

# Representation and Expression in East and West.

**A music philosophy essay inspired on Takemitsu Toru's *Rain Tree Sketch* (1982).**

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Hans Lindahl, professor of laws at Tilburg University, states that mankind is a being characterized by the need to represent in order to express a relationship to reality. The arts, a written and/or spoken language, a nation's constitution, a scientific theory, all are examples that express representation. Representation can be defined as the recreation or a substitution of something which was once present. Hence the name *representing*. It assumes that there was something original which could be presented in some way, to some degree. As political representation is the expression of the common interest, artistic representation is the sensory expression of reality. A broad approach is necessary, because there are many things to be presented in many different ways. Nevertheless, it's tricky to determine what is ought to be represented in art, and what actually is represented in art. In this essay, two contrasting visions will be covered. Moreover, representation is connected to expression, which could be defined as the action of representing. Though the real issue here is this: whenever something is expressed in a certain way, something else cannot be expressed. Therefore, expression is making choices, and representation is directly connected with inclusion and exclusion. If you are a musician, those are musical decisions, based on your perception of what is to be represented and by which means.

In playing a musical work, a problematic situation can occur due to the division between the composer and the performer. The composer writes music, which is expressing reality by the means of a musical score. The performer plays music, which is expressing reality by the means of a musical instrument. Generally in contemporary Western musical culture, the composer needs the performer to express his score, while the performer needs the composer to give something to express. When put like this, the performer's personal link to reality seems to be lost. You might ask '*expresses the performance a musical work?*' or '*expresses a musical work the performance?*'. Let's dive into literature to find out more about this duality.

Let's first take a look at the Platonic idea. This can be explained as a top-down approach on representation, meaning that there is one idea which includes all characteristics of something and whereof all concrete and physical expressions are recognisable, but remain inferior to the original idea. For music this could mean that for a written composition one ideal interpretation exists, and that all practical interpretations strive to come as close as possible to the original idea of the composition. In the ultimate idea all characteristics are included, while in the concrete expression of a representation only a part of the characteristics are included, leaving others excluded. Nevertheless, it renders a recognisable thing because of its derived link to the original idea. Takemitsu (1995, pp. 46-47) offers a quite different stance on this. The performer is not only the translator of the work, but recognizes that the notation of a score is not the final result, but a medium to offer possibilities to the performers. Although the score strives towards a precise rendering of a work, in the end all performance details are relative, as each performance expresses different nuances. It's the sum of all these performances, thereby taking into account all possibilities, that make up the score. This is a bottom-up approach on representation. Both Plato's and Takemitsu's writings take into account the variety of expressions and the one idea or reality, but approach it very differently, respectively in a normative and descriptive/explorative way.

Let's give an example on both perspectives. When Klemperer remarks '*The score is wrong*' after hearing Stravinsky conduct his *Sacre du Printemps* (Samama, 2014, p. 89), the case could be explained

thus: it was Stravinsky's conducting which discovered yet another possible interpretation to be added to all expressions of the score, while Klemperer could have thought that the performance should have been a representation of the score, which functions in itself as an expression of an ideal (Platonic) idea. Klemperer could have found out that the score expressed reality in less depth than Stravinsky eventually conducted it, and that the score was a guide full of possibilities to be expressed differently in each and every performance. Nevertheless, Klemperer's statement gives reason to believe that he thought that it was Stravinsky's interpretation which should be expressed more detailedly in the score. To support Stravinsky's approach, an adaptation of a quote of famous jurist Paul Scholten would be appropriate: *'The [law] is there, though it has to be found. In the find is the new'* (Lindahl, ). Replace [law] with [score] or any other kind representation, and you will find that score is a accumulation of all the expressions found by the performers. *The Landscape of the Score* (Takemitsu, 1995, pp. 46-48) offers further digestion on this topic. Let's delve into the topic of expression and representation more concretely using a musical work of Takemitsu.

*Rain Tree Sketch* is a solo piano piece written in 1982 by Takemitsu Toru. Now, on the presumption that composer and performer are not discriminated but one entity, what does this piece of music express concretely? According to Takemitsu (1995, p. 56), Japanese prefer an artistic expression close to nature, while the Westerner treasures an artificial expression that is not part of nature. Most characteristically is the influence of Zen-Buddhism, which allowed for an inclusive focus, namely on the quality of individual instrumental sounds. So generally, Japanese performers the discovery of the innate quality of sound, as a reflection of the world, rather than using the sound as resource for personal expression. Moreover, if music is expressing the volatility, irrationality and dynamics of nature, then performers who are emotionally familiar with this nature and culture are more prone to be able to express this more profoundly and intuitively. In my opinion, Japanese pianist Satoko Inoue plays *Rain Tree Sketch* in a very organic and natural way. It may very well be that she feels very connected to the irrationality and volatility of nature and that she understand this profoundly and intuitively.

An interesting point is the different views on harmony too. Generally in the West, the perception of harmony is based on structure and contextuality, with the core assumption that one is to be able to remember harmonies, to be able to place all into rational perspective. Keeping in mind that Takemitsu's writings are the expression of Japanese, Zen-Buddhistic and Eastern culture and influences on him, just like for Japanese performers like Satoko Inoue, his writing indicate a different view on harmonies or just tones in general.

*"I wish to discard the concept of building sounds. In the world in which we live silence and unlimited sound exist. Painstakingly I wish to carve that sound with my own hands, finally to reach a single sound. And it should be as strong as possible in its confrontation with silence"* (Takemitsu, 1995, p. 6).

This quotation expresses that context and relativity, just like the constructions of harmonies, are not what Takemitsu strives for in his musical writing. Instead, one single sound and listening to this sound in contrast with silence is what he looks for to express in his music. The emphasized quality of one single sound, like the innate quality of mentioned earlier, could be an expression of spectrality, which is a field in music focussing on the acoustic properties of sound as basis for composition.

Let's focus more on the score of *Rain Tree Sketch I* to conclude the essay. The use of traditional classical Western music notation, the use of piano as instrument and the preciseness by which the the score is formed, suggest that the score is an expression of Takemitsu's education in Western music. No wonder, since Takemitsu was well-acquainted with French composer, organist and pianist Olivier Messiaen,

who himself didn't only write with astonishing preciseness, but also influenced Takemitsu in the field of harmonic and tonal quality, which resonates well with the Japanese appreciation of the quality of sounds. The notational preciseness could resonate well with Eastern thinking too. As Japanese arts, especially *Noh* theatre, is renowned for its extreme precision and formalisation, the idea is that this leads to a more pure internal expression, because the performer's personal expression is hidden (Takemitsu, 1995, p. 58). In addition, this is an example that Japanese performance is not about using the art as resource for personal expression, but for a purer rendition of reality and nature.

In short: *Rain Tree Sketch I* is an expression of the influence of Eastern and Western culture on Takemitsu Toru's, but also an expression of his thoughts on East and West, by which he manages to give expressing to his own musical world. It's best to share what he says himself in his book *Confronting Silence*: "*Expression is not the world giving meaning to me, but me giving meaning to the world*" (Takemitsu, 1995, p. 12).

## References

Samama, L. (2014). *The Meaning of Music* (Dominy Clements, Transl.). Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Takemitsu, T (1995). *Confronting Silence* (Yoshiko Kakudo and Glenn Glasow, Transl.). Maryland: Scarecrow Press.

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