemingly exudes confidence and strength. Yet, as Stephen Davies suggests, music cannot simply ‘be’ an emotion, for an emotion is a human disposition. Music cannot feel sad, for music cannot feel at all (Davies, 1980, P67). Therefore, musical emotion must be expressive through a quality gained externally, it cannot be intrinsically emotional.

Many may argue that the lyrics, back-story and other contexts of these songs provide this expressive quality. While this provides an answer to some of the expressive properties of music, it does not provide an adequate response to ‘pure’ music. When a listener hears an instrumental piece, consisting of the musical properties only, one is still able to hear emotion expressed within the music. While it may be easier to explain the reasoning behind the expressiveness of lyrics, the expressiveness of ‘pure’ music, music which ‘contains no non-musical aspects’ (Davies, 1980, P67) remains a complex mystery. I will reference songs that have lyrics, however in these examples I will focus specifically on the musical properties of these songs.

There are many theories that attempt to explain the expressiveness of pure music, including appearance theories, arousal theories and expression theories. I will specifically focus on appearance theories, for they seem to solve many problems that other theories cannot answer. I will analyse and critique Stephen Davies “Appearance emotionalism” theory, demonstrating the theory’s strengths against other theories. I will then attempt to improve and expand his argument through Jerrold Levinson’s objections. Through this, I will attempt to answer how music can be viewed as expressing emotions.

2. Davies’ Appearance Emotionalism Resemblance Theory

Stephen Davies’ appearance emotionalism theory is a form of resemblance theory which argues music is expressive through the experience of resemblance between the music’s dynamic qualities and the qualities derived from human emotion (Davies, 2006, P2). Through this resemblance, one mirrors the appearance of the emotion perceived and thus feels the emotion (Davies, 1980, P86).

2.1. Dispositional Problem

Davies account begins by defining the first requirement, the dispositional problem, stating that when we describe music as “sad” or “happy” we do not literally mean the music is ‘feeling’ the emotion (Davies, 1980, P67). He suggests that a second distinction of emotional descriptors is required, one which focuses on music as *appearing* as the emotion instead of literally *feeling* the emotion. This is analogous to when one describes a person as sad looking. A person is capable of *looking* sad through their physical features without needing to *feel* sad. The internal states of the person are not a requirement to the person’s appearance of looking

sad, the same way the internal state of music does not need to feel sad to *sound* sad. One is able perceive a person ‘as if’ they were sad through their characteristics, instead of seeing a person ‘as’ sad (Davies, 1980, P73).

One may object to this idea by questioning how these associations come about; how the resemblance between sad looking and sad feeling is capable of existing. Davies specifies that this secondary use of emotional words is generated through relationships between the qualities that make one look a certain emotion, and how these appearance characteristics are linked to the experience of feeling sad (Davies, 1980, P70). One would not see a sad looking person as *sad* looking if feeling sadness didn’t *usually* generate the sad looking characteristics. We’d see the appearance qualities resembling a different emotion or no emotion at all.

Davies labels the physical descriptors to music and people as “emotional characteristics in appearance” (Davies, 1980, P68, P79). These ‘appearance characteristics’ are all that are needed to define the qualities of one’s character, for it is how a person literally looks (Davies, 1980, P68). These ‘appearance emotions’ must also be experienced within the music by the listener to cause the music to be expressive, and therefore Davies theory is “response dependent” (Davies, 2006, P4).

2.2 Analogy between Music and Human Behaviour

Davies must show that music is analogical to human behaviour. If Davies can provide this account, he creates the foundation for music to appear as expressive, the same way a person

can appear as expressive. If he cannot, one could argue that music is inherently too different to resemble human emotion and therefore the appearance theory is not applicable.

Davies answers how music presents appearance characteristics through two foundational features of music. The first is the ability for music to emulate movement (Davies, 1980, P74). Davies describes the dynamism of music as the perceived 'movement' heard in a passage. We perceive music in its own "aural" space. Notes are described as high and low and when heard in relation to each other and one hears movement between them (Davies, 1980, P74). The bass guitar in the introduction of Led Zeppelins 'Dazed and Confused' '*descends* downwards' as the notes 'lower' in pitch. Additionally, the 'ebb and flow' of music, the introduction and return of sections like the chorus, suggest a movement in and out of the perceived space within a piece. These 'dynamic' properties are properties that change within time, the notes 'move' as the song plays.

These properties are core to expressing movement analogical to human behaviour, for both possess the ability to express movement in perceived space. A sad person may show the appearance characteristics of sadness through the characteristics displayed within their 'sad looking' movement. A slow walk with slumped shoulders and laboured footsteps are appearance characteristics that denote a person looking sad. As music has dynamic qualities, music can express its emotion through particular movement properties that emulate the emotions in human movement. The laboured movement can be resembled through the tempo and rhythm of a song, providing a foundation for the music to appear sad (Davies, 1980, P76, 2006, P3).

The second quality that both music and human behaviour share is a complex intentionality, a deliberative nature. One must see music as containing the ability to have its own intentions to be able to apply these emotions to the music. Without this intentionality, one could argue that the expression must be attached to a different object, not the music itself. Davies argues that human behaviour is not just a result of simple processes and determined causes like a machine (Davies, 1980, P74). More is necessary to understand why one may move with hesitation, and this is what separates computer-like movement from human behaviour (Davies, 1980, P75). For example, someone who may be feeling sad will not always cry as a result. The complexity of human behaviour isn't determined purely by condition requirements and instructions alone; behaviour is complex due to the large number of interacting mental elements that make up the human behaviour. There is an extra dimension to human behaviour that is required to explain human behaviour as a result of the unique intentionality one holds (Davies, 1980, P74), further than the casual mechanisms that create this behaviour.

Davies argues that the movement in music is perceived as having this same irreducible 'motive' or 'purposefulness' (Davies, 2006, P3). Music's ability to 'plod' or 'rush' would be not be described as such without this intentionality, for music would be described as having basic, emotionless movement. Davies argues that the ability for the music to 'make sense' separate from the intentions of the composer and its causal mechanisms is further evidence of the perceived intentionality in music. When one describes music, they are able to relate certain sections against each other to explain the story the music tells, such as the slow tempo building to the crescendo in the next section of a song. When one makes sense of the path the

music takes, one does not refer to the intentions of the composer, but the music itself. The music is perceived as separate from the composer, and when one considers how the music could have taken different paths in its movement, it is analogous to how one considers how human behaviour can differ despite the behaviours causal reasoning (Davies, 1980, P75). Much like human behaviour, music's movement must have its own intentionality, or at least be perceived as having its own intentionality.

These two similarities shared between music and human behaviour provide a foundation for music to sound like a certain emotion the same way a person can look like a certain emotion (Davies, 2006, P2). The appearance emotions present in sad looking people are also present through resemblance within the dynamic qualities of the music. These appearance emotions are presented to listener in music through the dynamic qualities of the music, the same way the sadness of a sad looking person would be presented to an onlooker through the sad looking person's physical qualities. The sonic qualities must resemble the qualities of the emotional looking-characteristic in human behaviour (Davies, 2006, P10). A car can *look* happy through the way the cars headlights and grill emulates a smiling face. If the car did not look like it was smiling, one would not see the car as happy. The same can be said for music; the sonic qualities must resemble the looking qualities present in an emotion characteristic. As music is 'temporarily unfolding' (Davies, 2006, P2), these resemblances take place in the dynamics, the movement, of the music. This musical movement emulates the movement present in behaviour which expresses emotion. Davies argues that anything that can "wear an expression or have a gait, carriage or bearing in the way in which a person's behaviour may exhibit these things" is capable of expressing an emotion in its appearance (Davies, 2006, P2).

2.3. Proper Emotions

As a consequence of this argument, Davies believes that there are limitations to the expressiveness that can be presented in appearance emotional characteristics (Davies, 1980, P71). Human behaviour that appears as emotional *looking* does not need any reference to the internal states or emotional objects, but simply the appearance of the emotion itself. Davies refers to as “Feelings” (Davies, 1980, P71), such as hope, embarrassment and acceptance as emotions which require knowledge of internal states to be expressed. One cannot understand ‘hope’ without knowing the desire for change. These emotional states do not have a ‘characteristic mode of behavioural expression’; the complex emotions cannot express themselves through physical characteristics (Davies, 1980, P85). This differs from what Davies describes as “proper emotions”, such as sadness, happiness and fear. These characteristics are capable of being expressed *in* appearance, and therefore can be expressed in human behaviour. As music can resemble this human behaviour, by analogy Davies claims that music can only present these proper emotions.

While this may be seen as too limiting to be considered a reasonable theory for emotive expression in music, Davies does suggest feelings can be presented in music through using the emotional characteristics in reference to each other to tell a complicated story of emotions. If a composer wished to convey hope, the song may start by displaying sad emotional characteristics through its dynamic qualities, before presenting happy emotional qualities towards the end. This is equally presentable in human movement, where a person may start by behaving in a sad looking way before slowly looking happy to *suggest* hope (Davies, 1980, P78). Yet Davies states that conveying these feelings are different from

appearance characteristics, they express emotions through the story of proper emotions, but not *in* the appearance of proper emotions themselves. The “proper emotions only” argument can strengthen the analogy between human behaviour and music if the qualities of music are limited to the same scale of emotions that is evident in human behaviour.

2.4. Mirroring Response

Furthermore, Davies must describe how the appearance characteristics lead to one feeling an emotion as a result of their existence within music. Davies suggests that the normal emotional response the listener has to emotional characteristics is one of ‘mirroring’ (Davies, 1980, P79). When a viewer perceives a sad looking person, they will respond by expressing or feeling the emotion characteristic’ of sadness themselves (Davies, 1980, P80). The appearance emotion evokes the feeling within the viewer. Davies suggests that there is empirical evidence for this in the way surrounding oneself with happy looking people can lead one to feeling happy (Davies, 1980, P80).

One may take issue with this statement, suggesting that the sadness one feels in response to music is not the same as one would experience grieving or truly sad. However, as the viewer is responding to the appearance of an object, the emotional response is different to how we may respond to a sad situation or a happy feeling person. The emotional response has no justification as there is no object to apply the emotion to. There is only the appearance of emotions, separate from any reasoning. The emotional response to these emotional appearances is without content which causes a different, hollow emotional response. (Davies,

1980, P82, 86). It is important to reference this part of Davies theory, for it answers sceptical claims against music's expressiveness.

To summarise, Davies' theory states that music has the ability to resemble the appearance of emotions seen in human behaviour through the music's qualities of dynamic movement and intentionality. These appearance emotions are limited due to the limitations an appearance can express, and one mirrors these emotional appearances to feel the emotion in a detached way.

3. Solving the Flaws of Other Theories

Davies resemblance theory manages to overcome the main pitfall of expressive theories through providing a response-dependent yet objective expressivity to the music itself.

Expressivity theorists such as Tolstoy suggest that the expression of music is caused through an 'infection' of emotions from the composer to the listener through the composition made by the composer (Tolstoy; 1995, Ch5). By suggesting the expressiveness of emotions originates and is purely through the composer, many complex flaws arise. 'Bad' music, music which is meant to express one emotion but expresses the other, or even fails to express any emotion, would be impossible without the music itself containing its own objective emotional properties. Furthermore, placing the focus away from the characteristics of music also muddles how certain emotions could be expressed through music. The properties of the music would be irrelevant to the creation of the song if all that matters is the 'infection' from composer to listener.

Equally, arousal theorists who place the expressiveness in the listener suffer a similar problem (Kania, 2017, Ch.3.1). If music was purely dependent on the response without referencing the appearance emotion characteristics, then there'd be no assumed 'correct response' to music. Music would be completely relative from individual to individual, which empirically seems incorrect. Davies does discuss the potential variation of responses due to how ones associations attached to one's movement may differ through culture and experience (Davies, 2006, P2). This provides an explanation for the variation in responses, yet still provides a reason for why responses seem to 'group' together and be seen as appropriate within different cultures. The commonly shared resemblances and associations through experience create this conventionalism.

Davies' theory also provides a solution to music having no object while still expressing emotions. As the arousal theorist Mew states, the common consensus within the philosophy of the mind states that core emotions require an object to express the emotions (Mew, 1985, P33). Yet through a reference to resemblance of appearance, Davies answers somewhat provides an account for how music remains expressive despite having no object to apply these emotions to.

4. Levinson's Objections

However, some theorists such as Levinson suggest that Davies does not provide enough of an account to explain how the resemblances between behaviour and music lead to feeling the emotion. Levinson argues that an object is required to apply emotional characteristics to. This object is the 'persona' of the music, imagined by the user and shaped by the characteristics

present in the music (Levinson, 1996, P104). This persona is an imagination of a person or entity within the music, providing the foundation of expressiveness of emotions. The music could not resemble the emotion without a persona to apply these emotional looking characteristics to. Musical qualities that resemble human behaviour are not the same as human behaviour; they require ‘animating’ and interpretation to be seen as expressing and *feeling* the behaviour. If the music was not imagined in a persona, the quality in the music would not be able to move across modes from sad sounding to sad looking and potentially to sad feeling, and therefore the music would not reflect sadness (Levinson, 1996, P105).

Levinson uses Kivy’s definition of ‘animating’ to describe how this crossing of modes allows for the expressiveness of music. Kivy states one must “hear an aural pattern as a vehicle of expression to be seen as an utterance or gesture, before we can hear its expressiveness” (Levinson, 1996, P106).

Levinson states that the resemblance between human behaviour and music is not the cause but the result of the music’s ability to trigger this personifying imagination in the listener. If the potential expressiveness of music was not already pre-conceived in the imagination of the listener, then Davies would have to provide an explanation for what is required for resemblance between music and behaviour to trigger this expressiveness (Levinson, 1996, P103). Levinson argues that everything is analogous to an extent, and so Davies needs to describe how analogous a characteristic must be before it resembles human behaviour. Davies must suggest why music can’t associate with other similar properties, like a fast car relating to fast tempo. As Levinson suggests that the music is already ‘readily heard as’ an expression through a feeling persona, he solves this problem (Kaina, 2017, Ch3.1 & Levinson, 1996, P107).

Davies counters this response by arguing that the form of response is shaped through an ‘experience of the resemblance’ (Davies, 2006, P2). Davies makes evident that music has the power to be expressive of emotions through the way one *experiences* the music’s characteristics through hearing the music *itself* moving. Therefore, an imagination of a persona is not required, as all that is really required is that the brain recognises the similarities between the qualities available *in* the music and *in* human behaviour. I will develop this argument further through conceptual metaphor theory shortly.

Additionally, the strength of the appearance characteristics suggests which experience of resemblance will take place. Davies elaborates that one is more inclined to see some resemblances as more “salient” than less fitting resemblances through ones experience of the world (Davies, 2006, P3). Therefore, whatever resemblance is seen by the listener as strongest is what is required for music to become expressive. This is evident in music that doesn’t clearly express an emotion. Some songs contain conflicting characteristics which can lead to a confusion of expression as there are no prevalent appearance characteristics that generate a coherent appearance. Davies believes that the main comparison one makes through their experience in the world is through oneself and others behaviour as we are social beings who experience our own behaviour as well as perceive the behaviour of others frequently, which provides a strong set of resemblances for musical movement to attach to.

Furthermore, Davies responds that there is no empirical evidence that one imagines a persona when one hears music (Davies, 2006, P9). Davies theory’ uses the evidence of how we

describe music with intention to show how we animate the music itself as we experience it. Davies also extends his objection to argue that Levinson's persona theory is redundant. To be able to personify an imagined persona with certain emotions, the music must already contain the appearance emotions to apply onto the persona (Davies, P9, 2006). Therefore, any imaginations of personas are secondary to the way the music already sounds through its appearance-emotion characteristics.

5. Extension Through Conceptual Metaphor

While Davies is capable of providing an answer for how a mental object isn't required to apply these emotions towards, I believe that Levinson's objections provide two interesting problems. Firstly, Levinson asks what resemblance is required to trigger an emotional response. Davies suggests that the main most salient resemblance that ties music to emotion is the dynamic structure of music resembling human movement (Davies, 2006, P3). From this resemblance music appears to express emotions. Yet, there does seem to be a number of ways one can resemble music to other concepts and experiences that are not associated with human behaviour. I believe that Davies unnecessarily limits the scope of what music can resemble, and therefore limits the expressive properties of music in the process.

Consider the example of 'distortion'. Distortion is a tonal quality that creates an aggressive sound through heavy compression. The common consensus of distortion is that it captures aggression, control and chaos through its sonic property. This is why distorted guitars are popular in the metal and rock genres. One could associate these tonal qualities with motorbike engines or chainsaws due to their similar sonic properties. One's experience can

hold a host of associations to this tone. Due to the nature of how distortion sounds, as a consequence of sounds being pushed to the point where they are warped or become 'chaotic', it is likely that one's experiences will equate distortion with aggressive experiences and looking objects. A chainsaw, due to its associations of danger, power and loudness all create a connotation, a feeling, of aggression. The distorted tones that can appear in music are part of a larger interconnected system of associations that all lead to a similar connotation, the connotation that distortion equates aggressiveness. These are found through our experience, and are naturally bound together. These *collections* of resemblances seem more salient than the sole resemblance that connects to human behaviour.

The distortion example also produces a question on whether tonal qualities are ignored by Davies theory entirely. The tonal quality of a note is not usually seen as tied to its dynamic properties, but the sound of the note itself. It seems more reasonable to suggest that these tonal qualities are tied to other tonal resemblances than movement. Davies does suggest that a relation to the voice could be a part of a larger resemblance (Davies, 2006, P2). Perhaps distortion could feel aggressive as it resembles a scream so loud ones vocal chords distort. However, even if this resemblance did exist, it seems unreasonable to ignore all the other resemblances that could strengthen this overall connotation.

I believe the connotations, the emotion that can attach onto certain objects and ideas, are central to the expressiveness of music. Davies is right to suggest that human movement plays a part in creating these connotations because our behaviour and emotional responses are naturally tied together. However, when one considers all the connotations that one may have, and how through resemblance they can be tied to musical properties, one is capable of

providing a much stronger resemblance theory. To ignore the connotations brought about through historical contexts and general experience is to ignore a number of resemblances and connotations that may play a part in how one perceives music.

An empirical objection could be suggested here against these group associations, arguing that there isn't evidence that one creates these associations as they are not consciously imagined in the mind when one listens to music. However, Lakoff and Johnson's theory of conceptual metaphor provides sufficient empirical evidence for our overarching connotations we equate to certain concepts and ideas, even if one is unaware of them. Conceptual metaphor theory suggests that we shape our thoughts through the way one links content to concept (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003, CH1, P3). For example, consider the orientational metaphor UP IS HAPPY, SAD IS DOWN. Orientation metaphors "organise a system of concepts in respect to each other" (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003, P14), and these metaphors are usually spatial in nature. HAPPY is UP and SAD is DOWN is a metaphor that exists in our language. One can feel "up" to the task, or feel "low" when they are sad. This could be why higher pitches are seen as happy while lower pitches are sad in music. Lakoff and Johnson suggest that conceptual metaphors have a physical base, an experience which links the concepts together. In the case of SADNESS is DOWN they state the physical base that provides this connotation is in the drooping posture which usually derives from feeling sadness. Lakoff and Johnson state that most orientational metaphors are derived from our experiences of the human body within physical space (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003, CH4, P14).

The orientational metaphor described above seems to directly fit Davies' theory of resemblance through human movement. The resemblance music has to human movement

creates a connotation towards HAPPY = UP and SADNESS = DOWN in both music and human movement. Conceptual metaphors provide evidence that there is a larger cognitive system that is capable of providing emotional connotations through different resemblances one discovers in experience. As Scruton suggests in his music metaphor theory, these connotations become bound to the quality, and we experience both the quality and the connotation at the same time as a form of “double intentionality” (Scruton, 1999, P7).

An example of Conceptual metaphor working within musical expression that does not relate to human movement can be seen in VITALITY IS SUBSTANCE (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003, CH10, P50). While things may “brim” with energy, things that lack energy are seen as weak and sombre. ‘Hollow’ notes, notes with lots of bass and reverb to suggest emptiness, can emulate this lack of vitality.

This inclusion of conceptual metaphors also may help further object to Levinson’s theory. While Levinson believes a persona is required to apply emotions to, conceptual metaphor demonstrates the covertness and intertwining of associations that help define how one perceives the world. Not only do we use metaphors throughout our language and thoughts, we do not always recognise we are using them as they become so intertwined with the way we perceive the concept or idea. As Davies suggests, the idea one imagines a persona seems evidently untrue by way of how most people describe music. In contrast, these covert associations that link to our perceptions of characteristics to specific connotations may provide a mental base for the experience of resemblance Davies suggests. The covert nature of associations in conceptual metaphor theory allows these connotations to exist without

reference to an imagined agent, as the appearance qualities contain the connotations through the conceptual metaphors one subconsciously learns through experience.

This also solves Levinson's second objection that suggests Davies theory is secondary by focusing on the result of result of an expressive system instead of what is required of a person to see this response. Levinson suggests the core of expressiveness lies in the "experience of hearing the expression", not in the identification of the expressive theory (Levinson, 1999, P104). Conceptual metaphors demonstrate a cognitive structure that provides the foundations for this 'experience of resemblance'. This allows Davies to state the reasoning as to *how* music appears as expressive, instead of *what* makes music expressive.

Davies has shown some resistance to the use of metaphor within expression theories, stating that metaphor is simply a linguistic technique, "a figure of speech" (Davies, 2006, P4).

Davies believes that his theory does not require metaphor, to say someone may look or sound a certain way is not metaphorical. However, through conceptual metaphor, one can see how metaphor accounts for more than just language. Lakoff and Johnson suggest that the linguistic uses of metaphors are simply a by-product of this larger thought based system (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, P6).

Davies must consider that even music itself is metaphoric to an extent, as music is an abstract concept that we apply *physical* movement to. The 'movement' Davies refers to is simply a metaphorical system used to make sense of vibrations. Therefore, any resemblances to movement are contingent on the type of metaphor. Antovic performed a study where children

were told to describe music, and some referred to music in heaviness and lightness, moving forwards and backwards, and towards a goal and back, instead of traditionally 'up and down' (Antovic, 2014, P8). We can see a number of metaphors that describe movement differently, and perhaps these differences will affect the resemblance one can have towards human movement. The onus of the theory should be placed on the ability to create these associations for music, as it is evident that the core resemblance could theoretically not exist under a different metaphoric view of music's movement.

Equally, it's important to note that I am not suggesting that music shows emotions through metaphorically 'becoming' that emotion. I wish to use conceptual metaphor to reveal the system that allows us to link and recall emotional connotations to characteristics through ones experiences. Whether this makes Davies resemblance theory metaphorical is a different question that I will not cover due to word limit restrictions.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, I believe resemblance theory is still sound in its use of resemblance and association to suggest how one feels a large number of emotions in music. However, I do believe that a focus on the cognitive ability to relate connotations derived through experience to content is the essence of how music can express emotion, instead of focusing on one group of connotations evident in human movement. Therefore, Davies' theory lacks the full picture of what can influence ones view of music. This full picture can be solved through the

application of conceptual metaphor theory to show how one can resemble different qualities that Davies does not provide a satisfactory answer for.

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