

PHANTASMS IN MUSIC

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Originally my project began from what I found to be awkward descriptions of music, yet were descriptions that could be understood by more people than perhaps a formal harmonic analysis. An example of this kind comes from Leonard Bernstein who describes passages from the fifth movement of *Symphonie Fantastique* as “the grisly shrieks of witches; bloodcurdling laughter of demons and devils; the diabolical dancing of Halloween hags and grinning monsters; and of course who should be the chief witch? None other than that sweet little Beloved of his whose angelic melody has now transformed into a hellish, squealing ride on a broomstick.”¹ I would not say that everyone who hears the piece without knowing the text Berlioz wrote to accompany his symphony would make such a description. However, I would argue that probably a few people, after hearing the piece, and then reading the short text could say, “It makes sense.” To try to understand this type of description of music better, I looked into the study Aristotle did on sense perception and mimesis. For this talk I will look specifically at sense perception.

Sense perception, in Aristotle, is a quite large and looming topic. I wanted to find a way to address it in terms that would be agreeable and not unnecessarily detailed in the context of this chapter. I tried to imagine what concept could fit somewhere in the middle between direct sense perception of sound and what might inspire Aristotle to say a melody has likenesses of *êthos*, for example. Indeed, the Aristotelian concept found here is the faculty “in virtue of which we say an image occurs to us,”² and without such an image, it is impossible to think:³ the faculty of *phantasia*.

I will start with an overview of *phantasia* (from the Aristotelian perspective); move on to suggest how different music can inspire different types of *phantasia* and conclude with the proposal of an idea of how music can be understood as a mimetic art.

(i) *Phantasia* definitions:

Simply put, as found in Liddell and Scott’s *Lexicon*, *phantasia* is a noun meaning “imagination, the power by which an object is presented to the mind.” The “object”, presented in this case is a *phántasma*. Consequently, *phántasma*, *phantasmata* (plural) means an appearance,

¹ BERNSTEIN, Leonard. “Berlioz Takes a Trip” in Hector Berlioz, *Symphonie Fantastique*. New York Philharmonic: Leonard Bernstein. Sony, 1964.

² ARISTOTLE. *De Anima* Books II and III (with passages from Book I). D.W. Hamlyn, trans. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993. 428a1–2.

³ *De An.* 431a17–18.

phantasm (an illusion or ghost), phantom, vision, dream; also, its secondary meaning coming from Plato is a mere image, unreality.⁴ Malcolm Schofield, in his essay on phantasia, writes that Plato uses the term to talk more about unreal appearances in general.⁵ Both of these words, phantasia and phántasma derive from the verb phantazomai / phantazô (a verb found only in the middle and passive forms before the Hellenistic period) meaning, “to become visible, appear, show oneself.”⁶ Phantasia is commonly translated as “imagination.” In Aristotle the verb associated with the concept of phantasia (and I found occurring more often) is phainetai, from the verb phainomai, and it means “he/she/it something appears” (in the passive/middle cases). Generally in Aristotle this verb is translated as “something appears [to us].”

(ii) An introduction to phantasia and phantásmata

To begin my overview of phantasia in Aristotle, I will look first to a passage in *Metaphysics* where Aristotle writes, “and concerning reality, that not every appearance (phainomena) is real, we shall say, first, that indeed the perception (aisthêsis), at least of the proper object (idiou) of sense, is not false, but the impression (phantasia) we get of it is not the same as the perception (aisthêsei).”⁷ In this passage we find one of the three types of objects of perception (aisthêton), described in *De Anima*, Book II, Chapter vi: idios, a “special object,” translated in the passage above as “proper object of sense” is something that cannot be perceived by another sense, and one cannot be deceived regarding it, e.g. sight is concerned with color and hearing with sound and taste with flavor. Further, “each judges about these and is not deceived as to the fact that there is color or sound, but rather as to what or where the colored thing is.”⁸ The use of the word phantasia in the passage quoted above from *Metaphysics*, portrayed in a phenomenalist vein, shows the importance of perception and sense data in the creation of phantasia and phantásmata. Moreover, the proper object of sense, phantasia, and sense perception are all interrelated.

Aristotle makes a series of distinctions between perception (aisthêsis) and phantasia. Below is a list with the breakdown of passage 428a7–16⁹ of *De Anima* into five parts:

1. Perception (aisthêsis) is either a capacity (like sight) or an activity (like seeing); but something can appear (phainetai) to us even if neither of these is in question, e.g. dreams.¹⁰

⁴ “phántasma” in Liddell and Scott’s.

⁵ SCHOFIELD, Malcolm. “Aristotle on Imagination” in *Essays On Aristotle’s De Anima*. Martha Nussbaum and Amélie Oksenberg Rorty, eds. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995. 249–277. 266.

⁶ “phantasia” and “phántasma” in Liddell and Scott’s.

⁷ ARISTOTLE. *Metaphysics*. Hugh Tredennick, trans. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1933. 1010b 1–3.

⁸ 418a11–16, see Hamlyn.

⁹ Cf. 428a7–16, Hamlyn and notes regarding passage on pp. 131–132.

2. Perception is always present but not imagination. If [perception and imagination] were the same in actuality, it would be possible for all beasts to have imagination; and it seems that this is not so, e.g. the ant or bee, and the grub.¹¹
3. All sensations (perceptions / *aisthēsis*) are true, but most imaginations (*phantasiai*) are false.¹²
4. It is not when we are exercising our sense accurately with regard to objects of perception that we say that this appears (*phainetai*) to us to be a man, but rather when we do not perceive it distinctly; and then it may be either true or false.¹³
5. Visions appear (*phainetai*) to us even with our eyes closed.¹⁴

If we examine number four on this list, we may think of expressions in the following format: “It appears to me to be a man”; or “It looks like a man”; or “I imagine it is a man.” These expressions, by nature of their format, suggest an additional step beyond what we actually perceive in particular cases.¹⁵ The judgment made to produce such a phrase is not clear or without doubt, rather the expressions describe how we perceive an object at a distance or something that is difficult to discern, and it suggests how we interpret our perception, in this case, sight.

It is especially important to note the role of *phantasia* in thinking and learning because although *phantasia* is neither thought nor sense perception, these three concepts are interdependent. We see in *De Anima*, “the objects of thought (*noēta*) are included among the forms (*eidesi*) which are objects of perception (*aisthētois*), both those that are spoken of as in abstraction (like mathematics) and those which are dispositions and affections (*pathē*) of objects of perceptions (*aisthēton*). And for this reason unless one perceived things one would not learn (*mathos*) or understand anything and when one contemplates one must simultaneously contemplate an image [mental picture or *phántasma*]; for images (*phantásmata*) are like sense-perceptions (*aisthēmata*), except that they are without matter.”¹⁶

Another important qualification for *phantasia* versus sense-perception (*aisthēsis*) and thought (*diánoia*) is found in *De Anima* 427b15–25, “*phantasia* always implies perception and is implied by supposition/judgment (*hupolēpsis*) [...] for the former (*phantasia*) is an affection (*pathos*) which lies in our power when we wish (*boulōmetha*); but believing (*doxazein*) [included in ‘supposition’: *hupolēpsis*] is not up to us, for it must be either true or false. Moreover, when we believe that something is terrible or alarming we are immediately affected [...] but

¹⁰ Translation is Schofield’s, see 260.

¹¹ Trans. Hamlyn, see note to 428a5, p.131. The ant, bee, and grub are not supposed to have *phantasia*.

¹² ARISTOTLE. [De Anima] On the Soul. W.S. Hett, trans., Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964. 428a12–13.

¹³ *De Anima*, 428a13–15. Hamlyn, trans.

¹⁴ 428a15–16, translation mine.

¹⁵ See Schofield, 258.

¹⁶ *De An.* 432a5–11, trans. Hamlyn. The parentheses are additions of mine, from the Hett translation and corresponding Greek text.

in the case of the imagination (phantasia) we are just as if we saw the terrible or encouraging things in a picture.”¹⁷

By this quotation, it looks like we have control over our imagination or phantasia, as though it were a light in a room we decide to turn on and off. In addition it is not only that, but like a light with a dimmer on it so we can control how bright or dim the light is as we choose (this being symbolic of how important or unimportant phantasmata are in respective judgments we make).

There are, however, cases where we are deceived by phantasia, says Aristotle, particularly in moments of fever and strong emotion or pathological states.¹⁸ Most often, we are able to recognize when a phantasma or appearance is not really what we are seeing (provided we remember that imaginings are for the most part false), and we are therefore able to remain unaffected emotionally by it and stand as though spectators “looking at a picture.” It is due to the often conflicting definitions and descriptions of phantasia given by Aristotle that Malcolm Schofield, in his essay in *Essays on Aristotle’s De Anima*, makes the distinction between Normal Phantasia and Abnormal Phantasia.¹⁹ I find these distinctions helpful, especially when applied to our perception of music.

Normal Phantasia, would be the kind of phantasia that Aristotle describes specifically in *De Anima* Book III, Chapter iii. For example, he writes, “for the thinking soul, images (phantasmata) take the place of direct perceptions; and when it asserts or denies that they are good or bad, it avoids or pursues them. Hence the soul never thinks without a mental image (phantasmatos).”²⁰ This shows how phantasia, (normal phantasia in this case) helps us in judgment and works as a tool for interpretation.²¹ Dorothea Frede, in her essay on phantasia, translates the first part of this paragraph as “to the rational soul, images serve as perceptions.”²² Though seemingly obvious, it is important to remember that it is only in rational animals (i.e. man) that can use phantasia for judgment and something beyond mere inspiration for motion.²³

For more information on normal phantasia, we can look to *De Anima* 431b6–10. Hamlyn translates, “but sometimes you calculate on the basis of images or thoughts in the soul, as if seeing (hōsper horōn), and plan what is going to happen in relation to present affairs. And when one says, as there, that something is pleasant or painful, so here

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 427b15–25. Cf. Hamlyn and Hett translations.

¹⁸ ARISTOTLE. [De Insomniis] On Dreams, W.S. Hett trans., Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964. 460b10–20. See also Schofield, 262.

¹⁹ See Schofield, 271.

²⁰ *De An.*431a15–16. Hett, trans.

²¹ We see another example in *De Memoria* 449b31–450a2 where Aristotle describes drawing diagram, and we imagine a triangle before we draw it. What we imagine is not identical to that which we will draw.

²² FREDE, Dorothea. “The Cognitive Role of Phantasia in Aristotle” in *Essays on Aristotle’s De Anima*. Martha Nussbaum and Amélie Oksenberg Rorty, eds. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995. 279–295. 289.

²³ I will refer to this point again with more detail.

one avoids or pursues – and so in action generally.”²⁴ Dorothea Frede also comments on this passage, “the soul would not be moved towards anything if it could not envisage it under a concrete aspect.”²⁵ We see in this passage a sense of planning for the future. Planning for the future can be further aided by the idea of practice or repeated phantasmata of the same or similar objects of sense, which can lead to better understanding and potentially better action.

Frede notes, “phantasiai can thus be separated from their origin while perceptions cannot, and this means that they can give us a coherent picture of a situation that transcends the immediate perception.”²⁶ In *De Anima* 417b18–26 we find Aristotle saying,

Actual sense-perception is so spoken of in the same way as contemplation; but there is a difference in that in sense-perception the things which are able to produce the activity are external, i.e. the objects of sight and hearing, and similarly for the rest of the objects of perception. The reason is that actual perception (*aisthēsis*) is of particulars, while knowledge is of universals; and these are somehow in the soul itself. For this reason it is open to us to think when we wish, but perceiving is not similarly open to us; for there must be the object of perception.²⁷

We begin to get the idea that phantasmata can possibly help us in understanding and grasping universals. In *Posterior Analytics* Aristotle claims that we can understand the universal of a lunar eclipse by repeated sense-perception of the event.²⁸ It seems relevant that the mental pictures, although vague, help us to plan for the future by remembering perception from the past.

As described before, the principal differences between these two kinds of phantasia or rather, what makes normal phantasia ‘special’ is: (1) it is an affection in our power to choose or wish to use phantasia²⁹ and (2) we have the ability to remain unaffected emotionally by the appearances that come to us. I would say normal phantasia is one that works for us in a rational way as an aid to judgment and opinion, and as an aid for acting in the right way.

Abnormal Phantasia, applies often in the context of Aristotle’s *De Insomniis / On Dreams*. Early in this book, Aristotle describes dreams, saying, a “dream appears (*phainetai*) to be some sort of mental image (*phántasma*).”³⁰ Aristotle also describes that when in fever or strong emotional or pathological states, we are deceived by such mental images

²⁴ *De An.* 431b6–10. Hamlyn trans., see 431b2.

²⁵ Frede, 289.

²⁶ Frede, 285.

²⁷ 417b18–26, Hamlyn trans., see 417b16.

²⁸ See *An. Post.* 87b37–88a5.

²⁹ *De Anima*, 427b20

³⁰ *De Insomn.*, 459a19.

we see (or imagine that we see) for various reasons. The faculty of Abnormal Phantasia works in the same way as Normal Phantasia in the sense that it is the faculty by which mental images or phantasmata occur to us, but our ability to govern them and how we are affected and/or control these phantasmata is different.

Aristotle gives the example of a man experiencing high fever often imagines (*phainetai*) that he sees animals on the walls due to the slight resemblance (*homoiotêtos*) of marks on the walls.³¹ He also describes a coward, in an emotional state of fear, will think that he sees (*horan*) his enemy. The coward's imagination is stimulated by more remote resemblances (*homoiotêtos*) in proportion to the degree of his excitement.³² In this case, the imagination is often stimulated by, and subjected to, the degree of pathological state and not necessarily controlled by the conscious 'will' or wish of the individual.

He continues by saying, "sometimes the illusion corresponds to the degree of emotion (*pathesin*), so that those who are not very ill are aware that the impression is false [...] but if their illness (*pathos*) is more severe they move (*kineisthai*) in accordance with what they think they see."³³ Notice the word used here for "move" is *kineisthai* and not from the verb *prassô*, *prattein* (to act)³⁴. We see in *De Motu Animalium* that movement can be linked to phantasia, "for the animal moves (*kinêtai*) and progresses in virtue of desire or choice, when some alteration has taken place in accordance with sense perception (*aisthêsis*) or phantasia."³⁵

If we move in accordance to an impression, it seems that not only are we incapable of emotionally detaching from the visions we see, but also that phantasia acts as a sort of / or feigned *hupolêpsis*; *hupolêpsis* being the word Aristotle uses for "judgment" or "supposal" in *De Anima* 427b17³⁶ when talking about the difference between phantasia and judgment. More specifically, he qualifies *hupolêpsis* as something that takes many forms: knowledge (*epistêmê*), opinion/belief (*doxa*), understanding (*phronêsis*) and their opposites,³⁷ things which clearly phantasia is not. Aristotle continues by saying, "thought, distinct from perception, seems to include imagination (phantasia) on one hand and supposal / judgment (*hupolêpsis*) on the other."³⁸ The phantasia then, when we are experiencing pathological states, becomes the basis on which we move, but it is not a rational action because it does not involve true *hupolêpsis* or practical syllogism. Rather, one is emotionally affected by an appearance, a vision of something that is not the case.

The explanation Aristotle gives for this deception is that the "controlling sense (*kûrion*) does not judge these things by the same

³¹ *De Insomniis* 460b11–13.

³² *De Insomn.*, 460b6–8.

³³ *Ibid.*, 460b13–16.

³⁴ For example, see *Nicomachean Ethics* III.i.20–23.

³⁵ ARISTOTLE. Aristotle's *De Motu Animalium*. Martha Craven Nussbaum, ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978. 701a4–5.

³⁶ See Hamlyn, trans. *De An.*, 427b17.

³⁷ See *De An.* 427b25–28.

³⁸ *De An.* Hett, trans. 427b29–31.

faculty as that by which sense images (phantásmata) occur.”³⁹ Aristotle reasons this by using his famous sun example: [when we look up at the sun] “the sun appears (phainetai) to measure a foot across, but something else often contradicts this impression (phantasían).”⁴⁰ The cause of our deceptive judgments (by the failure of the ‘controlling sense’) is explained further down in the same passage, “appearances (phainetai) of any kind may come to us, not only when the object of sense (aisthêtou) supplies the stimulus, but also when the sense (aisthêscôs) is stimulated by itself, provided that it is stimulated in the same way as by an object of sense; for example, to persons who are sailing past the land seems to move, though really the eye is being moved by something else.”⁴¹

Regarding this deception, Aristotle says, “the same faculty by which we are deceived in illness when we are awake causes this affection (pathos) in sleep.”⁴² Here we find a parallel between sleep and dreams and those affected by illness and pathological states: the failure of the controlling sense. Additionally, it is by slight resemblances that we are swayed to move, believing the phantásmata inspired by these resemblances to be reality.

When Aristotle writes, “the sensation (aisthêtou) still remains perceptible even after the ‘external object perceived’ (aisthêmata) has gone”⁴³ I believe this is because the phantásmata we may have related to the ‘external object of sense’ keeps the ‘sensation’ alive in our minds. Furthermore he adds, “we are easily deceived about our perceptions (aisthêseis) when we are in emotional states (pathesin).”⁴⁴ This deception most likely is in virtue of our phantásmata that we believe to be the case while in an emotional or feverish state. It is taking into account these more deceptive aspects of phantasia and our sense perception of sound that I would like to suggest how it might be that particular images or phantásmata arise to our mind upon listening to particular modes, melodies or sorts of music or sound. Not only that, but I will elaborate on the power or control that these phantásmata can potentially have. Frede makes the following comment, “phantásmata are flexible and can be enriched by repeated observations, while immediate sense-perceptions cannot. Phantásmata are often depicted as inaccurate impressions [...] but it is that less detailed and more general picture that we need for our generalizations.”⁴⁵ The flexible nature of the phantásmata could lend itself to the importance of education in certain matters that are based in sense-perception or objects of sense, such as musical modes and its relation to êthos. Nevertheless one must not forget the influence of delusions and pathological states on phantásmata.

³⁹ De Insomn., 460b16–17.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 460b18–21.

⁴¹ Ibid., 460b22–27.

⁴² Ibid., 458b27–28.

⁴³ De Insomn., 460b2–3.

⁴⁴ De Insomn., 460b3–4.

⁴⁵ Frede, 291.

I think this is why Aristotle is so careful when he treats the topic of musical modes and the likenesses they exhibit.

(iii) Phantasia / phantásmata / musical modes in action

In *Politics*, Aristotle makes reference to the classification of melodies that philosophers had made before him: ethical melodies [êthika], melodies of action [praktika], and passionate or enthusiastic [enthousiastika] melodies with certain harmonies related to each kind.⁴⁶ When Aristotle says how music should be employed and for what benefit, he gives three different purposes that music should serve: (1) for education, (2) for purgation / catharsis, and (3) for amusement, to relax our tension.⁴⁷ We might ask how it is possible to categorize or apply such descriptions to music. Aristotle gives an explanation by saying:

“Everybody when listening to imitations (*miméseôn*) is thrown into a corresponding state of feeling, by the rhythms and melodies themselves, even apart from the words.”⁴⁸ And, “rhythms and melodies contain representations (*homoiomata*) of anger and mildness, and also of courage and temperance and all their opposites and the other moral qualities.”⁴⁹ In addition, W.D. Anderson (in his book *Ethos and Education in Greek Music*) writes in a footnote, “both Plato and Aristotle contend that music is the great medium of *êthos*; neither considers the possibility of *êthos* in nonmusical sound.”⁵⁰ Anderson develops the idea of ‘musical sound’, adding, “a musical sound, i.e. a tone, has a regular pattern of vibration frequencies, while a nonmusical sound is identifiable as such because its pattern lacks regularity.”⁵¹ Even though Anderson argues that Aristotle could not have been aware of this technicality in sound, it seems that in Aristotle’s arguments in *Posterior Analytics* regarding concords, ratios and *Harmonia*, we know musical modes and melodies were based on these things. I think at the very core, the sound of concords, melodies based on these concords, and the rhythms typical of specific modes was how Aristotle developed the idea that musical modes contain representations. For example, M.L. West describes the performance of epic poetry (the *Stichic* form specific for the “Homeric epic”), had limitations like most Ancient Greek music, “the melodies of this form were limited to three or four notes [...] and [the performer] disposed syllables over them with regard both to word accents and to repeating melodic scheme.”⁵²

What Aristotle is interested in finding out initially in the *Politics*, which precedes his categories and explanations of music, is whether we can see if the influence of music reaches in a manner to the character

⁴⁶ *Politics*, 1341b32–35. Translations are from H. Rackham unless otherwise noted.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 1341b38–39; 1341b41.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 1340a11–14.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 1340a18–22.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 260, note #2.

⁵¹ Anderson, 261. Note #2.

⁵² West, 328. See also p.208. West describes that there were three structural types in Greek music: *stichic*, *strophic*, and *free astrophic*.

(*êthos*) and to the soul.⁵³ By the end of this section of the *Politics* I argue that he answers his own question with a resounding “yes”. I trace my conclusion back to what Aristotle says initially which is indeed to “see” if music’s influence reaches our character and soul. The word Aristotle uses in the passage is “*horan*”, from the verb *horaô*: “I see”. The first, and most common occurring sense of this verb is actually “seeing with our eyes, to look at, to behold,”⁵⁴ though it can be used metaphorically. Perhaps more evidence for Aristotle’s claim can be seen when we investigate one of these types of music that he describes. I believe the point is more easily recognized when we look at enthusiastic / orgiastic / cathartic music, rather than ethical music. We realize that this particular kind of music is rather peculiar from the others, because Aristotle treats the subject of cathartic music almost with a surgeon’s gloves, reverting back to it throughout the description of music in *Politics*, making sure the reader is aware of certain instruments that belong to this category. However, even by use of so much reference to the subject, I do not think Aristotle is making the claim that he thinks this type of music is more powerful than the others on our character and soul. Rather I think he is trying to show the particular strength it has.

First, I think it is important to define what it is when we read the word “*enthousiasmos*” or “*enthousiastikos*” in this text. The verb *enthousiazô*, according to Liddell and Scott’s, is “to be inspired or possessed by the god, be rapt, be in ecstasy”. A more modern definition of the English word “Enthusiasm” gives us the first definition, “(1) Intense and eager enjoyment, interest or approval. The second definition is more appropriate which is (2) religious fervor supposedly resulting directly from divine inspiration, typically involving speaking in tongues and wild, uncoordinated movements of the body”⁵⁵.

Aristotle associates the Phrygian mode with this type of music,⁵⁶ saying, it is, “violently exciting and emotional. This is shown by poetry: for all Bacchiac (*Bakcheia*) versification and all movement (*kinêsis*) of that sort belongs particularly to the flute [...] and these meters find their suitable accompaniment in tunes in the Phrygian mode [...] for example, the dithyramb is admittedly held to be a Phrygian meter.”⁵⁷ Rackham clarifies a few terms in this passage in his note, “*Bakcheia* and *kinêsis* denote bodily movement accompanying song, or may denote the emotional frenzy expressed and stimulated by it. The dithyramb was a form of poetry of this class, originally celebrating the birth of Dionysus.”⁵⁸ So here with melodies in the Phrygian mode, you have not only a pathological state that could be induced or made more aggressive, but also a physical reaction from the person (such as the *kinêsis* or ‘bodily movement’). We find additional information on specific Bacchaic rhythm by Aristides Quintilianus (a

⁵³ *Politics*, 1340a6–7.

⁵⁴ See Liddell and Scott’s.

⁵⁵ *New Oxford American Dictionary*, 2nd edition.

⁵⁶ He says that Plato was wrong for selecting this mode in his classification of modes for education, see *Pol.* 1342a35.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 1342b2–8.

⁵⁸ See *Pol.*, footnote “e”, pp. 672–673.

music scholar from ca. 1st century AD) who writes, “the bacchius [rhythmic pattern] gets its name from the fact that it is suitable [harmozein] for bacchic melodies.”⁵⁹

In the chapter, “The Blessing of Madness” by E.R. Dodds from *The Greeks and the Irrational*⁶⁰ we find descriptions of Dionysian ritual and Corybantic traditions as found in various texts by Aristotle, Plato and others. Dodds describes Corybantic ritual, related to the korubantiōntes as appearing in Plato’s *Ion* who are either people in an anxiety state or those who take part in Corybantic ritual (the Korybantes being dancers who worshiped the Phrygian goddess Cybele).

Dodds writes that (1), the Corybantic ritual was similar to the ancient Dionysiac cure, “both claimed to operate a catharsis by means of an infectious ‘orgiastic’ dance accompanied by the same kind of ‘orgiastic’ music – tunes in the Phrygian mode played on the flute and the kettledrum.”⁶¹ Physical symptoms are described by Plato in the *Symposium* as weeping and the heart beating violently,⁶² “accompanied by mental disturbance; dancers were ‘out of their minds’, apparently having fallen into some kind of trance.”⁶³

(2) The disease or ailment that Plato wrote the Corybantes proclaimed to cure was, “phobias or anxiety feelings arising from some morbid mental condition [...] the real test seems to have been the patient’s response to a particular ritual: if the rites of a god X stimulated him and produced a catharsis, that showed that his trouble was due to X.”⁶⁴ In *Ion*, Plato writes that the Corybantes, “have a sharp ear for one tune only, the one which belongs to the god by whom they are possessed, and to that tune they respond freely with gesture and speech, while they ignore all other [melodies or tunes].”⁶⁵

(3) Aristotle and Plato found these rituals to be “at least a useful organ of social hygiene, they believed that it worked, and worked for the good of the participants.”⁶⁶ In a related passage from Aristotle’s *Politics*, we see this in his description of catharsis, “for any experience that occurs violently in some should be found in all, though with different degrees of intensity – for example pity and fear, and also religious excitement (*enthousiasmos*): for some persons are very liable to this form of emotion, and under the influence of sacred music we see these people, when they use tunes that violently arouse the soul, being

⁵⁹ ARISTIDES QUINTILIANUS, “De Musica” in *Greek Musical Writings, Volume II: Harmonic and Acoustic Theory*. Andrew Barker, ed. Cambridge Readings in the Literature of Music. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004. 392–535. Chapter 16, 37; p.441.

⁶⁰ DODDS, E.R. *The Greeks and the Irrational*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951.

⁶¹ Dodds, *Irrational*, 78.

⁶² PLATO. *The Symposium*. M.C. Howatson and Frisbee C.C. Sheffield, eds. Howatson, trans. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008. 215E

⁶³ Dodds, *Irrational*, 78.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁶⁵ The quotation is from *ION* 536a C, embedded in Dodds, *Irrational*, 79.

⁶⁶ Dodds, *Irrational*, 79.

thrown into a state as if they had received medicinal treatment and taken a purge.”⁶⁷

The Dionysian ritual, can also be described as something collective or congregational, something highly infectious, and invoking the use of wine and religious dance.⁶⁸ The Dionysian ritual had a psychological, cathartic social function, “it purged the individual of those infectious irrational impulses which, when dammed up, had given rise, as they have done in other cultures, to outbreaks of dancing mania and similar manifestations of collective hysteria; it relieved them by providing them with a ritual outlet.”⁶⁹ Dionysus offered freedom and happiness for all as Dodds describes, “Dionysus was a god of joy, and his joys were accessible to all, including even slaves.”⁷⁰ The joys of Dionysus ranged from simple pleasures for simple people: dancing on greased wineskins, to the *hômophagia*, the tearing to pieces and eating raw, of an animal body.⁷¹ Dodds writes, in his introduction to *The Bacchae* that it “seems likely that the (animal) victim was felt to embody the vital powers of the god himself, which by the act of *hômophagia* were transferred to the worshippers.”⁷² In short, “he is the god by very simple means, or by other means not so simple, enables you for a short time to stop being yourself, and thereby sets you free.”⁷³ Ironically, in addition, Dionysus, “is the cause of madness and the liberator of madness.”⁷⁴

In the *Bacchae*, in an introductory song, the leader of the revelers, the individual representing the person of Dionysus, is said to cry out: “Sing out your Phrygian incantations. As the holy flute roars holy hymns, glorify him.”⁷⁵ Seeing Dodds qualifies Dionysian ritual where the use of the Phrygian mode is employed, as “madness,” it seems useful to examine his description of madness. He writes, “the common belief of primitive peoples throughout the world [was] that all types of mental disturbance [were] caused by supernatural interference [...] [and] the notion of possession would easily be extended to epileptics and paranoiacs; and eventually all types of mental disturbance, including such things as sleepwalking and the delirium of high fever, would be put down to daemonic agencies.”⁷⁶ Prophetic madness, such as the seeing of visions like Theoclymenus, or the oracles of Apollo who relied on *enthousiasmos*, “was due to an innate faculty of the soul itself, which it could exercise in certain conditions, when liberated by sleep, trance or religious ritual both from bodily interference and from

⁶⁷ Pol., 1342a5–11.

⁶⁸ Dodds, *Irrational*, 69.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁷² “Introduction” to EURIPIDES, *Bacchae*, E.R. Dodds, introduction, ed. and commentary., Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1944. xv.

⁷³ Dodds, *Irrational*, 76.

⁷⁴ “Introduction”, *Bacchae*, Dodds, xiv. See *Bacchae*, 860.

⁷⁵ EURIPIDES. *Four Plays: Medea, Hippolytus, Heracles, Bacchae*. Stephen Esposito, introduction, ed., trans., notes, Newburyport: Focus Classical Library, 2004. Lines 151-159.

⁷⁶ Dodds, *Irrational*, 67.

rational control.”⁷⁷ We have already seen that in high fever, sleep, and pathological states that our ability to create *phantásmata* is not exactly heightened, but we often falsely take what we see in our visions to be actually what we are seeing in reality. I think the “trance” and “religious ritual” that Dodds refers to here can be included in the states I mentioned taken from Aristotle’s *De Inomniis / On Dreams*. I would venture to say that, in Aristotle, it is the use of the Phrygian mode in the cases of religious ritual that fuels the madness and *phantásmata* and is why Aristotle is so careful with the subject. The Phrygian mode in these cases does well by inducing a catharsis of emotion, but can also be dangerous. It is dangerous in the sense that if we remember the *Bacchae* by Euripides, Agave kills and tears apart her own son Pentheus,⁷⁸ while under the influence of Dionysus, seeing her son to be a mountain lion or “lion-like prey.”⁷⁹

If we look back to the *Politics*, Aristotle describes, simply, how the different modes of music are felt in different ways,

Pieces of music⁸⁰ [...] do actually contain in themselves imitations [*mimémata*] of character [*éthôn*]; and this is manifest for even in the nature of the mere melodies [*harmoniôn*] there are differences, so that people when hearing them are affected differently and have not the same feelings in regard to each of them, but listen to some in more mournful and restrained state, for instance to the Mixolydian mode, and to others in a softer state of mind, but in a midway state and with the greatest composure to another, as the Dorian mode alone of tunes seems to act, while the Phrygian makes men enthusiastic [*enthousiastikous*].⁸¹

He adds a general comment on rhythm saying, from the varieties of rhythm, some “have a more steady character [*éthos*]; others have a lively quality; and these last may again be divided, according as they move with a more vulgar rhythm or move in a manner more suited to freemen.”⁸² Aristotle does not remark much on the Mixolydian mode or music for amusement or hearer’s pleasure in the *Politics*, though he says that it is a type assigned for competitions and shows good for relaxation.⁸³ The Dorian mode, for Aristotle, is the one most appropriated for education and learning,⁸⁴ he further describes the

⁷⁷ Dodds, *Irrational*, 71. Dodds uses Aristotle’s *Problems* 30, 954a 34 ff. as support. Italics are mine.

⁷⁸ “Agave, foaming at the mouth and rolling her protruding eyeballs, not thinking what she ought to think (*ou phronous’ ha chrê phronein*).” 1122–23. *Bacchae*, trans. Esposito. See, *Bacchae*, Dodds edition.

⁷⁹ See *Bacchae*, Dodds, 1120–1135, 1173, 1195.

⁸⁰ [*en de tois melesin*]

⁸¹ *Pol.*, 1340a39–1340b7.

⁸² ARISTOTLE. *The Politics of Aristotle*. Ernest Barker, ed., trans., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958. 1340b8–11.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 1342a22. Rackham, trans.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 1342a27.

mode as “sedate and of manly character.”⁸⁵ Though, it seems apparent that Aristotle spends a lot of time on the Phrygian mode because of the movement it inspires.

The words Aristotle uses to say “imitations” or “representations” in these passages, such as 1340a40, is *mimēmata*, deriving from the word *mimesis*. Subsequent uses of the word “imitations” or “representations” he uses “*homoiois*” or “*homoiomata*,” which have been translated elsewhere as “resemblances,” for example in the passage in *De Insomniis* / *On Dreams* where Aristotle says that a man with high fever imagines he sees animals on the wall merely from slight resemblances.⁸⁶

(iv) Conclusion

I argue that our ability to recognize melodies or rhythms as resemblances of *ēthos* or character requires *phantasia*. Nonetheless, there is an awkwardness to this statement, an awkwardness that is two-fold: (1) when we are unable to discern something well with sight we say “it appears like a man” and by saying this we are expressing a kind of doubt or confusion that can later be confirmed whether the blurry object was a man or not when he comes closer; (2) Yet to say that a melody contains “representations of anger,” we are unable to confirm, as with sight, that this is a “representation of anger” or “this appears to be ‘anger’” or “this melody looks like ‘courage’” because what we are essentially doing is describing an affect that we cannot see. Because we are unable to see the thing that is giving resemblances, I think *phantasmata* are very important for understanding characters in this sense from Aristotle. Not only that, but once music is heard, it disappears; I think we rely on our memory and principally *phantasmata* in order to speak about it (for a *phantasma* remains after the sense object is gone) and we describe it, using what sounds like metaphors to do so. However, it must be that enough people see music in such a way that the statement works (in the sense that it must be some kind of property the object has) that the Dorian mode can be called “sedate and of manly character.”⁸⁷ As Anderson said, Aristotle relied on specialists in music for his conclusions about music having categories (such as educational, cathartic, for pleasure).⁸⁸ Even so, we could conjecture that enough people heard a particular melody in a specific mode, *phantasia* occurred to them upon hearing it, it made them think in a certain way, and perhaps inspired action, such as dance.

When people refer to pieces exhibiting certain qualities, or inspiring narratives I think quite possibly this is a kind of explaining the *phantasmata* that occurs upon listening to a piece that is the basis of their respective descriptions. This conclusion then, could apply to both

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 1342b12–14.

⁸⁶ *De Insom.* 460b11–13.

⁸⁷ *Pol.* 1342a27.

⁸⁸ Anderson, 142.

music that has words or absolute music, seeing Aristotle's theory applies to music even in the absence of auxiliary text, "everyone who listens to examples of musical mimesis experiences a corresponding state of feeling."⁸⁹

Roger Scruton argues in the beginning of his chapter on music and representation (in his work on musical aesthetics) that the music the Ancient Greeks had in mind was, "sung, danced to, or marched to. The thing imitated in the music was, they thought, automatically imitated by the person who 'moved with' it."⁹⁰ This thought echos the 'movement' inspired by the Phrygian mode as developed by Aristotle. Not only that but Scruton's remark almost makes it look as though the Aristotelian treatment of music in the *Poetics* (calling music a mimetic art),⁹¹ to be very confining and irrelevant to our times, at least because the music we have now is not all made for the purpose of inspiring movement (there are many other genres aside from e.g. disco, techno, and waltz).

The flexible notion of *phantásmata* (as introduced by Dorothea Frede)⁹² can also help in the support of our memory and understanding of music. If we hear a certain piece and it inspires us to think in a certain way or talk about it in a certain way, this *phántasma* that aided in thought could be remembered and used for future judgments on specific pieces of music or even be applied in the future, if we are in a situation that perhaps reminds us of a piece of music. For example, we recently heard a 'heroic' piece of music, and are presently in a situation that requires this type of *êthos*; perhaps the *phantásmata* from the previous experience could help in the second. This also could prove as support for Aristotle's claim of the importance of music in the *paidéia* and the learning of *êthos*. Anderson writes on this topic,

One may feel some curiosity about the facts of musical perception as they relate to *êthos*. According to a recurrent hypothesis of Aristotle's the soul, which exists only potentially until it actualizes its potential in thinking, never thinks without an image. The present passage calls mental images or forms *homoiómata*, "likenesses." [...] [Aristotle's] general theory of perception, however, suggests two conclusions: the likenesses must be projections of forms within the soul of the agent; also, their influence upon the auditor takes the form of finally realizing the corresponding potential or predisposition within his nature.⁹³

⁸⁹ Anderson, 125.

⁹⁰ Scruton, 118.

⁹¹ *Poetics*, 1447a14–16.

⁹² See Frede, 291.

⁹³ Anderson, *Ethos and Education*, 128. The use of 'the present passage' is vague in the text, though I believe he is referring to *Pol.* 1340a18–22. It also looks like Anderson is equating *homoiómata* to *phantásmata*.

In a footnote to this paragraph, Anderson notes that in a study on the work *De Musica* of Philodemus (the Epicurean philosopher from ca. 100 BC), “Annemarie Neubecker holds that *homoiōmata* in [De Anima 429a15–24] is a synonym for *mimēsis*.”⁹⁴ With this suggestion, we could see the ‘likenesses’ as *mimēsis*, understood by us via *phantasia*; and thus it looks like *phantasmata* could be an essential part of why Aristotle claims music to be a mimetic art.⁹⁵

However, it must also be remembered that it is not only or exclusively the words in a piece that serves to provide ‘likenesses’ or representations. It often can happen that we “understand” a certain feeling in a Bach cantata, for example the aria from *Ich hatte viel Berkümmernis*, “Sei nun wieder zufrieden, meine Seele”⁹⁶ without understanding the language in which the piece was written. We can at least imagine certain aspects upon hearing it, whether these aspects or mental pictures were intended or not by the composer may be another question all together.

Questions raised by what Aristotle called ‘mimetic music’ leaves a lot of confusion. I do not think there is a simple solution for explaining how music is mimetic comparable to the explanation of ratios and mathematics to explain concords. When we get into the concept of music having ‘imitations’ or ‘representations’ (however one translates *homoiōis*), most resort to the phrase ‘this passage expresses such-and-such’ rather than a more binding term such as ‘representations’ (that for scholars such as Roger Scruton and Kendall Walton implies narrative). I attempt to challenge an aspect of this argument by examining what Aristotle means when talking about *homoiōis*, its relation to a virtue or ethics, and music. And what it seems is that some kind of narrative, however vague, is implied. Indeed if Scruton is right that the music was accompanied by dance or song or particular motion, a loose narrative could be strongly suggested. However, I argue it could be by something similar to pictorial representation that is present in Aristotle’s comment on music. If we look at sense perception and the development of vocabulary that we use to talk about music, there are often items that cross sense modalities (such as a note being called ‘black’ or dim [*melan*] demonstrating what looks like the same word used to describe color is used to describe music in *Topics* 106a25). If Aristotle implied *phantasia* or *phantasmata* in his argument, without mentioning it explicitly, perhaps the sometimes pictorial way of hearing music (descriptions using sight vocabulary) or ‘imitations of virtue’ is via a mental picture one has upon hearing a work of music (though this does not imply that everyone must have identical *phantasmata* upon hearing a piece of music in order for it to be heard as mimetic of X).

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 267, footnote #36. The work he is referring to is by Annemarie Neubecker, *Die Bewertung der Musik bei Stoikern und Epikureern: Eine Analyse von Philodems Schrift De Musica* [diss. Berlin, 1956], pp.78–79, 92.

⁹⁵ It could be that *phantasmata* were so much of a part of his theory on perception that Aristotle neglected to develop this idea in relation to music.

⁹⁶ BWV 21. My Heart was Deeply Troubled, “Be Peaceful again, my soul.”

I find that the ability to call music representational and/or mimetic derives from the Aristotelian notion of phantasia and phantasmata. The descriptions where we say, “music is mimetic of X” is built on the notion of mental pictures we have upon hearing a work of music. These mental pictures, then, serve to help bridge the sense modalities and make it possible for us to understand descriptions such as “brightness” in sound. It also shows that the connection between the description and phantasmata is stronger than a metaphorical relation. I think that our interpretations of a “melody mimetic of X” can be traced back to phantasmata or phantasms that haunt our memory. The ephemeral quality of music works against an interpretation of music compared to an interpretation of a painting that could be made while in the presence of the object. Considering this aspect, I think it is also reasonable that our descriptions of music are often filled with terminology for describing objects of sight due to the phantasmata keeping the sensation of the sound of a particular piece alive in our mind. Phantasmata help in understanding our perception of music, and in understanding music as a mimetic art.

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