

# 1. What is a ‘musical work’? Reflections on the origins of the ‘work concept’ in western art music<sup>1</sup>

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To many, it would still seem absurd to suggest that there is any argument to be had about how ‘musical works’ exist: the answer is surely obvious to anyone with an interest in the history of western classical music, since even the titles alone can conjure up a host of past and possible performances and, most importantly, experiences. Moreover, most musical works are associated with a documentary trace, the score, by which certain parameters are fixed, others suggested or left open, and the work can thus be identified as a document qualifying for copyright protection or authorial ownership, much in the manner of a verbal text.

Already though, this very brief sketch of assumptions is reliant on specific contexts of performance, authorship, title and documentation, which are all too easily naturalised across diverse types of music (witness a growing concern with authorship, ownership and varying levels of ‘authenticity’ in reproduction within the history of popular music). There is something definitely ‘western’ about this too. While there might indeed be canons of ‘high’ and ‘low’ music in the traditions of countless non-western cultures, very few of them are concerned with documentary precision or the intellectual property rights of individual, unique creators (of course, this is not to say that western-style music, in both ‘art’ and popular categories, cannot successfully be introduced or indeed created within these cultures).

If there is this synchronic observation to be made across contemporary cultures, might there not also be a diachronic one? In other words, if ‘musical works’ have more resonance in some parts of the world than others, might they not also thrive in specific eras of western history? The

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<sup>1</sup> This chapter reworks several substantial passages previously published in Butt (2005) and Butt (2010).

historicity of musical works has long been a concern among German musicologists, most particularly Carl Dahlhaus and Walter Wiora.<sup>2</sup> Writers in this tradition tend to assume that in any given period there is a phenomenological entity that can be defined as a 'work' so long as our command of language and our intuition of the dynamics of music history are up to the task. In this view, if many works in the later stages of western music history acquired features that gave them a greater claim to autonomy (assuming that this is a useful criterion in defining a 'work'), this was more a matter of degree than of kind. Within the context of the European tradition, there is for many, therefore, an essential trans-historical unity implied by the concept of a work. Certainly, developments in music notation, tonal harmony and increasingly mechanised methods of reproduction helped produce a more solidly 'work-like' work from, say, the mid-eighteenth century onwards, and most specifically in western Europe. Music from previous times was not automatically devalued (although that might often have been the net result), but rather valued for the degree to which it provided an important precursor for the 'fuller' work, a sort of 'Old Testament' to ground the 'New'. Works here fitted into a progressive narrative (each new work having to represent a 'step further'), with faintly Whiggish pretensions.

But, in the decades following World War II it is not difficult to detect a slight unease about the direction of musical progress among both composers and historians. To put it simplistically: were we beginning to run out of notes? Were we producing music that might possibly not make any sense to the human ear and understanding? Most importantly, was classical music, just like other arts, becoming irrelevant in an increasingly connected world, in which 'high' and 'low' cultures had equal claims to value?

The 1960s saw the beginnings of the dissolution of the 'highbrow' in relation to the academic study of literature, and musicology was not that far behind. From the 1980s onwards, US scholars (some inspired by contemporary French and German thinkers) became increasingly irritated by the dryness and deference of traditional 'positivist' scholarship.<sup>3</sup> Soon the very basis of the 'academic canon' was called into question and even war-horses of the western tradition were becoming subject to various forms of 'deconstruction' (ranging from the colloquial sense of uncovering social and cultural norms concealed within them to the more

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<sup>2</sup> Dahlhaus (1983); Seidel (1987); Wiora (1983 (1988)).

<sup>3</sup> This move is often conveniently, and justifiably, dated to the publication of Joseph Kerman's trenchant critique of contemporary 'positivist' musicology, Kerman (1985).

theoretical, Derridian approach). Scholars split roughly into those who wanted to save the classical canon from itself (and particularly from its devotees) by taking issues of culture, politics and gender head on, and others who wanted to see this music dethroned and – at best – as only one music among many within popular and world traditions. In all, the ground was extremely well prepared for the most influential English-language study of the musical work, which appeared in 1992, *The imaginary museum of musical works*, by Lydia Goehr.<sup>4</sup>

One of the most disarming aspects of Goehr's approach was the fact that she came from outside the usual circles of American/UK musicology, and seemed – at least in this book – unaware of the disputes currently underway (which usually came under the stirring, but ultimately facile, title of 'New Musicology'). Her targets were, rather, in another field entirely, one considerably more hermetic than the all-singing world of musicology: analytic philosophy. Philosophers in this tradition share something with music analysts (themselves very different beasts from historical musicologists) in considering musical works to subsist independently of their historical position and cultural context. Indeed these 'external' aspects could be seen as damaging distractions from the task of rendering the abstract structures of musical works much more latent.

Goehr's thesis was hardly radical in itself: not unlike German musicologists in the preceding decades, she asserted that the concept of the musical work is historically conditioned. More provocative was her view that the work concept did not develop until around 1800 and that, strictly speaking, no musical works were written before this time (not even, seemingly, by Monteverdi, Bach or Mozart). In Goehr's account, no analytic theory adequately accounts for the historical boundary of the music that it concerns. The notion of the work is, instead, a Wittgensteinian 'open concept', allowing for the subtraction or addition of defining characteristics provided that its continuity is preserved and that it is consistently recognisable over its period of operation. Open concepts are thus 'signposts' facilitating language use. The work concept is also a 'regulative' concept, one that defines certain normative and interrelating practices that are implied when we talk of musical works.<sup>5</sup>

Goehr seeks to show how the many strands constituting the work concept came together around 1800, so that it is, in fact, closely associated with early Romantic aesthetics of music. Defining features

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<sup>4</sup> Goehr (2007 (1992)).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 89–101, quote from p. 93.

include the notion of the unique, original composer, a distinction between art and craft, a defining written score of the work, a sense of musical autonomy distinct from other aspects of the world (especially the everyday), a formalist move towards inner rather than outer significance, a co-option of religion by music, stronger copyright laws, the construction of concert halls as the principal premises for musical consumption, and, most importantly perhaps, disinterested contemplation on the part of the listener. While many of these strands are present before that date (thus certain pieces and composers show a superficial affinity with pieces and composers from the period in which Goehr's work concept became operative), in the strictest sense, only 'pieces of music' exist before 1800, not 'musical works'.

Inevitably, Goehr's book has engendered considerable discussion, not least the objections from scholars of earlier music, who clearly feel that their research would be devalued if the music concerned were no longer given the status of 'musical work'. But most of the discussion has ignored one of the more productive issues to be implied by Goehr's historicist approach. This is the notion that we should not just be discussing whether works as actual objects, or as idealised embodiments of pieces of music, existed at one time or another, but rather whether the interaction between ideas held about music, various social practices and the various musical objects or events at hand *together* generated the notion of the musical work. If some tend to assume that musical works are objects that are basically non-human and thus stable in character (those on the side of analytical philosophy and music analysis), others have surely gone too far in the direction of social constructivism and assumed that pieces of music exist only by virtue of the attitudes of a particular society – that there is nothing essentially 'there' beyond the cultural norms at hand. For a while, it was a moment for uncontrollable mirth and sarcastic put-down whenever any scholar unwittingly mentioned 'the music itself', since this clearly showed a refusal to admit the necessary human constructivist element into music and, at worst, evidenced an elitist, culturally normative attitude to western art. Yet the vertiginous attitude of social constructivists towards objects of art, while a stern lesson for those who underestimate the importance of human involvement at every level, is surely beginning to sound as tired as that argument of America's NRA (National Rifle Association), namely, that 'guns don't kill people, people do'. This would seem to suggest that guns are neutral, innocent objects that are constituted as weapons only through human agency; they cannot influence the human, or put evil ideas into one's head that are not there already. Here I am very much influenced by Bruno Latour's attitude to the findings and 'facts' of science: rather than

opting for a natural order 'out there' on the one hand, or total social construction on the other, he sees a constant circulation between the human and the non-human. Facts and natural objects obviously have to be constructed or formulated in order to be recognisable and accessible to the human understanding, but they also acquire a little autonomy in return, influencing what appears as, and how we conceive of, the world around us.<sup>6</sup>

Pieces of music – whether remembered, composed in the mind, notated or sounded – are obviously human constructions through and through, but they also acquire an element of autonomy instantaneously. We cannot necessarily predict how we are going to react to, or conceive of, them at any point in the future. If we are somehow changed through our encounter with music, something must surely somehow be 'there' and not merely be constructed by us on the spur of the moment. But what the argument for social constructivism does indeed show us is that what is 'there' is not a stable entity that endures regardless of the energy we bring to it.

In examining the possibility of work concepts before that of the nineteenth century some, such as Reinhard Strohm, look for similarities linking one age to another. Therefore, the move towards the profiled composer and the perfection of individual works (as was happening in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, if not before) is precisely that which Strohm considers essential for the European tradition as a whole. It would thus be false to suggest that the western tendency to abstract art from its context and function, treating it as if it were a world in itself, is just a nineteenth-century invention.<sup>7</sup> But, according to Goehr, what render this later conception unique are the specific social, aesthetic and analytic practices attached to music, ones that resonate with earlier 'work concepts' but which do not necessarily constitute a more refined, perfected version of a consistent concept. As she later writes, the fact that the origins of the work concept can often individually be traced back to earlier periods does not mean that the fully fledged concept emerged then. To her, apparent similarities, such as the perfection of a notated musical text or a canon of commendable pieces of music, hide profound differences in culture in which the meaning of a perfected text or commendable exemplar was entirely different.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Latour (1999).

<sup>7</sup> Strohm (2000).

<sup>8</sup> Goehr (2000).

Strohm correctly complains that Goehr tends to homogenise the incredibly complex and varied attitudes to pieces of music before 1800, blatantly ignoring factors that in some respect come close to elements of the later work concept. But she is surely right to insist that we critically examine the roots of our conceptions (a clear example of Nietzsche's 'critical' use of history).<sup>9</sup> While there is a very real sense in which we try to influence our successors – a crucial element in child-rearing for instance – most forms of significant artistic influence draw on the past and react to ideas that are already there. Crudely put, the processes of influence and development are characterised more by sucking than blowing. We cannot simply assume that any innovation of a past era was made with anything close to the forward-looking aim that we now might attribute to it.

This point is, of course, one of the central elements of Darwinian evolution, but the concept of evolution is more popularly associated with a process that is progressive and developmental, one in which there is some ideal end in mind even if earlier actors were not aware of this. This brings us back to the so-called Whiggish approach to history, in which aspects of the past are highlighted for their foreshadowing of a more perfect and enlightened present. It is against this concept of evolution and progress that I most take issue. There is nothing wrong with finding resonances in the past (granted that there is the danger of presentism) – this is, after all, one of the crucial functions of history, which serves to enhance our own sense of belonging to a broader culture of humanity. But this should not be confused with a sense of the past seeking resonances in the future. The Whiggish approach also tends to undervalue aspects of the past that do not conform to its particular model of progress; so it may well render us ignorant of alternative concepts, events, styles or pieces that were dropped from the historical or cultural canons, but from which we still might be able to learn. This is especially pertinent to music from the seventeenth century, for instance, when the very instability of concepts of music led to a degree of experimentation that was probably unprecedented. Many pieces from this time might well be undervalued or ignored if we merely judged them according to whether they were 'hot' or 'cold' in relation to the game of work-laden hide-and-seek.

Another crucial reason to resist the notion that composers and other musicians were aiming towards the work concept all along is that this attitude might ultimately be detrimental to the very institution of western

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<sup>9</sup> Nietzsche (1983).

art music as it exists today. Only by recognising the contingency of the work concept, only by recognising its historical boundedness, do we have a chance of planning for its survival and revival in a rapidly changing world. Blind belief in its universal validity will not by itself preserve the institution. As Latour remarks for the apparently far more robust field of scientific facts: 'It is always dangerous to imagine that at some point in history, *inertia* is enough to keep up the reality of phenomena that have been so difficult to produce', there is no such thing as a 'final' victory that requires no further work or action.<sup>10</sup> Even cherished near-universal values, such as democracy or fundamental human rights, need constant attention and effort; if these are taken as givens they may simply disappear over time.

In all, Goehr's study is particularly useful in showing how modern analytic theories of music are all beholden to the work concept, specifically in the guise in which it arose at the end of the eighteenth century, and thus tend to apply only to certain values and repertoires of the nineteenth century and half the twentieth. Much can be disputed concerning her generalisations about nineteenth-century musical culture, in which the performative and improvisational could still be very important. But what I set out to do in the remainder of this chapter is to flesh out a little of the argument that Goehr leaves even less well supported, namely, the issue of how pieces of music were developed and conceived of during the three centuries before 1800. If everything did indeed fall into place at that latter point (and even if that point is negotiable, as it surely must be), what were the preconditions? My ultimate aim is to see whether such preconditions relate to any aspects of western history, culture or periodisation that can help explain the overall phenomenon of the western musical work in broad but non-universalist terms. My overall hypothesis is that the musical work in its more reified senses relates to the covering conditions of *modernity*.

Goehr's claim would seem senseless if we were to take at face value Listenius's statement (from the 1530s)<sup>11</sup> that the art of *musica poetica* results in a 'perfect and absolute *opus*' that survives the death of its maker. According to Heinz von Loesch, Listenius may not be referring exclusively or even primarily to individual pieces of music. Von Loesch argues that this formulation is one that early Lutheran music theorists

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<sup>10</sup> Latour (1999: 155, 168).

<sup>11</sup> Listenius developed this definition from the opening of *Rudimenta musicae* (1533) to a fuller version in *Musica: Ab authore denuo recognita multisque novis regulis* (1537). For a comprehensive survey of these writings and the tradition that they engendered, see von Loesch (2001).

adopted from Aristotle and Quintilian to describe the activity of production in general, which could equally result in printed publications or theoretical treatises (even if Listenius's formulation was soon to become associated exclusively with musical compositions). Given that the essentially German theoretical tradition of *musica poetica* – of which Listenius was one of the founders – was to die out (together with the theoretical reliance on Aristotle and Quintilian) in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, it is unlikely that this was a significant component of later, progressively stronger concepts of work. On the other hand, one could argue that there is a sort of work concept, across most of the arts, right back in the ancient world. But if there is, it contains very few of the regulative conditions that Goehr claims became operative in 1800.

Therefore, in exploring the possibilities for a work concept in earlier centuries, much depends on the combination of characteristics that one considers necessary for a work. This might involve simply the identity and portability of notated musical pieces by famous composers as implied by Tinctoris (1477), or something closer to Goehr's open, regulative concept that requires a broad combination of conditions such as the separability of musical works from extra-musical environments, bourgeois concert-hall practice, and copyright. One way out of this impasse might be to take Gretel Schwörer-Kohl's distinction between a broader (and weaker) sense of 'work' and the narrower sub-category of 'opus-work' as a starting point.<sup>12</sup> The broader concept would cover compositions resulting from 'creative activity of the highest order', some form of self-contained formal structure, and some historical durability. But the concept of the 'opus-work' would demand more notational fixity, attribution to a specific author, and some degree of originality within the context of the age. The broader concept of work could be applied to a wide range of music, including much non-western music, while the 'opus-work' would refer mainly to the western classical tradition, more or less in Goehr's sense, and only to a limited number of non-western traditions.

Nevertheless, this distinction is not without its problems. The term 'opus' has a long history and was already well established in the sixteenth century. This might perhaps reflect the transfer of work concepts from other artistic fields, but it still does not necessarily evoke the individualised and unique connotations of Schwörer-Kohl's definition of the 'opus-work'. Moreover, her inclusion of 'creative activity of the highest order' as a principal definition of the broader sense of 'work'

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<sup>12</sup> Schwörer-Kohl (1997).

begs a question of relative quality that cannot objectively be answered; it also raises the issue of whether the judgement is made from the standpoint of the composer's environment or of later reception. Perhaps the broader definition should be liberalised to include *any* musical entity (be it an event, a musical text, or just an idea) that can be perceived, remembered or discussed. Yet this would make the term 'work' virtually synonymous with 'piece of music' and thus more or less superfluous. The word 'work' works to the extent that it carries some sort of *charge* that 'music' on its own would not otherwise hold.

So significant is the charge associated with workhood in the western tradition that, to many, it is imperative to trace the roots of its corollary, compositional thinking, to its earliest stages and follow these through the subsequent centuries. Workhood can thus be thought of as something that develops in tandem with the very concept of western civilisation and the sense of 'universality' that this brings.<sup>13</sup> Strohm makes the point that there has always been a 'cohabitation' of functional elements with 'work-like significance' in music; thus it is a mistake to take the absence of a specific functional role as a crucial factor in defining any particular piece as a work.<sup>14</sup> From this perspective it is eminently possible to see musicians from the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries as playing their part in the creation of conditions that 'full' workhood co-opted during the nineteenth. Strohm notes Tinctoris's assertion (1477) that composers found fame in their works and also that commentators of the next generation likened the finest music of the Josquin era to the great works of pictorial and verbal art. While this latter point incidentally suggests that music culture does not lag so far 'behind' the other arts as we are often led to believe, it does raise the question of whether even the contemporary objects in other arts should be considered works in as strong a sense as they are often regarded. In all, though, it is clear that the idea of a musical work enjoying a public trajectory and bringing fame to an absent composer greatly expanded during the sixteenth century. Historians also observe a growing sense of canon formation and the predominance of single-author collections; these would suggest the notion of a 'great' composer standing above the merely skilled musician. This was marked by an adaptation of the traditional veneration of models from the past (covered by the notion of *Imitatio*), as encapsulated in general education by the commonplace book tradition, towards the notion that creators could be original and actually depart from the past. This

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<sup>13</sup> Strohm (1993: 1–5, 412–88).

<sup>14</sup> Strohm (2000: 139).

shift was encapsulated by Descartes' constant call that past authority should be critically challenged and that all models should be treated with scepticism. Indeed, one important aspect of the development of stronger work concepts across all the arts must have lain in the fact that human originality actually became a possibility. The pre-modern view had largely been that, given God was the only true creator, any claim to originality must have counted as heretical.

Yet, time and again, the more one notes an apparent move in the direction of the work concept (at least in Goehr's sense), another move seems to go in the opposite direction – in opera for instance, the genre that is the first actually to be termed a 'work', it was well into the eighteenth century before the composer became celebrated on an equal footing even with the singers, and quite often the librettist had pride of place. Moreover, with the growth of instrumental performance it became customary to expect some degree of improvisation, and elaboration of existing notated pieces, thus weakening the absolute authority of notation. On the other hand, some genres specifically geared towards performance, such as those performed by the *concerto delle donne* at Ferrara in the 1580s, show evidence of the performers obeying the letter of the notation, diminutions and all,<sup>15</sup> although here it is almost as if the *concerto* were being celebrated for its unusual practice of *not* improvising embellishments – in any case, it may well be that the notation follows what the singers were accustomed to do rather than vice versa. It was perhaps a record of past performances, skilfully to be duplicated in the present and future performances.

In finding resonances between past and present – which is one of the crucial functions of history, and serves to enhance our own sense of belonging to a broader culture of humanity, and from which we can learn certain lessons – the satisfying discernment of similarities between past and present surely needs to be counterbalanced by an awareness of the profound differences. For instance, whatever new sense of individuality did indeed begin to evolve during the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, this was against the background of an overriding belief that music was still grounded in natural and universal rules governing all musicians, regardless of their local differences. To its adherents of the time (and perhaps some today), late Renaissance polyphony embodied assumed natural laws that connected music directly to the rest of creation; all systems belonged together under a sort of

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<sup>15</sup> Newcomb (1980: vol. 1, 25–26, 55).

supernature.<sup>16</sup> At best, the aspect of nature increasingly embodied in the human passions, in the newer musical conceptions straddling 1600, would have been a lesser one. At worst, the growing emphasis on the heart rather than mind was to many the beginning of a slippery slope towards anarchy. This point demonstrates very clearly the way in which seemingly abstract and internally perfected *prima pratica/stile antico* music (i.e. the 'old' style of music as seen from the perspective of some of the newer ones of the seventeenth century) was so fundamentally different in conception from the more 'absolute' branches of music of the nineteenth century. The abstractness of perfected Renaissance counterpoint was testimony to its contiguity with the whole chain of being, which after all had never been immediately evident to the naked eye (or, in this case, ear). The abstractness of later, stronger, work concepts, on the other hand, was testimony to the separation from the world that could now be achieved by art, within the world itself.

The theoretical conception of 'disenchantment' is particularly relevant to the discussion of the development of stronger concepts of works. First formulated by Max Weber, disenchantment highlights the gradual move away from the magical significance of the world and human practices, still fully alive in the Middle Ages, along with the veneration of past ancestors and authorities, and reliance on beliefs in a wider macrocosmic order – what Adorno and Horkheimer call the 'extirpation of animism'.<sup>17</sup> Although the theory naturally generalises, it remains a useful tool for viewing the development of the modern world, beginning with the Renaissance and Reformation, by which assumed connections and resonances between the order of things and souls were gradually dismantled. But, with the concomitant move towards materialism, the control of nature and bountiful information, particularly with the scientific revolution straddling the turn of the seventeenth century, we became alienated from the objects disenchanted, precisely as these become more familiar and comprehensible within a rationalised taxonomic system.<sup>18</sup> 'Works' in the stronger sense, might then serve to shore up this loss by providing alternative worlds in which wholeness still pertains – part of what might sometimes be referred to as a process of 're-enchantment'.

Willem Erauw draws attention to a particular point made in Goehr's thesis concerning the development of musical works around 1800, namely that cultural activities assumed the transcendental function that a

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<sup>16</sup> Chua (2001: 18).

<sup>17</sup> Adorno and Horkheimer (1997: 5).

<sup>18</sup> Chua (2001).

declining religious practice could no longer provide.<sup>19</sup> He sees essential practices in reception, such as the motionless concert audience and reverence for the musical score, as being specifically religious in nature. From this viewpoint based on reception, it is possible to see why there is at least a conceptual problem in considering earlier music (at least from an environment in which it was impossible to question the truths of religion) as instantiating works in the nineteenth-century sense. This is not to say that religion completely disappeared in later centuries; indeed, nineteenth-century religious revivals could themselves be seen as prime examples of 're-enchantment', a compensation for the loss of the interconnected and magical world. Rather, religion became one system among others, to be adopted or contested in various ways.

With disenchantment came the view that the cosmos was not necessarily constructed entirely for mankind's benefit, so that a new form of human initiative was required to render the natural world amenable to human purposes. This is what Hans Blumenberg terms the 'burden of self-assertion'. With the new development of scientific method, it became necessary to adapt man to the impersonal reality uncovered by repeatable experimentation. But this distinction between reality and the human condition also brought with it the contrary tendency: to adapt that reality to the needs and purposes of man.<sup>20</sup> The most positive aspect to arise from this is the potential to see reality as whatever is most actual and immanent rather than as something that must always remain beyond our immediate experience. This might be what gives western society its restless and ongoing energy, a state that I would claim is usefully defined by 'modernity'. On the other hand, this development tends to drive a wedge between the natural world and human civilisation, to suggest that humankind is progressively alienated from the secure and harmonious place in the natural order that our cultural memories always seem to evoke. Hans Robert Jauss usefully relates this line of thinking to a trajectory leading from Rousseau to Adorno, thus suggesting an intellectual epoch that coincides with the latter part of the era of modernity as I am trying to outline it.<sup>21</sup> However, the sense of a growing rift between western humanity and nature did not necessarily prevent the re-invention of the transcendent hidden reality to give human orders support and justification 'from beyond'. It is imperative to make a distinction between 'enchantment' in its earlier (pre-modern) sense and 're-enchantments' of

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<sup>19</sup> Goehr (2007: 157); Erauw (1998).

<sup>20</sup> Blumenberg (1983: 137–38, 209).

<sup>21</sup> Jauss (1987: 243–68).

various kinds, since the latter are always undertaken in the wake of the breakdown of the former, and against the background of a disenchanted modernity.

As must already be clear, I would argue that Jauss's starting point of Rousseau is really only a later stage in a process begun with the late Renaissance and Reformation. The increased emphasis on subjectivity and individuality in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries – and by extension, on some notions of workhood – can themselves be seen as a compensation for the increasing uncertainty of the natural order. It is therefore plausible that an increasing sense of individuality in musical composition does indeed parallel a stronger conception of human individuality and subjective presence. Yet this – almost paradoxically – does not necessarily reflect a deeper confidence in the human condition, but more a reaction to a loss of security within the wider order of things. Descartes' famous move was to advocate the total certainty of the thinking – or rather doubting – mind, compensating for the absolute uncertainty of everything else. The whole of nature is swapped for the unshakeable actuality of one's own existence. Reason, no longer at one with surrounding nature, becomes a tool to dissect the world. Charles Taylor links the growing sense of internalisation with the turn against an external, pre-existent order that is 'found' and that determines our station and role in life, towards a form of order that is made with our own minds. This is something made overt in Descartes' work on subjectivity, particularly in the *Discours de la Méthode* (1637).<sup>22</sup>

Hobbes represents the other wing of this turn, by which human order no longer has an unmediated connection with the raw, natural order of the world. From the very outset of *Leviathan*, the 'art' of man consists in constructing artefacts in imitation of nature, which are in essence no different from the given automaton of the human body, as already created by God.<sup>23</sup> The human creation of the state is but a further fabrication of this kind. If such a common power is not constructed, man reverts to a kind of war and famously experiences life as 'solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short'. It is not so much that there is brutish nature on the one hand and human civilisation on the other, but that humans need to construct order out of the various conflicting natural orders at hand (which, unchecked, represent the condition of 'mere nature' in which all would recklessly pursue absolute liberty). Hobbes's principal departure from the old thinking of mankind as part of a broader chain of being is

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<sup>22</sup> Taylor (1989: 124).

<sup>23</sup> Hobbes (1990: 1).

that the human must take a more active role in ordering nature. The artificial is as necessary as the natural and is indeed part of a more refined aspect of nature. Something of this attitude is evident in the way in which musical instruments rose in importance in the course of the seventeenth century: the fascination with describing and cataloguing instruments may well be part of the wider view of using artifice to improve nature and extend human capabilities.<sup>24</sup>

Another development was noted by Max Weber, namely his linking of the move away from 'natural' tuning towards tempered systems within the broader process of 'rationalisation'.<sup>25</sup> Human capabilities are greatly enhanced by the imposition of an ordered, rational system that patently ignores the 'natural purity' of musical intervals (i.e. that directly derived from the size of the intervals in the spectrum of harmonics, which together constitute the timbre of individual pitched notes) in order to extend the tonal system. Music thus moves out of the natural world into a seemingly richer world of its own. However much humanist reformers at the end of the sixteenth century (together with many music critics of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries) might have prized music for its supposedly 'natural' qualities, what was becoming increasingly effective were precisely its independent aspects, its deviation and modification of supposed natural principles. With this potential for autonomy came the sense that musical compositions were individuals, following their own implications and potentials, and thus almost of a piece with the individuality of those who created them.

Hobbes's sense of authority also suggests that a circulating process is involved, one by which all authority itself depends on the will of those in an apparently passive position. In the context of art, this would suggest that while the concept of individual authorship is elevated, this is at the same time dependent on the collective will of those who receive the work composed. We might also recall the example of Lully (who produced music drama for the court of Louis XIV) here. He was highly complicit in authorising his monarch's power, but also in creating his own authority within the same hierarchy. A stronger seventeenth-century concept of the musical work thus corresponds to a stronger – but essentially artificial – concept of human subjectivity, which, in turn, coincides with the rise of absolutism (a 'modern' development despite its seemingly retrograde political direction). Discrete musical works also began to adopt a series of internal laws, checks and balances that paralleled Hobbes's artificially

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<sup>24</sup> Austern (2001: 44–45).

<sup>25</sup> Weber (1958).

structured state – in other words, something that eschewed the immediate dictates of nature in order to mediate between the competing forms of power and authority.

One exceptionally illuminating theory of the role of art in this period is Lukács's of the novel: to Lukács, Cervantes's *Don Quixote* is the first true novel, in which the old epic practices no longer connect to the surrounding totality. The form of the novel thus compensates for the actual disenchantment of the surrounding world through its very irony. According to Lukács, Cervantes was writing at a time 'when man became lonely and could find meaning and substance only in his own soul, whose home was nowhere; when the world, released from its paradoxical anchorage in a beyond that is truly present, was abandoned to its immanent meaninglessness'.<sup>26</sup> The autonomy of the novel, its formal re-enchantment within its fictional world, its very inessential yet vital place in its culture, thus show the beginnings of crucial traits in a new conception of art, that 'raised the most confused problematic into the radiant sphere of a transcendence which achieved its full flowering as *form*'.<sup>27</sup> This sense of distance from the world, this consciousness of the autonomy of art, clearly resonates with the concept of the musical work as it reached its full flowering in later centuries. However much this type of art resembles aspects of the surrounding world, there is no longer a process of direct imitation, an uncomplicated correspondence between the world pictured and the world from which we read. To Lukács our consciousness of the disintegration and inadequacy of the world is the precondition for the existence of high art and of its becoming conscious and autonomous.

If Lukács is right, then, there *are* actual traces of struggle, irony, distancing, disenchantment and re-enchantment within artefacts that should be described as 'works' in the 'strong' sense (and clearly not just musical ones). The work concept may indeed widely reside in the culture of reception but it also leaves its tell-tale traces in the artefacts concerned. In this somewhat demanding conception, Goehr may well still be correct to doubt the existence of musical works long before 1800. It is clear that earlier music did not generally enjoy that sense of transferability and detachment from its contexts that literature was beginning to experience. One can, of course, point towards developments in compositional practice that do show a sense of abstraction – most significantly an increasing interest in musical form, even in genres, such as opera, where

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<sup>26</sup> Lukács (1999: 103–4).

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 130.

the music was assumed to serve other functions. We might even be able to find examples where musico-dramatic works become self-reflexive, directly commentating on their contrivance and necessary detachment from the world. It is perhaps no accident that early operas so frequently concentrate on music as a dramatic theme, specifically in the form of the Orpheus myth. Here, music becomes a topic of re-enchantment, a nostalgia for an ancient age in which music actually had magic power.<sup>28</sup> But such is the complexity of issues of authority, commission, intention and collaboration in early opera, that disenchantment – if there is such – is the net result of these factors and not easily to be attributed to a single composer or librettist. It is precisely the ambiguity as to what music represents or reflects, and by whose authority, that renders the birth of opera so fascinating. As I have tried to argue, Bach's two surviving Passions co-opt the 'modern' technologies of opera in order to serve a traditional religious purpose, thereby creating what is potentially a richer experience and interpretation of the passion story, but one that is also detachable from its original religious context.<sup>29</sup>

There is also the question of pieces that exploit a particular issue of compositional theory (canon, fugue, etc.). It is often these, by composers such as Palestrina, Frescobaldi and Bach, that became so highly esteemed in the nineteenth century, since they are already, to some extent, models of 'absolute music'. Can these pieces really be 'works' if they presuppose a continuity between the fabric of the music and the hidden structure of the world? Indeed, this would seem to suggest that they reflect the survival of a form of musical thought that is yet to be disenchanting, and thus considerably more distant from the 'strong' work concept than might at first seem apparent. We should be very cautious in assuming that pieces approaching musical autonomy (i.e. without a text or specific function) were autonomous in the same way as later works. I am not trying to argue that no music from the earlier centuries can be treated, elevated or 'retrofitted' as a 'work', since the very concepts of work are not inherent just in a musical manifestation in sound or on paper, but in the circulation between these and the wider concepts both held in the period and evolving through reception. It might also be relevant that some Baroque music designed for religious worship transferred particularly easily into nineteenth-century aesthetics, in which music and the formal experience of the concert became a sort of substitute religion. But while it is extremely important to acknowledge that certain aspects of

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<sup>28</sup> Chua (2001: 25–26).

<sup>29</sup> Butt (2010: 197–99).

thought and culture developed before the nineteenth century would eventually become crucial in the construction of the stronger work concepts, we should never presume that the earlier period ever had the latter in mind.

Finally, the question arises as to whether the historical foundations of the work concept shed any light on why it suddenly became an issue towards the end of the twentieth century, and was clearly no longer something to be considered self-evident. Much of my argument has been pointing in a particular direction, namely that the development of the type of strong musical work concept, as defined by Goehr, is part of a process that is specific to the West, one that I have identified as 'modernity'. This is not identical with the 'modernism' that characterises much late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century art, but rather something of a piece with what historians have long described as the 'modern age' (modernism is thus a particular intensification, if not exhaustion, of the potentialities of modernity). The exact timelines are not perhaps important, but historians have long used the broad categorisation by which the Ancient World is separated from the Modern World by the Middle Ages. Modernity thus has its beginnings in the era of the Renaissance and Reformation and is fed by the scientific revolution of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Culturally, it surely has some real presence in Montaigne, Shakespeare and Cervantes, the philosophy of Locke, Hobbes, Descartes and Spinoza. It reaches both a peak and a crisis at the time of the Enlightenment and French Revolution and thereafter forges ahead with the industrial revolution and the increasing dominance of capitalism (and thus the period of Goehr's work concept).

The development of modernity shows several parallels with the stronger work concept: the scientific revolution and the notion of empirical experimentation; the development of a stronger sense of subjectivity and individuality; separation and specialisation in different spheres of human endeavour; instrumental reason; and division of labour. It was precisely this same division of labour that facilitated the development of the modern symphony orchestra, where every player has a specific place and a single instrument to perfect to the highest possible level, through methodical practice within an approved pedagogical system. With the foundation of the Paris Conservatoire in the wake of the French Revolution, musicians became trained in very specific tasks that together played a part in a large hierarchical system of orchestras, soloists, conductors and, of course, composers.

Already there might seem to be something rather oppressive about the industrialisation of classical music and its increasing range of re-enchanted texts – those ever more precise scores of musical works.

But perhaps one of the strengths of the classical tradition and its associated work concept lay in the way they sat between the establishment – confirming the status quo in sound, as it were – and simultaneously opposed or subverted it, challenging its secure assumptions. It became an art that took inherited orders as its starting point (thus its reliance on a particularly strong pedagogy of harmony and counterpoint), but through its seeming autonomy and individuality could act as a critique of our own assumptions. It could also develop a feeling of alienation, resistance or even opposition to the surrounding orders. In other words, it worked dialectically in the sense that it could lead to results that could never quite accurately be predicted (at least for the active performer and listener), a real sense of autonomy that distinguished this culture and its emerging work concept from one in which music was always at the service of other arts, religion or politics.

What Goehr's claims may be reacting against, then, seems to be the high modernist mindset that tends to assume that autonomous music's fictional truth is so refined and honest in its own integrity that it virtually outdoes any other kind of truth. It is supremely true because it is so distanced from the messy chaos of the rest of reality. With this in mind, it is easy to see how the later culture of classical music has contributed so much to its own self-regarding sense of exceptionality – as something totally apart from the mundane. The modernist outlook is thus assumed to apply to the whole of this art of modernity. From this point of view, the advent of a 'postmodern' mindset, or at least that part of it that undoes the dichotomy of high and low culture, might have provided a healthy corrective. But, one could ask, might we not also have lost a sort of productive tension between different types of culture? Should we perhaps be lamenting the loss of Goehr's stronger concept of musical works, which was a sort of religious surrogate upheld by its own existential dogma?

If there is some symmetry between the pre-modern and the current situation, one might wonder whether there is a sort of return to the old scholastic prohibition against curiosity in the unknown or unfamiliar, against changing the order at hand and violating our inborn place within that order.<sup>30</sup> The place of the religious order that was previously protected against violation is now reoccupied by that of the global market, often posing as an ideal democratic principle. If this sort of attitude is hardly conducive to the cultivation of 'classical' music, it is surely barely any better for the health of any other kind of music, since it

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<sup>30</sup> Blumenberg (1983), especially pp. 325–29.

tends to efface the resistant or oppositional elements of any music whatsoever.

On the other hand, several new possibilities have arisen for reappropriating the 'museum of musical works'. One particularly rich field is the emergence of performance studies as an area of serious musical enquiry. Among several other directions there is the trend towards trying to move away from works as fixed in scores towards works as events in real time and in which the performer is fully complicit.<sup>31</sup> This involves not just the issues that are not specified in the score (such as absolute tempo and rubato) but also creative deviations. Although this might seem to be a return to the time before the score became dominant, when music could be spontaneously embellished or even composed, it is clear that improvisation has never really disappeared. Rather, it was usually merely devalued and ignored by historians of 'serious' musical works. As Goehr herself states in the preface to the second edition of *The imaginary museum* (2007), the relation of performance to work is rather like that between someone practising law and the law as notated: 'Just as laws are interpreted or even "performed" in their application to specific cases, so works are performed in such a way that we would say that without the performances the authority of works would be of no interest at all.'<sup>32</sup>

One final issue concerning the ontological status of musical works is the fact that the perfection of notation might often have been done for its own sake, and thus not dictating precisely how the music was performed. At least some of the music of Palestrina – so often seen as the epitome of notated perfection – was originally performed with levels of improvised ornamentation that would have wrecked the notated perfection. In other words, the composer may well have thought of ideal 'paper music' and sounding, 'performed music' as two intersecting but not coterminous forms of music ('eye' and 'ear' music). Moreover, rather than thinking that a composer always stood at the beginning of the compositional and notational process, he might well have been imitating what he heard performers doing. For instance, it is highly likely that some of the most spectacular solo numbers by Monteverdi – his 'Possenti spirito' from *L'Orfeo* and Arianna's lament (surviving from the lost opera of that name) – were heavily influenced by the styles of the singers for whom

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<sup>31</sup> Cook (2013).

<sup>32</sup> Goehr (2007: xxxix).

the music was composed; they might even partially be records of what the singer actually did, thus feeding into the composer's compositional process.<sup>33</sup>

In all then, the weakening of the classical work concept has, at the very least, allowed us to consider other factors implicit in the music, particularly to do with performance. New media and methods of communication have also helped to draw attention to different ways of listening to music, something that could be going well beyond the passivity so often assumed for the consumption of musical works. Many scholars and performers relish the ways in which the experience of certain works might come as close to popular or non-western forms as they do to traditional concert-hall practice. It is also clear that there is a pronounced move towards celebrating the human aspects of the classical repertory, the music being no longer so impersonal and heard only as an object in its own right.<sup>34</sup> There are surely many ways in which pieces of music might interact with our ever-changing cultural context to bring forth new meanings, understandings and sensations, but only if we give up the idea of works as fixed and inviolable objects.

But, some might argue, with the exponential growth in the various ways in which musical works can be understood, experienced and enjoyed, might we not have diluted the impact of musical works compared with the time they were actually 'works'? Perhaps, like some of the most unequivocal achievements of western modernity itself (universal justice, equality of rights, freedom of the individual, etc.), classical music is not going to endure – as if it were *the* natural order, one which would survive even if we did not tend it – without some form of positive effort.

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<sup>33</sup> For a consideration of several different ways in which notation may have related to performance, see Butt (2002: 96–122).

<sup>34</sup> Goehr (2007: xlvi–xlvi).

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