

ASPECTS OF ART LECTURE

Classical Music and the Subject of Modernity¹

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ON THE LAST day of 2006, *The Observer* published an article reporting Julian Lloyd Webber's plea that classical music be restored to its former privileged place in the classrooms of Britain. As he told *The Observer*, 'You have to be able to walk before you can run . . . Classical music is the grammar of music; it is the harmony, the melody, the notation . . . It is wrong for teachers to focus on "youth music" such as R&B instead of the likes of Mozart and Shostakovich . . . because classical music is the root of all other styles.'²

Much as we might sympathise with at least some of Lloyd Webber's general intentions, there is, I believe, a fundamental misunderstanding of classical music, if it is seen as 'the grammar of music' or 'the root of all other styles'. Much as one might hear some rock and pop superstars—from *The Beatles* to *Tenacious D*—as occasionally playing off, debasing, or even purposely contradicting classical practice, surely one cannot say that classical music stands at their root, even if we bear in mind that it had much to do, historically, with the development of notation and the

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¹I borrow part of my title from Anthony J. Cascardi's *The Subject of Modernity* (Cambridge, 1992), which has influenced some of the conceptual background for this study. It is impossible to list the number of readers and listeners who have helped me make this study less incoherent than it might otherwise have been, but my warmest thanks are due to Reinhard Strohm, who worked extremely hard to help me refine the final version.

²Anushka Asthana (education correspondent), 'Out with Classroom Rap, in with Mozart', *The Observer* (Sunday, 31 Dec. 2006).

tonal system. And, if we were to consider the history of world music, this too has seldom engaged with western classical music, even when it has had any exposure to it. Of course, it might well be that Lloyd Webber's point works far better in reverse: classical music has often absorbed many other forms of music into its vocabulary and performative gestures, somehow transforming them into a music that is quite distinct from the sum of its parts. In this way, classical music may have something of the quality of an enzyme—to borrow a metaphor from Stephen Greenblatt;³ perhaps it is a practice that absorbs many elements (including those indigenous to its own traditions), but somehow changes their meaning and content in ways that cannot necessarily be predicted in advance. Perhaps, then, in terms of the broader culture and histories of world musics, this function renders classical music more an exception than the norm to which all the others aspire. But would such exceptionality necessarily define it as a universal, transcending all other forms of music, or is it rather an exception in the sense of being a temporally (and culturally) bound deviation from the broader environment of world musics? This is one of the main questions I will be trying to address in this paper.

What about the voices opposed to Lloyd Webber in the same article from *The Observer*? Tina Redford, project manager at MusicLeader North West (an organisation addressing the professional development of music teachers), states that 'Music education and teaching methods have to modernise . . . A music leader in a classroom has to have an intrinsic sense of liking and valuing young people, listening to their ideas and responding to them. The only way to do that is to engage with the kind of music they want to make, not what others want to prescribe to them. We are trying to get away from a didactic teaching style and classical music is seen as didactic.'

Again, one may agree with some of the sentiments here, such as the desirability of a diversity of music within the educational environment. But there are surely some things here that will jar for anyone sceptical of the many recent applications of the word 'modernise'. This is a word that has become particularly prevalent since the 1980s, especially in the last decade or so (at least in the UK). Seldom does it now refer to such laudable aims as, for instance, the redressing of historic inequalities, the eradication of poverty, or even, necessarily, the sort of progress in science that

³ See, for instance, Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning—from More to Shakespeare* (Chicago and London, 1980), p. 230, or *Marvelous Possessions—the Wonder of the New World* (Oxford, 1991), p. 4.

unequivocally brings an improvement in the human condition. As Fredric Jameson has recently quoted from Oskar Lafontaine's memoir of his fate under Schroeder in Germany, "modernizers" today understand little other than the economic and social adaptation to the supposed constraints of the global market . . . Modernity has simply become a word for the conformity to such economic constraints—the question of how we want to live together and what kind of society we want has become a completely unmodern question and is no longer posed at all.' Indeed, as Jameson goes on to suggest, 'people like Lafontaine are unmodern because they are still modernists—it is modernism that is unmodern—"modernity" however in the newly approved positive sense is good because it is postmodern'.⁴

That Tina Redford is using the term 'modernise' in this 'postmodern' sense is perhaps substantiated by the implication that schoolchildren are essentially customers with their pre-given interests and desires. This is part of a trend in education towards an insipid sort of naturalism that sees each person or group as a ready-made particular, best left unscarred by any didactic universals. It further suggests that everything good about music is fundamentally natural, latent in all its dimensions within the human psyche. If there is some symmetry between the premodern and the postmodern, one might wonder whether this represents a 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.⁵ But 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 popular music, since it tends to efface the resistant or oppositional elements of any music whatsoever.

Given that what we call 'classical' music has seldom generated profits, even at the times of its greatest influence, it does not seem to fit so naturally into a world where, increasingly, everything must have its economic cost (again, the same doubtless applies to many other musics). Therefore, it is difficult to cultivate it as an art available to all, whether in terms of its audience or its creation, if it is not afforded some degree of privilege

⁴ Fredric Jameson, *A Singular Modernity—an Essay on the Ontology of the Present* (London and New York, 2002), pp. 9–10.

⁵ Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, translation by Robert M. Wallace of *Die Legitimität der Neuzeit*, 2nd rev. edn. 1976 (Cambridge, MA and London, 1983), esp. pp. 325–9.

in education and the allocation of public or charitable resources; it requires far more in terms of general effort and time than most other forms of music. If it is left to take its place, equally, beside the other forms of music, it follows that the personal choice to indulge in classical music becomes increasingly expensive. The claim that classical music is essentially elitist and therefore does not belong to the ordinary person, becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. In an environment where the only generally agreed index of value is that which can be quantified—this is the essential assumption lying behind John Carey's recent polemic, *What Good are the Arts?*⁶—there is no way that anyone can unarguably claim that classical music has any particular value at all, especially if the only way to find out is for us all to fill in an endless chain of questionnaires.

Most significantly—and this is perhaps the factor that has changed most over the last few decades—classical music culture has traditionally involved substantial amateur participation in music making, whether this be in large choral societies, amateur instrumental groups, or simply performance alone at home. Roland Barthes and Edward Said, as ardent amateur classical musicians, stood out as part of a dying breed of intellectuals who felt that their hobby developed their thought and perception in ways that could not otherwise have been acquired. But nowadays it is clear that many capable people—outstanding intellectuals included—get by perfectly well without any encounter with classical music, that the demise of civilisation so often predicated on the advent of Rock and Roll still seems yet to materialise and, most tellingly, that august journals such as the *London Review of Books* are more likely to review monographs about Bob Dylan than about Beethoven.

Does this all suggest that classical music essentially belongs only to the past? This will be another question underlying much of what I have to say, although at this stage my provisional answer is—frustratingly perhaps—yes and no. To begin with, we do need to guard against the assumption that all was somehow rosy for classical music over the last two centuries, that scores of respectable, decent citizens queued up in an orderly fashion for endless concerts and operas. Moreover, if classical music were indeed to have been so directly complicit in oiling the wheels of the industrialised west, we might indeed be correct in seeing it as of its time and now to be superseded by music more conducive to our age of diversity and equality. While classical music clearly has to carry the bur-

⁶ John Carey, *What Good are the Arts?* (London, 2005).

den of a few threads of respectability in its genealogy—don't we all?—its history is surely much more varied and ambiguous. Funding was never straightforward or even ubiquitous, nor was universal education in the art, whether for composers, performers or listeners. Indeed, many of the inherited traditions within classical music, at least in the UK and the US—such as its privileged place in education or the public provision of orchestras—were the product of a particular high modernist mindset that reached its peak only in the middle of the twentieth century.

The status of classical music in western society thus seems to be highly ambiguous. Indeed, perhaps one of the strengths its tradition has had lies in the way it sits between the establishment—confirming the status quo in sound, as it were—and that which opposes or subverts it, challenging its secure assumptions. If I understand it aright, it is an art that takes inherited orders as its starting point (thus its reliance on a particularly strong pedagogy of harmony and counterpoint), but can also act as a critique of our assumptions. What I am beginning to imply is that classical music is of a piece with the fundamental attitudes and reflexes of modernity itself. My argument will now need to proceed by trying to define what both classical music and modernity might be, in order ultimately to give more flesh to that 'yes and no' answer (to the question, does it belong only to the past?). After that, the question would be, does classical music still belong to us and do we still belong to modernity? Inevitably, much of this latter line of enquiry will have to remain sketchy here.

Is there anything substantial that can unequivocally identify classical music as more than merely an example of 'music' in the more general sense? After all, it is hard to dispute that there is much that classical music and most other forms of western music have in common in terms of melody, tonality, mode, rhythm and harmony. *Green Day's* 'Basketcase' is a song that in its harmonic frame is essentially identical to Pachelbel's canon. Whether or not this latter is a genuine example of the Lloyd-Webberish flow from the classical to the more popular, surely what is more significant is the fact that the similarities between these two pieces lie in the basics of the tonal system that is common to both genres. The bass line of Pachelbel's canon is one of the generic expansions of the perfect cadence (chords V–I), which is the most fundamental dynamic impulse of the tonal system. It is not surprising, then, that this crops up in a variety of music—indeed, the same pattern underlies 'Puff the Magic Dragon' as well. Given that much classical and virtually all popular and traditional music share common tonal underpinnings, it does not take much to turn a classical piece into one that sounds more popular, and to

‘classicise’ a popular one. More challenging is the fact that a piece of unadulterated classical music can take on an entirely different ethos if it is used in a way outside its customary home in the concert hall (or, increasingly, personal sound system): Vivaldi’s *Four Seasons* becomes a different, not always welcome, animal when a company switchboard puts us on hold for half an hour, and Wagner’s ‘Ride of the Valkeries’ is somehow translated into another language when heard as part of the sound track to *Apocalypse Now*.

Perhaps, then, the safest way of distinguishing classical music from competing musical languages is to suggest that it tends to display a combination of certain tendencies or attitudes rather than essential qualities: e.g. it tends towards more complexity than most surrounding music; it usually requires the cultivation of a specific, and somewhat abstract method—performance technique or compositional theory—before it can be created; it displays a degree of ‘written-ness’, that is, the development of the sort of sound structure that is sometimes best created and recorded in notation; it has a tendency to subsume diverse musical gestures within a broader, dialogic argument. But it is perhaps a mistake to identify it solely in terms of its specific musical substance. We surely have to take into account at least some of the attitudes and tendencies of the cultures that accompany it, and of which it may well also be a constitutive ingredient.⁷ These might include the ideal of listening to the music in dedicated spaces where the listener’s attention is as fully engaged as possible (and usually without direct physical participation); a culture in which the musical practices designated as classical are seen as beneficial in terms of education and continuing personal development. Again, a specific method is usually cultivated and practised, prior to the music-making proper. It also presupposes a society in which there is a sufficiently numerous paying public to finance both the space and the performances. In short, classical music is a particular historical construct that includes a menu of performative and receptive practices as much as specific compositional structures; it is an ensemble of things that came

⁷ This is part of the overriding argument of Lydia Goehr’s *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Arts* (Oxford, 1992), by which the ‘work concept’ dating from around 1800 is defined in terms of a ‘regulative concept’. Reinhard Strohm suggests, rather, that this concept originated in fifteenth-century humanism, in ‘Looking back at ourselves: the problem with the musical work-concept’, in Michael Talbot (ed.), *The Musical Work—Reality or Invention?*, Liverpool Music Symposium, 1 (Liverpool, 2000), pp. 128–52; and “‘Opus’: an aspect of the early history of the musical work-concept”, in Tomasz Jez (ed.), *Complexus effectuum musicologiae*, Studia Mirosława Perz septuagenario dedicata (Kraków, 2003), pp. 309–19.

together at a specific historical juncture and therefore could equally well dissolve if the historical conditions accompanying its emergence begin to dissipate.

When, then, might classical music actually have emerged? If it is essentially to be connected with concert-hall practice and the sense of moral self-improvement that the Germans termed 'Bildung', then its emergence would unequivocally have to belong to the late eighteenth century. This is the conclusion of Karol Berger's recent searching study of musical modernity, where he identifies the classical style specifically with a new form of human autonomy, distinct from the order of the cosmos; one in which God becomes a metaphor for harmony rather than, as before, harmony a metaphor for God.⁸ But, if this account is correct, then Pachelbel's *Canon*, Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* and the entire works of Bach and Handel would have to count as preclassical (as indeed they do in traditional historical categories of western music, where the term 'classical' tends to be more strictly reserved for the generation of Haydn to Beethoven). One way out of the problem of excluding music predating the 'classical' era (if indeed it is a problem) is somehow to 'retrofit' it as classical music. The obvious example of this is Bach's *Matthew Passion*, which was 'rediscovered' by Mendelssohn in 1829 and received by the German public as one of the greatest of all classical works, a sort of Old Testament to the New of Beethoven and his followers.

Another strategy might be to note how earlier music may have provided one or more of the vital strands that contributed to an eventual 'full-blown' culture of classical music: the development of an official 'canon' of music within the plainchant repertory; the successive emergence of modality, polyphony and rhythmic complexity; the implications of using notation. The place of music in the Middle Ages as one of the scholastic seven liberal arts (indeed on the more prestigious, theoretical side: the *quadrivium*) meant that music—as theory, at least—retained the aura of its Pythagorean links to the essential order of the cosmos. The eventual emergence of classical music might well be a sort of reoccupation of the prestigious position music had retained throughout the Middle Ages, both in terms of cosmic theory and its ubiquity in liturgy, court and civic life; this gave some of the music concerned a sense of canonic identity. Therefore, there is no obvious point at which 'early

⁸ Karol Berger, *Bach's Cycle, Mozart's Arrow—an Essay on the Origins of Musical Modernity* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 2007), see esp. pp. 14, 127.

music' ceased and 'classical music' began: as one model moved to the other, strands of the older and newer conceptions lay side by side.⁹

Nevertheless, it is striking that the roots of this continuum clearly lie in the Middle Ages. Most other western arts and intellectual traditions comprise a canon stretching back into antiquity. However much music was cultivated in the ancient world, even as something with striking affective powers, it never developed in any sense as a body of exemplary works; and, like the majority of world music, it seems to have been primarily monophonic. This therefore gives support to my claim that classical music (together with its direct historical precedents) is something exceptional even among the western arts in general, and is more directly connected with the history of modernity.

Some aspects of classical music culture may have been partly accidental, though. At the outset of the seventeenth century, music that was specifically geared towards human emotion and expression was very much in vogue; this was a product of a humanism that seemed to forsake the lofty cosmic ideals of the Platonist tradition in favour of a type of music that mimicked, stirred and stilled the human passions (thus following the alternative, Aristotelian, strand in the conceptions of music inherited from the ancients).¹⁰ This new idiom was soon to be heard in church, court and the newly emerging public venues, particularly those associated with opera. Yet music's direct connection with a specific text did not seem as secure as the reformers might initially have imagined: for, as new formalising procedures emerged from an interplay of traditional techniques of musical construction, dance patterns and newly expressive gestures, music seemed somehow capable of pursuing a life of its own, certainly paralleling human emotion and the implications of text, but not necessarily confining itself to these. In other words, 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 increas-

⁹ For Reinhard Strohm the most crucial root of musical modernity lies in the humanists' artificial derivation of musical ideas from ancient precedents, beginning in the fifteenth century; see 'The Humanist idea of a common revival of the arts, and its implications for music history', in Maciej Jablonski and Jan Steszewski (eds.), *Interdisciplinary Studies in Musicology*, Report from the Third Interdisciplinary Conference, Poznan (Poznan, Society for the Advancement of the Arts and Sciences, 1997), pp. 7–25; and 'Music, Humanism, and the idea of a "rebirth" of the Arts', in Reinhard Strohm and Bonnie J. Blackburn (eds.), *Music as Concept and Practice in the Late Middle Ages*, New Oxford History of Music, vol. 3/1 (Oxford, 2001), pp. 346–405.

¹⁰ Berger, *Bach's Cycle*, pp. 35–7.

ingly effective were precisely its independent aspects, its deviation and modification of supposed natural principles. With this potential for autonomy came the sense that musical works were individuals, following their own implications and potentials, and thus almost of a piece with the individuality of those who created them. Discrete musical works also began to adopt a series of internal laws, checks and balances that paralleled Hobbes's theory of the artificially 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.

Perhaps the most dynamic aspect of this developing musical culture was the tension between a sense of the universal and the particular: music could articulate, represent, or even actualise both a more conservative sense of an established order—that which corresponds to pedagogic method—and a radical sense of individuality. It could 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. If this thumbnail sketch is accurate, it describes a world of music utterly remote from that of the supposedly 'modernised' classroom, which mirrors the choices of its students or engages them in a range of practices cleansed of didactic, methodical, content. The idea of a music that has to do with human, spiritual or moral order and that—simultaneously—challenges, subverts or utterly opposes such orders, seems to be an ontological category entirely foreign to a conception of music that expresses the self with the apparent spontaneity of an unmediated bodily function.

Having sketched the way classical music developed within specific historical parameters, what do these same conditions tell us about the western modernity that I propose is of a piece with classical music? First, modernity itself is—in the wider course of humanity—the exception rather than the rule, however much we might today use terms like 'modern' and 'modernise' as normative categories of unlimited progress. The concept of modernity, which I am trying both to define and co-opt, might seem unorthodox to some in the field of musicology. This latter has tended to avoid the term as a broad historical category and generally associates the 'modern' with the specific stylistic category of 'modernism', as applied to progressive music from the late nineteenth century to the last decades of the twentieth. It may well be that musicologists have avoided engagement with 'modernity' and all the broader cultural issues that this implies because of the autonomy that western music seems to have acquired through that very modernity, and specifically through the

intensified ideology of modernism (thus something relatively recent); namely, a sense that music stands apart from all other considerations, that it is somehow more ‘true’ than the messy contingencies of politics, society and, specifically, cultural history.

Historians, on the other hand, have long used the broad categorisation by which the Ancient World is separated from the Modern World by the Middle Ages.¹¹ 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. It is thus tempting to divide it into three historical phrases, the first dating from the sixteenth century to the end of the eighteenth; the second, from the time of the French Revolution to the late nineteenth century; and the final phase characterised by modernism. By this model, the second phase would neatly coincide with what Karol Berger characterises as the inauguration of ‘our’ modernity, which is associated with the type of music traditionally termed ‘classical’ and ‘romantic’.¹² However, it is impossible to give the concept of modernity hard and fast chronological markers. While the Renaissance, with its restoration of a lost antiquity, could not be considered ‘modern’ in itself, its new oppositional mechanism—beating the immediate past with the stick of the ancient world—could well have been significant, since this was indeed something that was soon to be engaged against the very antiquity it previously envied. In other words, many aspects of modernity were inaugurated within earlier traditions, their eventual effects being entirely unanticipated when they first arose.

Much also depends on particular views or national traditions, which might prioritise different starting points: the Reformation, for instance,¹³ or Descartes’ concept of the self-conscious, reflexive ego, unmediated by

¹¹ Habermas traces this conception back to Hegel’s designation of the ‘new age’ as coinciding with the Renaissance, Reformation and the discovery of the new world, in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*; Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity—Twelve Lectures*, translated by Frederick Lawrence of *Der philosophische Diskurs der Moderne*, 1985 (Cambridge, MA and London, 1987), pp. 4–5.

¹² Berger, *Bach’s Cycle*, pp. 5, 14.

¹³ This is certainly true of German conceptions of modernity, beginning with Hegel and taken further in art criticism by Jacob Burckhardt. See also Jameson, *A Singular Modernity*, p. 31.

any light other than its own, or the political revolutions of the late eighteenth century. Some theoretical traditions usefully define modernity as primarily a qualitative category—as a sort of attitude—rather than as chronologically bounded, thus allowing that elements of it might well appear in periods long before the ‘Modern’ age.¹⁴ This also allows that there can be considerable strength in ‘non-modern’ traditions within the age when modernity seems to dominate. Indeed, it may well be that modernity is liveliest when it interacts with traditions that it is either trying to surpass or that, in turn, challenge it. This sort of modernity thus retains a dynamic quality that could become ossified when that which is modern finds no resistance. In all, the precise bounds of modernity are dependent on the sort of narrative one adopts to explain it, as if it contains the seeds of a story that can be unfolded in several ways.¹⁵

Well-worn theories associate modernity with various developments in the way the cosmos was believed to cohere: foremost is perhaps the concept of ‘disenchantment’ (Max Weber’s famous term), a retreat from the magical significance of the world and human practices, the ‘extirpation of animism’.¹⁶ With this 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.¹⁷ The most positive aspect to arise from this is the potential to see reality as that which is most actual and immanent, rather than as something that must always remain beyond our immediate experience; this might be what gives modernity its restless and ongoing energy.¹⁸ On the other hand, this development tends to drive a wedge between the natural world and human civilisation, to suggest that

¹⁴ The classic text for this approach to modernity (or rather that which is termed ‘Enlightenment’) is Theodor W. Adorno’s and Max Horkheimer’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (*Dialektik der Aufklärung*, 1944), translated by John Cumming (London and New York, 1997).

¹⁵ Jameson, *A Singular Modernity*, pp. 31–3. For Jameson, modernity is a narrative category rather than a concept as such, see p. 40.

¹⁶ Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 5.

¹⁷ Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, pp. 137–8, 209.

¹⁸ Harvie Ferguson, *Modernity and Subjectivity—Body, Soul, Spirit* (Charlottesville, VA and London, 2000), pp. 3, 66.

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 directly with the era of modernity as I am trying to outline it.¹⁹ 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. While the birth of the nation state is one of the most palpable inventions of modernity—deriving from its tendency to divide phenomena into manageable units (which are then rationally governed as efficiently as possible)—such units are invariably buoyed up by the reinvention of myths relating to their identity and cohesion. Again, modernity is almost always something which works in counterpoint with non-modern elements, the interaction often resulting in a change on both sides, an unpredictable synthesis that is itself rarely stable.

Roughly simultaneous with the beginnings of self-assertion in the Renaissance and Reformation was the breakdown of the medieval chivalric tradition and the complex customs and interactions of various classes, dominated by aristocratic and military etiquette. Cervantes' satire on the old order, *Don Quixote*, clearly demonstrates that this had irrevocably declined by the early seventeenth century.²⁰ What is less certain is what the disintegration in this order actually led to, although it clearly left a space for new ways of defining the self. Some commentators point to the steady breakdown of the assumption of resemblance and interconnectedness between all facets and dimensions of the world and universe (something also central to Cervantes' satire). This has been most famously theorised by Foucault in recent years, but is already clearly evident in Descartes' critique of inherited modes of thought: 'Whenever people notice some similarity between two things, they are in the habit of ascribing to the one what they find true of the other, even when the two are not in that respect similar.'²¹ The concept of resemblance has undergone many forms of

¹⁹ Hans Robert Jauss, 'Der literarische prozess des modernismus von Rousseau bis Adorno', in Reinhart Herzog and Reinhart Koselleck (eds.), *Epochenschwelle und Epochenbewusstsein* (Munich, 1987), pp. 243–68.

²⁰ Cascardi, *The Subject of Modernity*, pp. 72–124.

²¹ René Descartes, *Regulae ad Directionem Ingenii* (c.1628), trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, Dugald Murdoch, (Cambridge, 1985), Rule 1, p. 9. For the most ubiquitous study of these issues in recent times, see Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things—an Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (*Les Mots et les choses*, 1966), unattributed translation (New York, 1994). See

revival within even the strongest eras of modernity, most significantly in the various forms of musical Romanticism. Thus, again, modernity cannot be thought of as a monolithic movement, uninflected by survivals from the past and restorations in the present. Older elements often become spheres of knowledge and practice developed along their own trajectories. Moreover, the inevitable tensions between the various practices, ancient and modern, generate a sense of movement, whether positive and progressive or negative and alienating.

The breakdown in the system of resemblance during the seventeenth century may well have led to the increasing autonomy of different activities and practices, developed more for their own sense of coherence than for the way they might automatically relate to other things.²² The development of different activities independently of one another could, technically, be infinite and ongoing, thus engendering a sense of openness in terms of both reality and the human mind.²³ Something of the excitement at the opening of new horizons is captured by the print of the Pillars of Hercules on the title page of Francis Bacon's *Instauratio Magna* of 1620.²⁴ One gets the sense of the possibility of breaking out of an enchanted circle of interconnected elements and that, having chosen a direction in which to sail, the journey could be potentially endless. Pragmatically, separation could also be exercised in the name of efficiency, something most obviously demonstrated in the concept of division of labour necessary for industrialised societies. 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 of an approved pedagogical system. Modernity is thus frequently related to the development of instrumentalised rationality, the ability to

also Dalia Judovitz, *Subjectivity and Representation in Descartes: the Origins of Modernity* (Cambridge, 1988), p. 41. Judovitz is sceptical of reductionism on the part of both Foucault and Descartes, observing that writers from Plato to Montaigne were well aware of the way resemblance could produce illusion, and suggesting that Foucault merely relied on Descartes' opinion, which itself lacked a systematic critique of resemblance.

²² Foucault tends to associate this process with a second stage of modernity, beginning in the late eighteenth century, although others would see it as already seeded in Descartes' conception of the separation of subject and object. What links them is perhaps the notion of 'method', which overrides assumed connections between things. Jameson, *A Singular Modernity*, pp. 73–4, 86.

²³ Eric Voegelin, *Religion and the Rise of Modernity*, Collected Works, vol. 23; History of Political Ideas, vol. 5; ed. with an introd. by James L. Wisner (Columbia, MO and London, 1998), pp. 136–7.

²⁴ Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, p. 340.

adapt rational principles from one situation and apply them in another, thus progressing the material comforts of humankind. Max Weber's conception of equal temperament in music as an essential element of rationalisation is, of course, particularly telling here.²⁵

If, in one sense, modernity led, through the division of labour, to a sense of alienation, of being separated from some intuited organic whole, in another way it led to a consolidation of the individual. Given that reality has to be constructed, as much as it is duplicated or mirrored, the question of how it is represented from each individual viewpoint becomes more pressing, something obvious in the development of perspective in painting. The standard accounts of the development of the human subject within modernity tend to stress its sense of autonomy and its freedom from the constraint of the inherited orders into which it was born; yet this has to negotiate with other subjects in order to achieve a society that is both harmonious and progressive. This approach immediately risks a level of generalisation, though; after all, were there not recognisable human subjects before the mythical dividing line between modernity and premodernity? Is not the variety of subjecthood within modernity so extremely great as to render the concept of a 'modern subject' meaningless? Charles Taylor provides a useful starting point by linking 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 or 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).²⁶

Of course, something of this inward turn was evident in Augustine, but with him it was coupled with a sense of the moral sources as lying outside us, which are by definition good (like Plato's cosmos). Descartes' move was to make such moral sources internal to the individual.²⁷ This by no means excluded the divine origin of such internal moral sources, but made these independent of the order of the external world and cosmos. Thus the essence of modern ethical and political thought was to lie in the subject's sense of his or her own dignity, something to be enhanced and

²⁵ Max Weber, *The Rational and Social Foundations of Music* (*Die rationalen und sozialen Grundlagen der Musik*, appendix to *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, written 1911, published Tübingen, 1921), trans. and ed. Don Martindale, Johannes Riedel and Gertrude Neuwirth (Carbondale, IL, 1958).

²⁶ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self—the Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, 1989), p. 124

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 143.

developed over and above the disenchanting matter of the world. This was seeded in Descartes' conception of the subject and later developed much more overtly in the moral system of Kant.²⁸ This is not to say that the modern subject is to take a reckless attitude towards the external world as something that is merely the plaything of subjectivity, but rather that the orders of nature do not automatically determine our inner nature, that our rationality demands that we accept the outside world in relation to the evidence it offers, our models for understanding it always being subject to modification and improvement. Rationality is thus procedural rather than a substantive, ready-perfected vision of reality.

Before turning more directly to the way that music might relate to this sense of modern subjectivity, I will briefly propose another contextual element that arose at precisely the same time that classical music came into being. I suggest that the sort of music emerging with modernity acquired much of its apparent power precisely through doing musically what the modern novel was doing textually, in other words, as a sort of fiction that brought its own, new form of 'truth'. Catherine Gallagher relates the development of the 'true fiction' of the novel specifically to modernity, to that attitude of speculation and scepticism which led the reader of novels to entertain speculations about the believability of the characters and actions, to hypothesise about motives and outcomes. This sort of fictionality challenged the reader in gauging the likelihood of possible outcomes, something vital in negotiating new forms of commerce and enterprise.²⁹ As she perceptively puts it, ordinary people had to exercise the ability to suspend literal truth claims even in order to accept paper money. Thus, most of the developments associated with modernity required precisely the kind of 'cognitive provisionality' developed in the novel, a sort of fiction that was accepted and fostered for some sort of practical convenience. The characters of novelistic fiction are open, inviting the reader to bring them to life, internalised in a way that would be impossible were they to represent actual people. This sort of internalisation is not necessarily the direct identification that many critics of the bourgeois sensibility of the novel have assumed, but something much more open and flexible, enabling the reader to reflect on his or her own unfathomability in contrast to the knowability of the novelistic character. It is thus more an exercise in flexible self-creation than one of recognising

²⁸ Ibid., p. 152.

²⁹ Catherine Gallagher, 'The rise of fictionality', in Franco Moretti (ed.), *The Novel, Vol. 1: History, Geography, and Culture* (Princeton, NJ, 2006), pp. 336–63.

a completed model of oneself behind the text. Moreover, as Descartes tried to show in *Le Monde* (1664), the notion of fictional worlds becomes the prototype for the way we gain our knowledge of the real world, as if we were imitating God's creative capabilities, trying them out on a fictional world in order to adapt them to the real one. The representation of the world becomes a form of metaphor, a representation of what things ideally should look like, rather than something essentially of a piece with nature, as metonymy.³⁰

Having brought up the relation of music, not only to modernity as a broad cultural attitude but also to the novel, I am perhaps beginning to fall victim to a very common problem in recent music scholarship. This is the tendency to translate music into other phenomena, to reduce it to more concrete and readable models, particularly the verbal. However, having used such models as analogies in order to bring music out of its habitually autonomous territory, I now suggest that the type of music I am addressing is specifically important because it also helps to constitute modernity in the very process of reflecting it. Taking the novelistic analogy as a starting point, it is clear that most forms of music relate to narrative in the broadest way (that is, to a human sense of organisation in time, rather than necessarily to the specific implication of a storyline) and also to some sort of voice.³¹ Indeed, the latter can—as in novels—be quite multiple, but, given the way lines and gestures may be combined simultaneously in music, this can present multiple voices and associated viewpoints in a way that is entirely unique. While some forms of musical narrative can come closer to the novelistic than others—sonata form, for instance, in its relation to novels of the Enlightenment era—what is significant is that a narrative element is palpable in music precisely because it is performed in time. A 'modern' listener will try to piece together elements of narrative in any music which contains a plethora of events and gestures (even if the emerging temporality is relatively static or circular). Indeed, it is the implication of a stronger form of listenership—akin to the reader of a novel—that makes classical music so significant in the development of the modern subject. In hearing relationships both between figure and ground—if the music profiles a specific melodic

³⁰ Judovitz, *Subjectivity and Representation*, pp. 92–4, 189–90.

³¹ I use the term 'narrative' here in its broadest sense, as covering the way human understanding is organised in relation to time, thus implying that most music evokes a sort of temporality, even if this may be relatively cyclical or even static. This broader concept of narrative is theorised at exhaustive length by Paul Ricoeur, in *Time and Narrative*, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer, 3 vols. (Chicago, 1984, 1985, 1988).

line—and between events passing in time, one is not just testing out a possible world, as one might in reading a novel, but exercising a form of consciousness over time. And what is specifically significant about this form of consciousness is that it is purposely artificial, based on fictional musical events (rather than—say—an exercise in coordinating one's listening with an assumed harmony of the spheres or one that amplifies one's prior sense of identity).

Let me suggest some of the ways in which this form of artificial (i.e. constructed) consciousness is different from that of a premodern experience. One of the most perceptive accounts of experience of the self in time from the ancient world is Augustine's self-analysis of the recitation of a psalm—thus something that could well have been as much a musical experience as a verbal one.³² He overcomes the problem of the pinpoint subjectivity of the present (i.e. the fact that our consciousness at any particular moment is gone as soon as it comes) by noting the persistence of the mind's attention and how it is through this that what is expected passes into the memory. Before beginning a psalm, his faculty of expectation engages the whole, but, as he begins to recite, this future expectation pours through the consciousness into the memory (perhaps rather like the sand in an egg-timer). From the experience of reciting a psalm, Augustine abstracts the way we encounter both small durations and longer, including life itself and the whole history of mankind. Music, in this sort of consciousness, thus helps to attune us to a greater reality that is entirely pre-given and to which the state of attention aligns us. There are, of course, many other ways in which music can exercise our sense of being in ways that are not specifically 'modern' (by which I do not mean that they are by any means irrelevant to our own condition). Dance music can regulate a predictable flow of physical movements in space as well as time; music can also be used to express precisely the feelings we are experiencing at any particular time, the type of person we believe ourselves to be or the cultural group to which we belong or aspire to belong. None of these modes—and more—are necessarily to be excluded in the culture of classical music, as I have been outlining it. Where would it be, if it did not in some ways resonate with our emotions, confirm our beliefs or sometimes make us want to dance? Rather, I would suggest its crucial element is that of fictionality, of the implication of a form of consciousness that is *not* merely an amplification or confirmation of what is already given or expected.

³² St Augustine, *The Confessions*, book 11.28, trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin (Chicago, 1990), p. 125.

I do not have time to do anything more than sketch out what I mean by this relationship between classical music and modern subjectivity. My current work specifically addresses the Passions of Bach, which are significant in this regard since so much about the intention lying behind them is surely of a premodern mindset: texts concerning the universal sinfulness of mankind, as a state dating back to the beginnings of human time; or the sovereignty of Jesus as something wound into the very fabric of the world and all creation. Musically, too, the textures tend towards a consistent web of harmonic certainty, music that is so technically confident that it might be understood to reflect the very unseen structure of the cosmos that surrounds us and of which we are a symptom. Yet, in practice, the results can be entirely surprising. When Jesus speaks only three lines in the long second half of the *Matthew Passion*, we hardly notice his absence since the large number of emotionally charged arias, sung by personages constructed in our present rather than in the past of the story, together point to him in their varied ways. Following Hobbes, we might infer that the monarch is constructed through the very authority of his free subjects, who together 'authorise' him through their own intensified subjectivity. Moreover, in the arias themselves, there is a constant dialectic between the singers as personages entirely dependent on the material of the music that brings them to presence and their melodic independence from this web of musical connections.

It is obviously impossible to gauge what all listeners—from whatever period or background—are likely to experience when listening to Bach's Passion arias. All I can suggest is something of the possibilities of what a listener attuned to imperatives of modernity, as I have outlined them, might intuit (whether consciously or not). What we might be able to hear are abstract but emotionally charged personages emerging in the course of their ariosos and arias, as musical characters who are built up through conformity to a pattern, or deviation and repetition. Sometimes, these characters acquire a sense of themselves through a subject-object duality, by which we hear a quaking heart or flow of tears represented in the music, but viewed at a distance by the singer (since she might sing patterns independent of the pictorial figuration). This same subject-object relationship can work at the level of listening: we can observe the construction of a musical subjectivity in time as an object from our own position, or we can make the same musical event part of our own subjectivity as we map the vocal line onto our own consciousness. Following the musical events of a Bach aria can have a sense of directional narrative, although this is much more a feature of later music, as Berger has

shown.³³ But, in the way so much of the music is the manipulation and creative elaboration of an initial body of sound, there is almost the sense that our expectation is exercised through an increasing enlargement of our initial experience. The progress of the piece both confirms and expands an initial burst of musical consciousness, deepening our experience as if in concentric circles. This form of subjective consciousness is quite different from that performed by coordinating oneself with a given external reality, like Augustine's recitation of a psalm. Neither does it necessarily have a specific aim in mind, such as the anticipated resolution of opposing elements: it is a sort of exercise in consciousness in and for itself, born of the specifically Protestant imperative to develop personal responsibility for the cultivation of faith.

Of course, my study of Bach relates to what I would call the earlier stages of musical modernity. But similar issues would emerge for the study of 'classical music' proper and later types. The period of the later eighteenth century brings in the obvious linear features of sonata form, by which the free and open dialectical elements of earlier music are now directed towards a level of synthesis and resolution, precisely in the way many contemporary novels might be structured. Again, it is not the 'truth' of the individual elements that counts, but the way they relate, both combining and inflecting one another in a process we can both view objectively and map as subjects in time. This is precisely the type of music that can absorb other musical influences, which thereby become something entirely different within the course of the musical fiction. In typically 'modern' fashion, much music around the turn of the nineteenth century appropriates elements of folk music, dance, or even ancient church polyphony, stripping them of their supposedly natural 'truth' and constructing something that is a new type of fiction. This is equally true of music that aspires to be more naturalistic or popular, such as Italianate opera, all of which presupposes expert singers who have undergone rigorous institutional training in voice production and coloratura. As we map any of this music with our consciousness we might find ourselves facing particular moral quandaries. How are we to take it, for instance, when Mozart writes some of his most ravishingly beautiful music in his operas for characters we know are being flattering, dishonest or downright evil? Does the beauty of the music represent some sort of truth that belongs to us as listeners and which the singer does not directly

³³ Berger, *Bach's Cycle*, esp. pp. 45–129.

hear? Or does the music teach us that fiction is all we have, but it is up to us whether we use it for good or ill? The crucial thing is that this music might encourage us to ask questions, feel ambiguities, try out characters, ones that we might not otherwise have been able to experience.

Later music might radicalise the subject–object relations by rendering the music quite alien to our own feelings or sensations, an independent entity that is neither the continuous cosmos of premodernity nor the idealised bourgeois subject of the early nineteenth century. But there are countless ways in which this process might work; what they all have in common is the tendency for the music concerned not to take its elements at face value, as a form of truth continuous with the rest of existence. They all mostly presuppose a form of attention that is bounded by a time frame. Many within the modernist mindset tend to assume that supremely autonomous music's fictional truth is so refined and honest in its own integrity that it in fact outdoes any other kind of truth. It is supremely true because it is so distanced from the messy ambiguity of the rest of reality. With this in mind, it is easy to see how the later culture of classical music has so much contributed to its own sense of exceptionality—as something totally separate from the mundane—that the modernist outlook is thus assumed to apply to the whole of this art of modernity (as I claim for it). 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, has provided a healthy corrective. But, one could ask, might we not also have lost a sort of productive tension between different types of culture?

If we accept my thesis of classical music as not only reflective of modernity but also part of its very constitution, then we have to accept that it also brings with it both the positive and negative elements of that modernity. Human autonomy as something cultivated away from what seems to be naturally inherited is both wonderfully liberating and fulfilling, but also potentially oppressive and cruel. Artificiality enables us to escape naturalising prejudices and achieve things in technology, art and thought that we might never have believed possible. Yet it can also take us so far away from our necessary grounding in the world that we are in danger of destroying the environment that sustains our very existence. Universality, in the sense of bringing differences together and synthesising them into something new, can both surpass the best qualities of the contributing factions or intensify the worst. Moreover, it is very easy for a dominant faction to claim successful synthesis of all the others and exterminate anything that remains, the cultural equivalent of colonialism,

perhaps. I would claim that it is classical music and its supporting culture that expresses, represents and even constitutes all these things in musical time (with all the caveats that music cannot do these things ‘on its own’, without a certain range of preconceptions on the part of those receiving it). One can easily think of examples where classical music seemed to be co-opted as a force for the good—Beethoven’s evocation of the free human subject liberated from hierarchy or domination, the various forms of musical resistance to Stalinist oppression—or for the worst—the co-option of Beethoven, Wagner and Bruckner by the Nazi regime. In its historical use, then, classical music might be associated with as many dangers as advantages, although it belongs to a modernity that is—on balance—ultimately more successful than disastrous. If it were entirely a ‘safe’ sort of art, I doubt if it would have the importance that I am trying to attribute to it.

But, if we are to believe that classical music contains a specific kernel of cruelty—its origins in barbarism, as Horkheimer and Adorno would have said³⁴—this could hardly refer to specific aspects of musical content, since this would be to read a meaning into something that can really carry no stable meaning. Scepticism towards the habit of finding a literal meaning in anything from human culture is surely one of the greater achievements of modernity, but one that has frequently been eroded, even in some of the writing of self-proclaimed postmoderns. I suggest that it is rather the sense of mechanism that is the central issue: music in modernity combines elements, plays them off against one another within an artificial construction, and in such a way that the listener is invited, as never before, to intuit meanings, resonances and significance. This is music that seems positively to welcome a diversity of reception, since it can work in both rhetorical and dialectical relation to virtually anything we bring to it.³⁵ In a rhetorical mode of listening it will confirm our assumptions, beliefs or prejudices with remarkable conviction and certainty; in the dialectical, it will put everything we assumed into question, leading us to thoughts and sensations that could not necessarily have been predicted. If what is powerful about this music is essentially its mechanisms—its sense of ‘method’—in other words, its relation to the thought

³⁴ Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, pp. 111–12.

³⁵ I borrow this distinction between rhetoric and dialectic from Stanley Fish’s study of seventeenth-century English literature (which is itself grounded in Plato’s *Gorgias*). See Stanley E. Fish, *Self-Consuming Artifacts—the Experience of Seventeenth-Century Literature* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1972), see esp. pp. 1–29.

processes of modernity, then one can begin to understand how such mechanisms can be put to a variety of uses.

So what is the fate of this culture in our own time? First, it is impossible that the conditions of, say, the early nineteenth century can be recreated in such a way that the music has exactly the same, seemingly beneficial effects and cultural aura that it supposedly had then. The notion of 'restoration' is a sterile one if it is believed to take us back to exactly where we were once before. On the other hand, as I have argued elsewhere, the concept of restoration in the present is considerably more promising if it becomes a part of our own creative practice.³⁶ There is also a sense in which restoration of past practices, values or ideas helps to ground us in a feeling of historical continuum that replaces some of the roots that the more aggressive forms of post/modernism have tended to efface. Such roots might be entirely false or, for some people, entirely alien to their actual genealogy. But in many ways these roots are all we have, synthesised as they are in the wake of the alienation resulting from late modernity's purposive erasure of the past.³⁷ Putting this more positively, historical roots of this kind are there for all to share, particularly for those who have benefited directly from some of the inclusive processes of western modernity and can now claim a stake in a cultural inheritance to which they were formerly denied access. Thus, if there is any time to break with the truism that classical music is essentially a bourgeois phenomenon, now is that time.

Another point to consider is that what I have called 'classical music' has always had the tendency to absorb and transform gestures and vocabularies from other types of music. The dialectical nature of this music as a process heard in real time means that it has the potential to inflect whatever presuppositions we bring towards it in new stages of reception. In this sense, it is not necessarily worn out as historical conditions change, since its counterpoint of elements renders it always already something that is changing whenever it is sounded. This is one way in which the music is, in a sense, separable from the wider culture from which it derived, although it is impossible to predict what sort of effect it might have.

But there is surely no doubt that classical music has completed a certain trajectory in terms of the music created today (which is now often

³⁶ John Butt, *Playing with History—the Historical Approach to Musical Performance* (Cambridge, 2002), esp. pp. 165–217.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 158–63. See also Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC, 1991).

called merely ‘new music’, thus distinguishing it from popular or contemporary music, but also distancing it from the classical canon). Until, say, the 1960s there was still the sense that classical music had gone through a sense of progress stretching back to the late sixteenth century. The tonal harmonic language seemed to develop in ways that built upon conventions of the previous generation, but broke certain rules in order to push the musical language forwards, usually towards more complexity and expressive nuance. To Schoenberg and his circle, the development of tonality towards free and, later, structured atonality was an historical inevitability. If we admire certain composers—say Tchaikovsky and Elgar, or those in the Italian opera tradition from Rossini to Puccini—partly because they remained purposely resistant to certain aspects of musical progress, and thus quite ‘modern’ in their own oppositional way, today it is exceptionally difficult to tell whether a contemporary composer is progressive, conservative, reactionary or avant garde. Ironically, composers who adopt the technical complexities of 1950s high modernism, or indeed the aleatoric procedures of experimental music, might sound curiously old-fashioned, while some of those who write music in a simple, modal or neo-tonal style can seem somehow authentic to the present (particularly if they somehow cross over with the broader culture of popular music). Whether or not we take ‘authenticity to the present’ as the highest possible cultural accolade does of course betray the extent to which we are still wedded to the concept of a ‘classical’ art, but the essential point here is that ‘the progressive’ now seems to point more to the past than to the future.

With the demise of its specific trajectories, then, the culture of classical music has clearly changed; but this is something it shares with most of the arts. It is difficult to claim that this music is part of a culture that is still fully present in all its substantive aspects and unquestioningly to be justified as the most authentic cultural sound available. Indeed, the broader modern narrative of progress and historical destiny (as was evident from at least the end of the eighteenth century) is surely untenable as something that can simply continue uninterrupted, as if all we have to do is step back onto the pathways established by the Enlightenment. Now, creative restoration of past practices together with interaction with other forms of music are not merely options in ensuring the survival of classical music in any form, they are absolutely imperative. Perhaps, like some of the most unequivocal achievements of 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—without

some form of positive effort. Thus, contrary to the protestations of Julian Lloyd Webber, its universality is hardly self-evident and definitely not self-sufficient.

If classical music's integrative tendencies can still somehow operate in our time, even without its original sense of historical trajectory, we might also reconsider its traditional forms of resistance to the societal norm of its time (the same could be said of popular music, which is perhaps only in danger of becoming 'too popular' to preserve its counter-cultural credentials). Learning to play an instrument, applying this technique to a sometimes alien repertory, developing a coordination of the physical and the intellectual—all these are somewhat counter to much of the culture we currently experience, since none of these activities has an immediate purpose in our world of targets and measurable goals. But bringing up a new generation that works towards ends that cannot, by definition, be measured, might perhaps help us creatively to regenerate one particularly crucial strand of modernity: its striving for a world that continually challenges inherited prejudices and subverts the literalism of convenient, unthinking beliefs.