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'The work': an evaluative charge

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Problem and aim

Writing entries for EPMOW (*Encyclopedia of Popular Music of the World*) is a tricky business. One recurrent problem with this work is how to refer to what, within a given musical culture or subculture, is generally perceived as a musical continuum of determinate duration and of sufficient internal structural cohesion to be understood as sonically identifiable in itself from whatever precedes or follows it, as well as from other similarly integral sets of sequences of musical sound. The concept is really quite simple, even self-evident, but what is it called? For example, in attempting a definition of 'turnaround', I wrote:

1. (original meaning): a short progression of chords played at the end of one section in a song or instrumental number and whose purpose is to facilitate recapitulation of the complete harmonic sequence of that section or of another section within the same number;
2. (transferred meaning) any short sequence of chords, usually three or four, recurring consecutively inside the same piece of music.

Note the clumsy expression 'song or instrumental number' to cover a particular type of 'integral set of sequences of musical sound'. Note also how 'number' and 'piece of music' are used as synonyms. Such terminology is unsatisfactory, to say the least. I thought about using the word 'work' but rejected it because it sounded pretentious.

In this paper I want to try and answer one simple question: why does the notion of a musical work sound pretentious, or at least incongruous, when used in popular music contexts? My aim is therefore to lay bare some of the mechanisms underpinning the practical problem of terminology mentioned above so that eventual alternatives can be based on firmer musical, historical, social and linguistic foundations than has often been the case with other terms employed in popular music scholarship.¹ The main part of this text seeks in other words to unravel the various semantic and historical values attached to the word 'work', starting with its definitions and equivalents in various European languages.

1. For example, 'iconicity' is used incorrectly by Shepherd and Wicke in their *Music and Cultural Theory* (Cambridge, 1997), while 'intertextuality' was generally used in an imprecise 'blanket' sense during a recent symposium organised by the Institute of Popular Music (University of Liverpool, 11-13 September 1998). Even basic terms such terms as 'beat' and 'rhythm' are also often used without clear definition or distinction, as Tamlyn (1998) has observed.

Meanings and values of the 'work'

The English word 'work' has a multitude of meanings. Of particular relevance to our understanding of 'the musical work' are the following four:²

[i] the application of mental or physical effort to a purpose; ... [ii] a thing done or made by work; the result of an action; an achievement; ... [iii] a person's employment or occupation etc., esp. as a means of earning income; [iv] literary or musical composition.

It is important to note from the outset that these meanings are presented in chronological occurrence of their recorded usage in the English language. The *Oxford English Dictionary* traces the original meaning of the word — 'application of mental or physical effort' — back to the Old English and Anglo-Saxon word *weorc* and considers the second meaning of the word — the result or effects of work, also in the sense of 'deed' including its ethical aspect (e.g. 'by your works shall ye be judged') — to have been in common use not much later. However, the majority of sources quoted by the *Oxford English Dictionary* in relation to the fourth meaning of the term — 'literary or musical composition' — date from the fourteenth century or later.³

Whoever consults *Roget's Thesaurus* for synonyms to 'work' in relation to the topic of this symposium is dispatched to such semantic fields as:

1. *exertion*: effort, struggle, strain, stress, trouble; labour, industry, work, hard work, donkey work, manual labour, grind, drudgery, slavery, compulsion, toil, chore, job, task. 2. *production*: creation, origination, invention, undertaking, authorship, performance, output, throughput, execution, accomplishment, achievement. 3. *composition*: combination, construction, production; ballet, musical piece, work of art, picture, portrait, sculpture, literary work. 4. *form*: shape, formation, structure, structuration, expression, formulation; organisation, pattern, constitution, fabric, texture. 4. *[musical work]*: piece, composition, opus, work; number, tune, track. 6. *skill*: masterpiece, chef d'œuvre, pièce de résistance, masterwork, magnum opus, stroke of genius, coup-de-maitre, feat, tour de force, work of art, objet d'art.

Labor sive opus?

The first striking distinction in these definitions of and synonyms to the English word 'work' is that between, on the one hand, work in its original sense (or work as experienced by the majority of people who have ever worked) and, on the other, work as the tangible outcome of work in its primary sense. In other words, English uses the same word ('work') to cover two concepts which in the majority of other European languages are denoted by separate words.

For example, Greek's δουλεια and εργο(v), Latin's *labor* and *opus*, German's *Arbeit* and *Werk* or the *arbete* and *verk* of Scandinavian languages, not to

2. The following reference works have been regularly consulted for definitions, translations and synonyms: *Cassell's Compact Dutch Dictionary*, London, 1955; *Cassell's German Dictionary*, London, 1978; *Cassell's Italian Dictionary*, London, 1978; *Cassell's Latin-English, English-Latin Dictionary*, London, 1968; *Collins Spanish Dictionary*, London, 1982; *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*, Oxford, 1995; *Dicionário Inglês-Português* and *Dicionário Português-Inglês*, Porto, 1983; *Langenscheidt's Standard Dictionary of the French and English Languages*, London, 1968; Liddell & Scott (eds): *Greek-English Lexicon*, Oxford, 1871; *The Oxford Paperback Greek Dictionary*, Oxford, 1997; *The Oxford Paperback Russian Dictionary*, Oxford, 1996; *Le petit Robert*, Paris, 1970; *Roget's Thesaurus*, London, 1987; *Swedish Dictionary*, London, 1993 (Stockholm, 1993).

3. See also Middleton's paper for this symposium.

mention the *travail*, *trabajo*, *trabalho* and *œuvre*, *obra*, *obra* of French, Spanish and Portuguese respectively, all underline the same dichotomy of, on the one hand, work as tiresome toil, tribulation, etc. and, on the other, work as the end product of effort expounded, more often than not, by someone other than the person using that product.⁴ It is obvious that the notion of a literary or musical work relates not to the former (*δουλεία*, *labor*, *lavoro*, *Arbeit*, *travail*, etc.), but to the latter: to *εργο*(ν), *opus*, *opera*, *Werk*, *œuvre*, etc. We are in other words clearly referring to a product viewed or heard primarily from the perspective of the beholder, i.e. with the *εργο τεχνης*, the *Kunstwerk*, the *œuvre d'art* (the 'work of art'), not, in the case of music, with the *δουλεία του μουσικου*, nor the *Arbeit der Musiker*, nor the *travail du musicien*. In short, the notion of 'musical work' refers not to the labour invested by composer or musician to generate the product or to derive income from it but to the product of that labour from an 'end-user perspective'. Equally clear distinctions are made in these languages between, say, *un grand travail* and *une grande œuvre* (or the equivalent pair in German, Spanish, etc.), both of which literally mean 'a big work' but which would translate more correctly as 'a lot of work' and 'a great work' respectively. It is interesting to note here that English, in order to compensate for the homonymous noun 'work', distinguishes the two concepts by qualifying that same noun quantitatively (as 'a lot') and evaluatively (as 'great').⁵

As self-evident as these observations may appear, they still constitute, as the difference between 'a lot of work' and 'a great work' suggests, much more than a mere philological nicety; for although from a European perspective the English language may be idiosyncratic in the manner just described, other languages — French, German, Greek, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, Swedish, and, to a lesser extent, Italian,⁶ — all contain some element of evaluation in their distinction between the equivalents of *travail* and *œuvre* in relation to the production of art. The next part of this paper therefore discusses such elements of evaluation in relation to music.

Opus, work and aesthetic value

'Beauty', it is said, 'is in the eye of the beholder', and since, with the musical work, we are dealing with a product whose use value resides in its capacity to please, disturb, excite, entertain or otherwise communicate a series of affective or gestural states and processes,⁷ the notion of a 'musical work' can assume an evaluative dimension depending on whether the work pleases,

4. It is worth noting in this context [i] that *travail*, *trabajo* and *trabalho* derive from *tripaliare*, popular Latin for to whip with the *tripalium*, a birch rod sporting sharp thorns and used by Roman masters on their slaves during forced labour; [ii] that the word has entered the popular Latin languages of former Roman colonies whereas Italian has preserved *travaglio* to mean pain, torment, distress, labour in particular and *lavoro* (from *labor*, *laboris*) to mean work in general; [iii] that *δουλεία* originally meant slavery, *δουλος* slave).

5. It should be noted that English accords 'work' a much larger and 'labour' a much narrower range of meanings than do other languages. For example, Russian distinguishes four separate concepts relating to 'work': [1] *тѣлѣ, жнѣ*, meaning work in general, [2] *нѣлѣ*, meaning labour, toil, etc., [3] *гѣлѣ, жнѣ, тѣлѣ*, meaning a work of art, a production or product, and [4] *бѣлѣ, жнѣ, тѣлѣ* in the sense of workmanship, craft or art.

6. Due to the particular meaning of *opera* as 'opera', the distinction in Italian between *lavoro* and *opera* is to some extent less clear than that between French's *travail* and *œuvre* or between Germans *Arbeit* and *Werk*, the Italian for 'masterwork' being *capolavoro* rather than the direct linguistic equivalent of *œuvre de maître* or *Meisterwerk*.

disturbs, excites, entertains, or otherwise provides the required aesthetic use value. Now, although beauty may be in the eye or ear of the beholder (in the singular), beauty and other notions of aesthetic value are not only an individual matter: they are just as much a collective issue, simply because similar opinions and values are held by many beholders (in the plural), such community of taste being more often than not related to other cultural as well as to social and economic aspects of community. This observation may seem trite but it is as often overlooked as it is important, being for example a condition *sine qua non* for the social survival of any set of musical practices.⁸

Now, the existence of different communities of aesthetic value within society does not in itself constitute a moral, ethical or terminological dilemma: on the contrary, the function-related aesthetics of, for example, different music clubs (*vú hà*) in Ewe culture play an important part in codifying the role and character of different groups within the larger community (young or old, fast or slow, male or female, etc.).⁹ Differences of aesthetic community can in this way be structured horizontally rather than vertically, and be considered of equal status or as mutually complementary to a larger social structure in a manner homologous with the polyrhythmic structure of much Ewe music which demands the simultaneous occurrence of clearly articulated different figures in different metres entering at different points in time as prerequisites for the construction of an integral sonic whole. No, our terminological problems start with social stratification, because if groups or classes within society are organised hierarchically, people belonging to (or aspiring to belong to) a ruling class will tend to assume that the aesthetic values of that class are commensurate with class superiority in other cultural as well as in economic terms. One common way of justifying such a viewpoint is to try and link the intrinsically transitory habits, mores and values of the privileged class to phenomena which appear to transcend the historically specific and culturally relative nature of the social system over which that class presides.

For example, in Ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia and China, etc., the ruling classes sought in various ways to establish links between their music — including its structuration, modes of reception etc. — and immutable or univer-

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7. This characterisation of aesthetic use value is not dissimilar to that provided by Horace: 'Aut prodesse volunt, aut delectare poetae / aut simul et iucunda et idonea dicere vitae' [=Poets want either to benefit or to entertain or to say things that are at the same time pleasing and relevant to life] (*Ars poetica*, lines 333-334, quoted by Zarlino in *Istituzioni armoniche*, Book 3 (Venice 1558); see Strunk, 1960:229).
 8. For example, the commercial viability of any format radio relies totally on the assumption that community of musical taste is a reasonably reliable indicator of other collective characteristics, e.g. lifestyle, social status, economic status. Such assumptions have also theoretical and empirical underpinning in social science. 'Concerned by the Nazi and Stalinist use of radio and movies for state propaganda in the 1930s, a number of scholars turned to look at the impact of the mass media on society. Krenek, Blumer, Adorno and Lasswell were soon joined at Columbia University by Merton and Lazarsfeld who founded the Office of Radio Research which became the Bureau of Applied Social Research. They, with their students, did a whole set of studies on the media industries, their program content, and effects on their audiences.' ... 'Ironically, what began in the 1930s as a concern with totalitarian political propaganda became, by the 1950s, the intellectual fountainhead of "motivation research" — the prime tool of Madison Avenue advertisers' (Denisoff and Peterson, 1972:4-5). Format radio mushroomed in the USA in the 1950s, its income deriving from advertising and the target audience from community of musical taste.
 9. See explanations provided by Ghanaian musicologist Klevator Abo (pupil of Nketia) in Tagg (1993:57-58).

sal truths, such as the positions of stars, mathematical ratios, the cycle of seasons, etc., thereby creating the impression that the aesthetic values of their class and, consequently, the social system they ruled were as immutable or universal as the phenomena with which they were held to be linked.¹⁰ Of course, all the social systems just alluded to and the aesthetic values of their ruling classes have died out: they have been replaced by competing social systems and sets of values. The rise of capitalism and the bourgeois revolution in Europe, understood here as a lengthy historical process and not as an individual event, brought about one such substitution in that one set of irrational tenets about music (those of the medieval church) were replaced with a new but equally confused set of aesthetic values.¹¹ Indeed, the overridingly metaphysical character of romantic music aesthetics, especially that of German-speaking intellectuals of the time, is well documented to the extent that what was to become known as 'classical music' was frequently held to transcend the supposedly petty concerns of everyday existence.¹²

As part of this process, the official image of a composer became less that of a skilled worker or tradesman (e.g. Bach, early Haydn) providing a service for courts and churches and more that of the genius who, it was often assumed, relied on mystically uncontrollable artistic urges to produce 'works' (*œuvres*, *Werk*), not in order for him to make a living but for the edification and entertainment of the upper classes (e.g. late Haydn, Beethoven).¹³ These 'works' could then be managed by agents charging entrance fees to concerts or recitals and commodified by publishers in the form of sheet music sold to persons rich or famous enough to own a decent piano or to put on musical soirees in their parlour. In fact, although the European notion of a musical work (and of its concomitant evaluative charge) dates back at least as far as Tinctoris (1477),¹⁴ the practice of cataloguing a composer's works by opus number first became commonplace in the merchant city of Venice towards the middle of the seventeenth century.¹⁵ Indeed, as Fuller

10. See Anderson (1955), Crossley-Holland (1959), Hickman (1961), Ling (1974, 1983), Stauder (1995).

11. See Zoltai (1970), Knepler (1961), Ling (1986, 1989), Dahlhaus (1989), Le Huray & Day (1988), all *passim*.

12. See, for example, Tieck and Wackenroder (1799). The quintessence of nineteenth-century transcendentalism in relation to music exudes from the pen of De Lamennais who wrote: [music] ... 'lifts man above earthly things and imports him to a perpetual upward motion'... 'Music's goal is infinite beauty. Consequently it tends to represent the ideal model, the eternal essence of things, rather than things as they are. For, as Rousseau so correctly observed, "Outside the individual being existing on his own, there is nothing beautiful apart from that which is not"' (Hughes Félicité Robert de Lamennais *Ésquisse d'une philosophie* (1840), part II, book 8, chapters 1, 2 and Book 9, chapter 1; cited in Le Huray (1988: 351-355)). The Rousseau quote is not translated by Le Huray or Day, and understandably so, for its meaning is obscure: 'Hors le seul être existant par lui même, il n'y a rien de beau que ce qui n'est pas'.

13. See Dahlhaus (1989: 171-175).

14. Tinctoris mentions Ockeghem, Dunstable, Binchois, Dufay and several others 'Quorum omnium omnia fere opera tantam suavitudinem redolent ut',... 'non modo hominibus heroicisque verum etiam Diis immortalibus dignissima censenda sint'. See R Strohm's paper for this symposium, footnote 7. It was during a flourishing period for early mercantile capitalism in Northern France (Chartres) that Tinctoris worked before moving to the court of Naples.

15. The first composer whose instrumental works were systematically assigned opus numbers by the publisher was apparently Biagio Marini (1587-1663) (see *New Grove* headwords 'Opus' and 'Marini, Biagio').

(1995) points out, in a cautionary note to scholars assuming opus numbering from that period to be chronological in relation to composition or performance date:

[...] 'numbers were not applied until publication, and then often by the publisher, not the composer'... 'Where the same work appears with two publishers, it may have different numbers assigned to it'... Until 1800 opus numbers were more common in instrumental than in vocal music and they have rarely been applied to stage compositions at any period largely because numbering was related to publications, not to pieces.'

This information corroborates earlier observations about 'work' as a term denoting not the composer's actual labour but the product of that labour from an end-user viewpoint; it also underlines the notion of 'work' as commodity, here in the shape of sheet music, whose use value for the publisher resides in its potential for capital accumulation. But there is more: we also learn that opus numbers were assigned to instrumental music much more than to vocal music or to stage compositions. Now, it is most likely that the reasons for this practice were purely logistic, i.e. that one composer could produce any number of sonatas or concerti grossi, each requiring its own number for purposes of unique identification in a catalogue, but rarely more than one song and certainly no more than one stage work bearing the same name. However, in pursuing the historical values embedded in the concept of a musical work, it is worth recalling a passage from Hegel's *Ästhetik* (c.1810):

'What the layman (*Laie*) likes in music is the comprehensible expression of emotions and ideas, something substantial, its contents, for which reason he prefers accompanimental music (*Begleitmusik*); the connoisseur (*Kenner*), on the other hand, who has access to the inner musical relation of tones and instruments, likes instrumental music for its artistic use of harmonies and of melodic intricacy as well as for its changing forms; he can be quite fulfilled by the music on its own'.¹⁶

It would be foolish to suggest any direct causal link between the practice of numbering instrumental works and Hegel's valorisation of instrumental music, equally misled to try and date the first widespread evaluative use of the term 'work' to the early nineteenth century (see footnote 14). Clearly, Hegel's ideas about music are unlikely to derive from the commercial logistics of music publishing, much more likely to be influenced by ideas of the German *Aufklärung*. To paraphrase Ford (1991: 2-4, 31-37) somewhat drastically, this intellectual and artistic movement, with its *Empfindsamkeit*, its *Sturm und Drang* etc., differed considerably from the Enlightenment in France or England, not least because the socio-economic base of the German bourgeoisie in the eighteenth century under the rule of a multitude of quasi-absolute mini-potentates, was much weaker than that of the same class living in larger nation states, such relative disempowerment resulting in the need to concentrate much more on the expression of ostensibly pri-

16. Cited in Zoltai 1970: 260; original source Hegel *Ästhetik*, Berlin 1955. 'Der *Laie* liebt in der Musik vornehmlich den verständlichen Ausdruck von Empfindungen und Vorstellungen, das Stoffartige, der Inhalt, und wendet sich daher vorzugsweise der begleitenden Musik zu; der *Kenner* dagegen, dem die inneren musikalischen Verhältnisse der Töne und Instrumente zugänglich sind, liebt die Instrumentalmusik in ihrem kunstgemäßen Gebrauch der Harmonien und melodischen Verschlingungen und wechselden Formen; er wird durch die Musik selbst ganz ausgefüllt.' Please note that Hegel included vocal music under *Begleitmusik* (translated as 'accompanimental music').

vate or subjective rather than public or objective aspects of individual liberty. It is from such a perspective that the importance of music by German-speaking composers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Germanophone Europe and, indeed, across the world, starts to make sense. It is also from such a perspective (the ideological peculiarities of the *Aufklärung*) that the primacy of instrumental music, as advocated by Wackenroder or Tieck before Hegel and by A.B. Marx, Hanslick and a host of others after him, can be understood as more than the mere metaphysical meanderings of misguided romantics, however much it may often appear that way. When trying to pinpoint historical place and time for the linking the evaluative notion of 'musical work' with the aesthetics of absolute music, and when concluding that location to be German-speaking Europe in the early nineteenth century, we are therefore positing a conjuncture of ideas and events which (by definition as conjuncture in the Gramscian sense) cannot be explained in simple terms of linear causality: no, we are dealing with the conflux of a multitude of lengthy, sometimes contradictory historical processes in dialectical interaction which crystallise into a more easily perceptible whole at a particular historical time and place. We are in other words in agreement with Goehr (1992) that it is around 1800 and, it should be added, amongst intellectuals in German-speaking Europe, that the concept of 'work' (in the sense of musical end product or commodity) started to become more frequently identified with the superior aesthetic values that many keepers of the 'classical' seal have attributed to a certain kind of Central European instrumental music ever since. This point of conjuncture contains many other strands of relevance to the understanding of the term under discussion.

As Dahlhaus (1989:9-12) explains, the (then) new romantic aesthetic also prioritised 'texts' rather than 'performances', the latter becoming a function of the former rather than vice-versa, as had been the case previously and as is now the case with much music qualifiable as 'popular'. Two further interrelated problems are associated with this attachment of aesthetic value to the work concept.

Firstly, attempts to identify what ought to be grasped from the work as a 'text', even if its performance may have been a fiasco, resulted in categories like 'overriding formal concept' and 'thematic manipulation' being placed on a pedestal, while notions of affect were relegated to a much lower level and referred to in derogatory terms such as 'stage emotion' or 'histrionics'. The manner in which Beethoven symphonies were latterly provided with exegeses by such figures as A.B. Marx (1902) or Kretzschmar (1911, 1919) for the benefit of music students and devotees of cultivated concert music underlines the primacy of the work as the text of an *auteur* and the primacy of a supposedly abstract formal narrative within the work.¹⁷

Secondly, the tendency to accord pride of place to 'overriding formal concept' etc., just mentioned, and the need to find convincing arguments for such primacy in the establishment of an 'autonomous' aesthetics of music, led to a bias for musical parameters operational in the construction of form

17. 'Beethoven's symphonies [came to] represent inviolable musical "texts" whose meaning is to be deciphered with "exegetical" interpretations; a Rossini score, on the other hand [was regarded as] a mere recipe for performance, and it is the performance which forms the crucial aesthetic arbiter as the realisation of a draft rather than an exegesis of a text' (Dahlhaus, 1988:9). Note also that *Le petit Robert* takes pain to identify *œuvre* in relation to authorship: 'l'œuvre d'un écrivain, d'un artiste'.

and in thematic manipulation, i.e. to concentration on tonal aspects, particularly harmony, less on melodic profile or articulation,¹⁸ even less on periodicity, much less on rhythm or metre and practically nothing at all on timbre. An impressive arsenal of terms and theories developed, constituting a conceptual universe relevant to the complexities of harmony and formal construction but of minor relevance to music whose interest is primarily created through complexities found in other parameters of expression. Such one-sided understanding of musical complexity is also related to the evaluative concept of the musical work in that the parameters relevant to the aesthetics of 'absolute' music are notatable, reproducible in the commodity form of sheet music or written score, the others much less so, if at all.

'Work', value aesthetics and musical institutionalisation

The critical reader will surely be aware that the narrative of this paper has now entered the realms of music's institutionalisation upon our continent with its isles and peninsulae. Indeed, it is with this institutionalisation rather than at the crossroads of historical conjuncture described above that the main dangers of aesthetic evaluation in relation to the work concept really kick in. We are now no longer dealing with intellectual or artistic processes in the making, nor with the historical specificity nor logic or those processes but with the logistics of power. We are dealing with the petrification of composers in the form of those alabaster busts that classical buffs used to keep on top of well-polished pianos.¹⁹ The tragedy of this process is that the dynamic independence which instrumental music once possessed *in relation to* other, older, forms of music that were felt to be fettered by certain types of extramusical bonding was stripped of that historicity and, in a new state of sanctity, preserved in conservatories that by 1900 had successfully eradicated anything that might upset the canon, including the ornamentation and improvisation techniques that had once been part of the tradition whose champions the same conservatories professed to be.²⁰ This left the seemingly suprasocial 'music itself' deep frozen as sacrosanct works commodified as notation and recruiting a century-and-a-half of *étude-broiler* instrumentalists to perpetuate it.²¹ In short, we need to remember that the proportion of living to dead composers on the concert repertoire in France fell from 3 against 1 in the 1780s to 1 against 3 in the 1870s and that this process was aided rather than impaired by the hegemonic notion of a musical work.²² We also need to remember that over a hundred years later the classical canon still rules in concert halls as well in many an institution of higher education

18. Schumann saw fit to speak of melody as the 'battle cry of dilettantes' (Dahlhaus, 1989:12). See also the aversion of late nineteenth-century German music aesthetes towards the work of Verdi and compare with the thorough treatment of the topic by Stefani (1987) and Stefani & Marconi (1992).

19. To illustrate this point, Dahlhaus (1989:79) includes a photo of a Beethoven statue, the composer clad in a bourgeois coat folded like a Roman toga. Some of the alabaster busts were mass produced in off-white moulded rubber. I am the proud owner of one such hollow Mendelssohn which became one of my daughter's favourite bath time toys, due to its qualities of flotation and to its ability, when squeezed, to emit large bubbles under water.

20. Much about classical ornamentation practice has had to be rediscovered in recent years and improvising has only really been carried on in the classical tradition by church organists. It is also worth remembering that improvisation was one of the most important creative practices of the European classical music tradition: Landini, Sweelinck, Buxtehude, Bach, Händel, Mozart, Beethoven, Liszt and Franck were all renowned not only as composers but also as *improvisers*, one of Beethoven's deepest complaints about deafness being that it impaired his ability to improvise.

and research across Europe. It is in this light that the notion of a 'musical work' is highly problematic and that it seems too pretentious for application in the field of popular music scholarship.

Que faire?

I do not intend to raise other problems of terminology relating to musical 'events', 'performances', 'songs', 'pieces' or 'works' that are specific to our field of study because these issues are eloquently raised and discussed by other contributions to this symposium. There is, however, a pressing need to find some kind of solution to the terminological issue raised at the start of this paper and we are faced, I think, with two general alternatives.

The first, and in my view ideal, solution would be to trust (in the spirit of these market economy times!) to some sort of terminological self-regulation and to derive our definitions from established practice in the manner adopted by dictionaries. The advantage of this strategy is that terminology could be based on a wide consensus of what is perceived to be a 'work', a 'piece', a 'number', a 'performance', an 'event', etc. and that the proven validity of a term is in its general perception, function and usage. However, the disadvantage is obvious as it is crippling: such consensual practice has yet to have been established.

If *post factum* terminology, by its very nature descriptive of conceptual prac-

21. Thanks to Jan Ling (University of Göteborg) for the expression 'piano broiler', denoting the conservatory student who, neither improvising nor composing, practises scales, Czerny études and the canonic repertoire twelve hours a day in the hopes of emerging as an acclaimed virtuoso in a saturated classical music performance labour market. This may seem like a harsh caricature, but it is less severe than what Hindemith (1952: 218, ff.) had to say of the standard conservatory mentality. He wrote: 'If imagination is the agent that, over and above the acquirement of a reliable technique, ought to direct a future composer's instruction, we must accuse the majority of our teachers of a lack of this quality' ... 'Unacceptable to them is the irregular though sometimes successful way of the non-fitting teacher, but equally repulsive to them is the composer who without any pedagogic principle and regularity just lives an exemplary musical life which is more instructive to the students than all scholastic rules. It is the average teachers' unshakable belief in the stiff corset of schedules that is supposed to keep their pedagogic posture in shape, and they do not want to see that corsets are neither salutary nor fashionable. A superregulated bureaucracy, in our everyday life a mere ridiculous nuisance, grows into a disease with frequent fatal issue when applied to the arts and their instruction.'... 'The teaching of music theory, intended to acquaint the student with the composer's working material and its treatment, has in our teaching system been degraded to a tedious educational by-product, which is presented without any relation to practical music and is accepted listlessly and practised drearily. Students majoring in theory must, as a rule, be taken as the most deplorable products of our musical education. If you are totally ungifted for playing an instrument or singing, if you don't care for music history, even if you lack the least musical talent, there is still hope for you as a theory major. You just fill several quires of staff paper with dull harmonic progressions, sour counterpoints, and finally some old motets and fugues, and in due time you will receive your degree. By that time you have, of course learned how to pound simple harmony exercises on the piano, and that is entirely sufficient for your future job. What is such a fellow's future job? What else could he become but a theory teacher? For him the corset of scholastic regulations is not mere support: it is' ... 'the only way of keeping him upright. Hunting consecutive fifths is one of his favourite activities and on the fifteenth of November each year he reaches the six-four chord with his beginners' classes.' ... [It is absurd to believe] 'that rigid scholastic regulation by marks, credits, and all other frozen procedures of an outdated system can produce composers and theorists of a quality that our music-minded society has a right to demand.'

22. Ling (1989: 173) citing Weber (1977).

tice, is unfeasible, and if our need to find satisfactory nomenclature is at all important, then we have no choice but to opt for a prescriptive terminology, 'prescriptive' in the sense of coming up with adequate terms in advance of concepts in common use, whether those common terms subsequently coincide with those we suggest or not. The main problem with this strategy is similar to that of our ancestors who tried to formulate the aesthetic practices and ideals of instrumental music around the time of the bourgeois revolution in Europe. Just as their attempts, whether with historical hindsight we agree with them or not, to systematise specific aspects of (then) contemporary trends in music were later institutionalised, petrified, falsified, preserved and repeated like unreflected litanies for over a hundred years, we need to be acutely aware of our own processes of institutionalisation, of our own canons — however 'subcultural', 'emergent' or 'alternative' they may currently appear to be —, of our own subjectivities and relation to careers, income and success. We also need to bear in mind that music produced by speakers of English, often with paratexts using the English language, is now at least as widespread throughout the world as music in the Central-European tradition was just over a century ago, and that we are anglophone academics attempting to understand and explain the workings of such music...

Without such self reflection and historical awareness we could also end up like the rearguard of the old aesthetic canon, ethnocentrically claiming universal, absolute and other suprasocially transcendent values for one set of musical practices and ignoring the real conditions, functions, contexts and structural complexities of others. Personally, I would not like to contribute to terminology based on such sloppy thinking, nor to go down in history as the music-aesthetical equivalent of an ignorant Paisleyite clutching at the last straw of some imagined universality or superiority before God.

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