

## The Aesthetics of Sensibility and the Culture of Affects in the Age of Enlightenment in Finland\*

Music is able to move us in many different ways, and the reflections on this affective ability during the 18th century were as numerous as those during the high Baroque. To tackle the question of musical ideas during the epoch of the aesthetics of sensibility means that one has to deal with the process of transformation between affects and emotions. As we know, these two psychodynamic phenomena represent two different modes of experience. Nevertheless, the mechanistic action of affects (in the Cartesian sense; Descartes 1994, 160–161, 163–164; see also Alanen 1984, 142–147) can be found alive and well even after the collapse of the Baroque culture. Evidently this is not so generally known – as far as I am aware of the present state of research.

First, it will be appropriate to comment on the term 'affect'. It has become customary to translate the German *Affekten* as 'affections' in English; but it is preferable to use the less common term 'affect', in order to avoid the modern connotations of the term 'affection' (see Neubauer 1986, 213).

It may be interesting to have a closer look at some of the lectures, or should I say orations, which were held at the annual festivals of the Musical Society of Turku during the 1790's. In those days the city of Turku, with its 10 000 inhabitants, was the capital of Finland, or to be more precise, the capital of the eastern part of the Swedish kingdom. Contacts between Stockholm and Turku were close, and it was partly due to these connections that certain learned members of the Academy of Turku began to gather round a society called *Aurora* in the 1770's. The Musical Society, founded in 1790, was an heir to these earlier, somewhat inchoate traditions (Andersson 1927; Andersson 1940, 28–31, 44, 47). As far as music was concerned, the members were mainly amateurs.

I don't want to take a stand on the question whether the intellectual and cultural interests in Turku can be taken to represent a sort of a Nordic Enlightenment. In any case, there are good reasons to argue that the ideas and thinking expressed in the Musical Society had their roots in the aesthetics of sensibility. Most of the annual lectures had their intellectual backbone in the thought of

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Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Johann Georg Sulzer. Many of the lectures can be interpreted as popularizations of academic dissertations defended in the Academy of Turku (op. cit. 186–187, 189–190, 193, 198–199). The first lecture is very important, because it deals with questions which were typical of the ideology of the Society. On the basis of this lecture, one can illustrate the ways in which the earlier mode of musical experience, i.e. the culture of affects, survived within the new mode.

## Music as a medium of passions

In the first lecture, which was held in 1791, the Secretary of the Society, music lover and Professor of Theology, Jacob Tengström (1755–1832), spoke about the influence of music on the customs and on the ways of thinking of a nation. He argued that the sweet sentiments which were aroused by the fine arts and especially by music produced gentle and affectionate ways of thinking and thus paved the way for the development of morals (Tengström 1791, 229–230). Music was a means towards the cultivation of morality, or as Sulzer thought, the aim of music was 'die Förderung der Sittlichkeit' (Francke 1976, 1381). This theme runs through nearly all the extant lectures, and it also characterized another lecture (Avellan 1801) which was based on Kant's Third Critique, *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (1790).

There is nothing special in the fact that the concept of motion is so fundamental in these reflections. Music had an emotive character. It was a medium of passions and emotions, a language between human hearts. In 1794 the poet Frans Michael Franzén (1772–1847), a member of the Musical Society, even outlined a hierarchy of the different levels and types of motions in the universe, and spoke of the "majestic drama" of the whole creation, from the mechanics of the stars to the smallest worms on the earth (Franzén 1794, 246).

This kind of a cosmic perspective suggests the idea that man and his qualities were somehow analogous to the universe. The principle of analogy was essential to the doctrine of affects in the Baroque. It was expressed countless times during the 17th century by the pattern: the motions of the harmony (*motus harmonici*) are the same as the motions of the soul (*motus animae*) (Dammann 1984, 36–37, 243, 247–249). Franzén didn't explicitly talk about this correlation between microcosm and macrocosm, i.e. the correlation between the human soul and the order of nature, nor did Tengström; but in the latter's lecture one can find a theme that shows that the doctrine of affects still had a place within the new conception of the self and the world.

Tengström described the experience of beauty by saying that everywhere in nature there exists a tendency to move our outer senses with pleasing impressions. Flooding into the soul, impressions and sentiments produced calm, peaceful and gentle thoughts. According to Tengström, the beauties of nature

gave a new drive and a new activity to the whole human soul. The experience of beauty affected not only the heart, but also – as the lecturer said – human reason (Tengström 1791, 229).

Emotions caused by nature and its beauties were interpreted as exterior influences, which inescapably induced in the recipient a changed state of mind. This is quite near the principle of ecstasy (*animam extra se rapere*) (Dammann 1984, 226–227, 241). Tengström described the way in which man's divine perception, distinguished from the rude emotions and brute instincts, was awakened from its dormancy by exterior influences. This divine perception wrenched human beings out of the brute and sensual world with an absolute power. I see nothing here but the pattern of ecstasy. The metaphors used by Tengström expressed the idea that the human soul was driven from a limited and finite existence towards the infinite order of the universe. Due to this motion, man was able to transcend selfishness, vanity and various desires. To be a human being meant that one had to be moved in a specific way, distinguished from all the other ways characteristic of the various natural creatures and objects.

The culture of the Baroque was gone, but the action of affects had survived. Tengström talked widely about music and its spontaneity. Music had an immediate impact on man. It took priority over the other fine arts in this matter. However, there is no reference to the old tradition of humoral pathology in the lecture Tengström gave: his argumentation was based on a mechanistic principle. Tengström noted that music full of beauty and sentiments affected every well-structured human being. It did this powerfully, with an almost mechanistic aggression (Tengström 1791, 230); but he did not analyse this process any further. Perhaps Tengström thought in the same way as Frans Michael Franzén did a couple of years later. Franzén stated in his lecture that the basis of the magic power of music was probably physiological in character. Music could set our blood and certain subtle parts of the body in powerful motion. This was due to pressure, which Franzén compared to an effect caused by a cannon shot. Music could shake the body just as a cannon shot could shake windows; but the means of music were naturally much more sophisticated, according to Franzén; this kind of tremor of the nervous and circulatory systems tended to produce a strong effect in the soul. He said it swung the soul as in a dance (Franzén 1794, 249). These ideas are survivals of the theory of animal spirits of Descartes.

### **Primacy of harmony**

It is true that the mechanistic-physiological explanation referred to by Tengström and Franzén can also be found in Sulzer's encyclopaedia called *Allgemeine Theorie der Schönen Künste* (1st edn, 1771–1774) (See Sulzer 1793, 433). Nonetheless, the first lecture of the Musical Society is not a neat repro-

duction of Sulzer's ideas: Tengström was also making a point of his own as far as music was concerned.

The aesthetics of sensibility in music was the aesthetics of melody, there is no doubt about that (e.g. Dahlhaus 1987, 54; Fulcher 1980, 51–53). Keeping this in mind, it is interesting to note that Tengström didn't speak of melody, but about harmony in music. Emotions and passions were expressed by the pure and ingenuous language of harmony and thus they could also capture the human heart. Finally, they could draw human beings out of the ordinary scheme of things, just as affects had done during the Baroque. The pattern of ecstasy can be seen here, again.

The primacy of harmony over melody in Tengström's thinking was presumably a trace of the old educational tradition of the *quadrivium*. In this tradition, music was considered one of the mathematical sciences, along with arithmetic, geometry and astronomy (Abert 1964, 14–15). Music was primarily a matter of harmony, and could be described in numerical terms. There was also a correlation between mathematics and the doctrine of affects. The order hidden in the system of number constituted the order of music and thus had a very powerful normative character. Earlier in the Baroque, the teaching on affects had attempted to explain the influence of music on people mathematically, in the spirit of the natural sciences, as a system of strict laws. According to Andreas Hartmann, the teaching on affects in music can be seen as an endeavour to condition and domesticate human affects (Hartmann 1980). It had a direct moral purpose.

Tengström was an apologist of the culture of affects – perhaps without being aware of this. His thoughts were a mixture of the new sensibility and the older metaphysics. There was something left of the earlier mode of musical experience. It is therefore reasonable to suggest that the mechanistic action of affects can be found alive and well even in the Age of Enlightenment in Finland. The lecture Tengström gave was probably evidence of a larger phenomenon. If this hypothesis is correct, the lecture is worth studying from various points of view.

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