Towards a hermeneutics of the Composer

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Chapter 1: How to read the composer?

This research paper grew out of a preliminary investigation into labour value and remuneration of the contemporary composer in Australia. While aspects of that initial research appear as featured references in this essay, the objective of my inquiry became the commencement of a hermeneutics of the composer. I say commencement because my research opened up a field far richer and wider than could ever be summarized in an essay of this length. The turning point came in my discovery of writings by Miguel Ángel Quintana Paz, who in 2007 wrote:

> …it is necessary to break fresh ground and accept that any human plan to understand anything (world, gods or human beings) will be characterised by two unavoidable features, two features that define the historical dimension of human beings. The first one is that humans are finite, ephemeral, mortal beings; and the second one is that, being *transient*, they are conditioned and historically changed by the circumstances that they come to find in their *transit* through life, by their specific contexts. An individual and the different situations she may face throughout her life share a common feature: they cannot be understood in a plausible way without taking into account their historical dimension, their precariousness and their contextual conditioning.[1]

My inquiry then is undertaken in an acceptance of these features, in full light of my essential mortality, and in recognition of the context of my immanent contingency. The key words of transit and transient seem pertinent to any inquiry about music composition, since music is a transient art in that it cannot be experienced in summary, but rather unfolds over prescribed time, requiring the listener and performer alike to transit through the blueprint, or mold, that the composer has created.

Since the mid-twentieth century, composers have been increasingly called upon to

[1] **Quintana Paz, Miguel Angel** "On Hermeneutical Ethics and Education: 'Bach als Erzieher'" in Fukac, Jiri; Mizerova, Alena and Strakos, Vladimir (eds.): *Bach 2000: Music between Virgin Forest and Knowledge Society.* Santiago de Compostela (Spain): Compostela Group of Universities-Brno University of Technology-VUTIUM Press, 2002, pages 49-109.

explain or frame their work for audiences with apparatuses as diverse as heavily technical annotations, descriptive philosophical approaches and TV talk show style pre-concert presentations. Whether this arms the audience with the skill or confidence to comprehend the work presented remains unstudied. The presence of such apparatuses has become what Quintana Paz refers to as contextually conditional, and while different in their method and assumptions, each apparatus conspires to condition audiences into the belief that new music is essentially difficult. Being force fed the instruction manual does not inspire the listener to aurally inquire. As the transient parent of this transitional event, the composer by direct association falls under the spell of such conditioned preconceptions: difficult, technical, and unable to be judged/read. Adorno believed that one of the reasons for this perception of composers and new music was the loss of a generalisation around aesthetics, a strength and weakness of aesthetic avant-gardism. By this he meant that "although it is possible to judge the quality of each and every avant-garde work in the same boundaries and as conclusively as for a traditional work… it has no longer been possible to "learn" once and for all what is good music and what is bad."[2] Outside of specialists like composers "scarcely anyone is capable of this".

Musicology has for the most part been historical, anthropological, technical or analytic in its sub-disciplinary pursuits. While the musicology of authors such as Susan McClary, Georgina Born, Nicholas Cook have pursued more interdisciplinary critical approaches, heralded in the mid-1980's by Joseph Kerman's game-changing publication *Contemplating Music: Challenges to Musicology*, it still remains difficult to locate a space where the meaning of what it is *to be* a composer is being investigated. "I believe that this may be due to what Pierre Bourdieu referred to as a "charismatic ideology of 'creation'" which "directs the gaze towards the apparent producer and prevents us from asking who has created this 'creator' and the magic power of transubstantiation with which the 'creator' is endowed. "[3] Hermeneutics then, offers a chance "to clarify the

[2] **Adorno, Theodor** Hullot-Kentor, R. trans. *Philosophy of new music* University of Minnesota Press, 2006 p.11
[3] **Bourdieu, Pierre** *Rules of Art*: *Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, Standford University Press, 1996 p. 167

conditions in which understanding takes place"[4] because “anything acquires meaning if it is connected with, or indicates, or refers to, something beyond itself, so that its full nature points to and is revealed in that connection.” [5]

What then, aside from the music they produce – the blue-print brought to life by the interpretation of others - is the composer connected to? While accounts from my lived experience as a composer have some value, certainly they are also profoundly subjective and limited by their very transiency.

My inquiry commences in the general absence of hermeneutical studies of the figure of the composer. It has therefore been necessary to borrow models from other disciplines such as history, economics, film and philosophy in order to break through the aforementioned charismatic ideology that Pierre Bourdieu identified. My current research has yet to lead me to discover any behavioral studies of composers, nor authors investigating what sort of cultural preconditions might influence or deter individuals into vocational composition. I found an abundance of biographical literature on historical and living composers, and a mass of musicological inquiry concerned with technical analyses of the produce of composers. Many celebrated composers have written anecdotally on the philosophy of aesthetics from their perspective as practitioners. But, at first survey I found very little written about the way in which composers are socially represented and culturally portrayed. Certain key authors outside of music have therefore provided me with an operational matrix for my inquiry namely Michel Foucault, Giorgio Agamben, and Jacques Attali. The economic studies of Frederic M. Scherer, those of David Throsby and Anita Zednik, and Hans Abbing, have ensured my inquiry remains connected to the fiscal plane. At times I have used the terms musician and composer with free interchange, but always with technical understanding that while all composer are musicians, not all musicians are composers. Musicians and composers share a common *paraskeuē* in that our ongoing musical

[4] **Gadamer, Hans-Georg** *Truth and Method,* Sheed and Ward, London, 1975, p.263
[5] **Cohen, M.R.** *A Preface to Logic* Routledge, New York, 1946, p.47

training – our "practice" – is intended to prepare each of us for a "future of unforeseen events whose general nature may be familiar to us, but which we cannot know whether and when they will occur."[6] My inquiry serves my own interests as a professional composer whose "survival…is linked to the existence of a reliable intersubjectivity of mutual understanding."[7]

The title of this essay pays homage to Michel Foucault's lectures at the Collège de France, transcribed and published as "The Hermeneutics of the Subject". To speak of a hermeneutics of the composer is to also borrow, in a sense, the strategies at play in these lectures, which signalled a specific shift in Foucault's work. The lectures launched a deeper inquiry into Foucault's analysis of the idea of "self", where he mapped the subject figure into the often paradoxical interstices between Truth and Subjectivity. I believe that Foucault routes his inquiry between *On the Genealogy of Morals* (adopting the primary tools of Nietzsche's systemic investigation of inherited and therefore changeable power constructs) and Heidegger's *Being and Time*, which challenged Cartesian thinking on existence through ancient (Greek) thought practices.

> It is a general feature, a fundamental principle that the subject as such, as he is given to himself, is not capable of the truth…unless he carries out or performs a number of operations on himself, a number of transformations and modifications that will make him capable of truth.[8]

If the subject is incapable of truth in his or her most essential natural state, that is without a series of socially constructed or regulated behavioural accords, then pursuing an inquiry into the identity of a subject can only be undertaken through a laying open of ideas of identity, found, Foucault suggests, in these modifying and transformative processes.

This sentiment somewhat echoes the earlier citation from Maurice Cohen's *A Preface to*

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[6] **Foucault, Michel** *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France 1981-82*, Burchell, Graham trans., Picador, New York 2005 p. 320

[7] **Habermas, Jürgen** (trans. Jeremy J. Shapiro) *Knowledge and Human Interests*. Polity Press, Cambridge, England, 1987) p.173

[8] **Foucault, Michel** *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* p.190

Logic. The impulse then becomes an attempt to trace where possible the origin of processes that permit the subject's truth-formation, in order to expose power relations that are masked by ritual repetition. The Nietzsche-inspired Foucault stratagem of applying genealogy as a method to unlock the origins of social conditioning, is an attempt to dissolve the solid nature of these inherited power structures and restore the liquid state of their immanent potentiality. It is a shared feature of these historico-philosophers to not displace one universalising theory with another, but rather open up a pluralist political field that particularly with Foucault seeks to empower and activate the reader. It is precisely this absence of a desire to reveal an alternate universalising "truth" that underpins this research paper, and which naturally turns it towards the richer open field of interpretation theory. Unable to develop a full hermeneutics within the word limits of this paper, I have chosen money and myth as the orbits around which two readings of the composer might take place. There are two basic halves to this paper, which like two sides of the same coin, are named accordingly, *"Heads" – Money and the composer*, and *"Tails" – Myth and the composer*. Loosely these domains are bound together by the generalized opposition of the real (fiscal) and the virtual (symbolic). As an attempt to negate a binary opposition I have introduced an intermezzo section between the two larger chapters that briefly examines the idea of portrayal of the composer – where reality and virtuality fuse. It serves this paper as any good intermezzo should: light relief between weightier inquiry. The dominant figure of Agamben's influence, the *homo sacer* became a returning motif in my research, so some attention is given to bringing it into circulation as threshold inquiry that stands in the place of a conclusion.

Aside from the literature already referred to, I have made effort to provide a context to any significant citation at the point of its use. As previously stated this inquiry seeks to identify a set of cultural conditions that orbit a subject figure in order to create discursive insight. Hermeneutics will be the principal apparatus with which I will compare and contrast some of the ways the figure of the composer is set in or played out in various texts and guises. While hermeneutics refers most broadly to the

interpretation of a text, or in fact of a set of texts, it has never been solely dedicated to purely linguistic parameters. Implicitly intertextual, hermeneutics is the earliest form of discourse analysis. Further, for the purposes of this research, I have chosen to return to a more archaic sense of the term hermeneutics – not withstanding impulsive drifts into the gifts of modern interpretation theory, but rather to re-assert the core pursuit of hermeneutics which in simplest guise asks "How to read?" and in precise application here, *How to read the composer?*

Chapter 2 "HEADS" – Money and the Composer

"Even though artists and art lovers tend to disapprove of the monetary connection in art, this connection is undeniably present ...(yet)… association of the art with non-commercial values has grown in importance over the last one hundred years. The economy is denied. Art products are sold in the market, but often in a veiled manner. Art and artists are highly esteemed. This kind of status could never have existed if the arts had embraced commerce instead."

Hans Abbing, from *Why Are Artists Poor? The Exceptional Economy of the Arts*

The purpose of this chapter is to outline some economic dimensions that inform how the composer is read. This section will use recent contemporary Australian statistical data as its primary source and deploy other texts less bound by time and geography to shape and deepen a likeness of the composer in monetary and labour value terms.

It is useful to focus on Australia as it provides a natural delimiting focus for this research paper by being the site from which this inquiry emerges, and to which therefore relevant lived experience might also provide useful reference. It is also relevant to focus on Australia because it is one of the only Western economies not to fall into recession since the 2008 Global Financial Crisis. As such Australian figures are more immune to the irregularities that are common in the short-term austerity policies currently in use by economies attempting to counter recession. In short, it provides as normal a contemporary financial portrait as possible. An analysis of the earnings of composers and their place in the broader ecology of the Arts and the average Australian income will provide comparative data with which to read the composer as a socio-economic creature. In addition, it will provide a concrete base on which to test case more abstract readings on the value of the figure of the composer because "economic analysis can illuminate matters in another way. Economic incentives affect the specific challenges to which individuals, creative or not, allocate their time."[1] Or

[1] **Frederic M. Scherer**, *Quarter Notes and Bank Notes: The Economics of Music Composition in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*. Princeton University Press, 2003

to slightly repurpose Habermas: "Understanding first arises in the interests of practical life."[2]

A numbers game

In 2010 cultural economists David Throsby and Anita Zednik published their analysis of a Newspoll conducted survey of professional Australian artists, *Do you really expect to get paid?.* The fifth of its kind in thirty years; a preliminary limited survey in 1983 was followed by three increasingly complex and comprehensive studies in 1987 and 2002. The publication in focus emerged from a 2009 survey. In their executive summary Throsby and Zednik observe that since the first study, "artists have not shared in the rising trend in real (inflation-adjusted) incomes that have been experienced across the workforce at large"[3] as Table 1 below plainly demonstrates. Excluding those artists who earn in excess of $250,000, which the authors separate in order to demonstrate the minor impact of these ultra high earners, the mean (average) annual Australian artist income in 2009 was $41,200.

Table 1 Comparison of mean and median incomes between different samples ($) (Table 26 from Throsby and Zednik's *Do you really expect to get paid?*)

	Means		Median	
	Full Sample	Sample excl. outliers (a)	Full Sample	Sample excl. outliers (a)
Creative income	21,600	18,900	7,000	7,000
Total arts income	30,500	27,700	17,400	17,300
Total income	47,400	41,200	36,100	35,900

(a) excludes artists whose total income exceeded $250,000 in the financial year 07/08.

Throsby and Zednik stress that it is of vital importance to recognise that the figures in this table are arrived at through combining earnings gained through work undertaken in the principal discipline of an artist's practice *as well as* their earnings in an arts-related role, that is a role within the sector but not their practice, and perhaps not even within the subsector of their discipline. Compared to the 2009 annual average Australian income of

[2] **Habermas, Jürgen** (trans. Jeremy J. Shapiro) *Knowledge and Human Interests*. Polity Press, Cambridge, England, 1987) p.173

[3] **Throsby, David and Zednik, Anita** *Do you really expect to get paid? An economic study of professional artists in Australia*, Australia Council for the Arts, 2010, p.12

$63,611.16 [4], artists as a collective workforce sit 35% lower than the average Australian. Throsby and Zednik foreground the abject financial position of artists in Australia that these periodic surveys demonstrate when they write:

> Even when other arts-related earnings and non-arts income are added in, the gross incomes of artists, from which they must finance their professional practice as well as the demands of everyday living, are substantially less than managerial and professional earnings. Indeed their total incomes on average are lower than those of all occupational groups, including non-professional and blue-collar occupations.[5]

The median figure (the *numerical* mid-point across the sample) for combined incomes sits as low as $35,900. In 2009 the line of poverty in Australia was $31,570 per annum[#]. Table 2 below shows from the same period, the yearly income required to meet basic living costs. It unceremoniously shows that all artists, with perhaps the exception of Community Cultural Development workers, orbit the line of poverty. In fact, composers, actors and craft practitioners median income sits below it, indicating that more than half the composers surveyed earned below the Australian poverty line.

Table 2 Mean and median minimum yearly income required to meet basic living cost (a) ($)

(Table 30 from Throsby and Zednik's *Do you really expect to get paid?*)

	Writers	Visual artists	Craft practitioners	Actors	Dancers	Musicians	Composers	Community c. d. w.	All artists (b)
Mean	33,900	33,000	29,300	36,500	35,600	38,000	38,600	44,700	35,500
Median	30,000	30,000	27,000	31,200	34,600	35,000	31,200	42,800	31,200

(a) excludes outliers, i.e. artists with minimum yearly income required to meet basic living cost above $150,000.
(b) numbers for all artists are weighted to represent Australia's artist population.

Excluding gifts, partner income and other forms of concession, as individual workers, all artists in the survey turn a low income. In this sense the composer is subject to the broader conditions of the Arts, and is not that different from other artists. Relevant to my inquiry though is Table 3 that shows how composers and musicians demonstrated a better ability to meet their minimum income requirements with supplementary incomes than all other practitioners. Although admittedly at the figure of 63% this leaves a significant many who

[4] Document 6302.0 Average Weekly Earnings, November 2009 Australian Bureau of Statistics, accessed http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/subscriber.nsf/0/0A1E617F3026B177CA2576D40012500D/$File/63020_nov%202009.pdf on April 4, 2012

[5] **Throsby and Zednik,** ibid, p.9

[#] This figure is arrived at on averaging the many complex figures that the Australian Bureau of Statistics looks at in terms of marital status and number of dependents and whether or not the head of house is working or not.

cannot. This does not necessarily mean that they earned more but rather that they managed their finances more effectively than other artists.

Table 3 - Proportion of artists meeting their minimum income requirement with different types of income (a) (%)

(Table 31 from Throsby and Zednik's *Do you really expect to get paid?*)

	Writers	Visual artists	Craft practi-tioners	Actors	Dancers	Musicians	Composers	Community cultural develop. workers	All artists (b)
Creative income	12	17	20	28	22	24	20	27	21
Total arts income	26	28	35	33	38	43	38	50	34
Total income	53	48	49	57	50	65	63	54	55

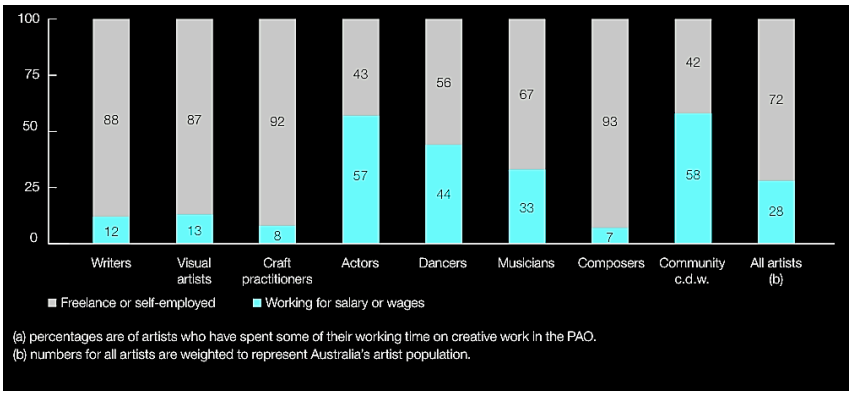
(a) excludes artists whose total income exceeded $250,000 in the financial year 07/08 or whose minimum yearly income required meet basic living cost exceeded $150,000.

(b) numbers for all artists are weighted to represent Australia's artists' population.

Table 3 also shows that composers (and writers and painters) spend more time earning money in related areas than in direct practice, which was, for the most part in administrative or publications roles. It must be pointed that this data might include composing and arranging for film, TV or advertising which are not classed by this survey as principal practice activities.

Figure 1 Employment status in principal artistic occupation (a) (%)

(Figure 17 from Throsby and Zednik's *Do you really expect to get paid?*)



The low number of salaried or wage earning composers in Figure 1 may be due to the fact that the specialised composer emerged as a discreet profession in the mid-twentieth century. Also many composer-performer, composer-conductor, or practitioners who are

active in all three areas still very much exist, and it is unclear in the Throsby/Zednik surveys how these interrelated activities are accounted for. Regardless, those who move between those roles, even at the top end of the market, are still free-lance. Further, one can speculate that a kind of existential collectivism may have imbued the figure, the station, and ultimately the body of each composer to remain disciplined within the little money they have, as ultimately they are on their own.

Self-employed or unemployable?

What we learn from Figure 1 is that although composers do represent the largest group of freelance of self-employed practitioners, they conversely represent those who work least for regular salary or income. While this is in music the very definition of free-lance activity, their extremely low percentage ranking is also indicative of the scarcity of salaried work for this vocation. As is widely acknowledged, the musician/composer undertook a long a complex professional emancipation across the 18th and 19th century from the European aristocratic and church systems to a broader middle class public. Through my own experience I have observed the resilience of the popular myth that the rightful, or most natural place for composers remains court or church. This image of an almost feudal labour identity seems to stick to the composer despite the long emancipation struggles that were simultaneous with (sometimes ahead of) a long series of political-economic triggers that included unionisation, wars, colonialism, publishing and industrialisation. These shifting sands of music's status and fortunes can be found meticulously mapped in Jacques Attali's landmark 1977 publication *Bruits*. Translated in 1985 as *Noise: A Political Economy of Music* it stands as the only overview of Western music read through the filters of its titular disciplines. As Attali himself describes it, *Noise* is an "attempt to trace the history of (music and society) relations with the world of production, exchange and desire: the slow degradation of use into exchange, of representation into repetition; and the prophecy, announced by today's music, of the potential for a new political and cultural order."[6] Since the publication of *Noise* survey show us, composers have certainly experienced the slow

[6] **Attali, Jacques** *Noise: A Political Economy of Music* , Massumi. B. trans., University of Minnesota Press 1985, p.19

degradation Attali describes if only in being locked out from the wealth benefits experienced by the rest of society as cited by Throsby and Zednik earlier this chapter. It is through the rarity of the Attali that we find in one document a long yield arc of the vocational composer. Attali commences by stating that until the end of the thirteenth century the musician was a vagabond, an outsider, at which time they "became a domestic."[7] While Attali dreamed of a new political and cultural order, the Throsby and Zednik analysis suggests more of a radical return, a neo-feudalism for composers in terms of money and power, something Jean Baudrillard believed was the consequence of "a reversive effect of modernity"[8].

While still often remarkable, Attali's argument is dated insofar as the copyright and royalty remuneration systems that dominated the 20th century, that is recording companies and publishers no longer have the same traction or power. Their reign ended with the "jolting upheaval…the music industry experienced when new technologies hit it." [9] Attali's belief that market demand will determine income certainly worked for some sorts of music, during a discreet period of history. In light of the emergence of file sharing cultures that announced the digital revolution this position can no longer be reasonably defended. However, the greatest legacy of *Noise*, I believe is that the French economist and former Mitterand advisor identified and articulated for the first time the problematic nature of the activity of composition. Within a Marxist tradition, Attali observed that the labour activity of the composer - the actual writing of music - sat outside the labour chain of capitalism. Attali saw the composer's labour akin to the artisanal frame of *molder*: literally someone who creates forms. He argued that as such, the labour of composition was consequently placed outside of the capital chain, beyond standardising labour value calculators, with composers drawing their…

> remuneration (as) a kind of *rent*. A strange situation: a category of workers has thus succeeded in preserving ownership of their labor, in avoiding the position of wage

[7] **Attali, J,** *Noise*.p.14
[8] **Baudrillard, Jean** (Turner, C trans.)*The illusion of the End* Stanford University Press 1994 p.19
[9] **Béhar,P. Colombani, L., Krishnan, S.** Publishing in the digital era, accessed at http://www.bain.com/bainweb/PDFs/cms/Public/BB_Publishing_in_the_digital_era.pdf

> earner, in being remunerated as a rentier who dips into the surplus-value produced by wage earners who valorize their labor in the commodity cycle.[10]

Further, Attali suggests the significance of this is that the rentier's " income is independent of the quantity of his labor he provides. Instead it depends on the demand for that labor. He produces the mold from which an industry is built…(and that) *the specific remuneration of the composer has largely blocked the control of music in capital.*"[11] These italics (Attali's own) present a questionable argument even at the time Attali wrote it. In the ongoing plight of the global recording and music publishing industry, one can retrospectively see if only through its "collapse…a cultural loss of such magnitude equivalent to the drowning of Venice." [12] Attali's point though is the identification of the labour of the composer as being in a state of exception, which is immanent of Hans Abbing's comments about the Arts in general. Attali is equally as interested in music as a political metaphor, a sort of philosopho-cultural stock market: that hidden in the role and labour of music you can read prophecy of future social structures. If this is accepted, this music a prophecy concept then we are headed for a brave new world indeed. Based on the Throsby/Zednik statistics composers worked a minimum 45 hours a week in combined activities including work outside of the their principal practice (the highest labour of all other artists) and despite 80 percent of professional composers being able to demonstrate significant public outcomes of their work (13 percent ahead of any other category of arts worker), 100 percent of composers had claimed unemployment benefit at some time between 2004-2009.

I'm doing fine on my own thanks

Two final salient aspects that have application in this inquiry emerge out of the many others graphs and figures of *Do you really expect to get paid?* The first is that musicians and composers (along with actors) represent the largest group of artists to *not* apply for funding and support. Concurrently, of those that did apply, the same three groups returned the smallest success rate across all applicants. As Throsby and Zednik never speculate, there is

[10] **Attali,** *Noise*, p.40
[11] **Ibid**, p.40 (his italics)
[12] **Lebrecht, Norman** *The Life and Death of Classical Music Recordings* Anchor Books, London, 2007

no indication as to whether or not more members of these groups applying would affect the proportion of successful applicants. Secondly, of all other groups of artist's surveyed, an extraordinary percentage – 88% - of composers belong to a copyright collecting agency. Musicians followed second with 45% and writers at 43%. Importantly, 72% of all composers surveyed felt that the current provision for copyright was adequate, which mirrors perhaps that the greater portion of composers who *were* members of a copyright collecting agency had received a payment that financial year. In 2009-10 The Australian Performing Rights Association (APRA) declared a royalties payment schedule to its more than 66,000 members of $151,341,000.[13] This calculates an average royalty return of $3000 per annum per member if evenly distributed, which is presumably not the case. Nor is APRA an agency exclusively dedicated to "art" composers but also represents the commercial royalty interests of film, TV and advertising composers, as well as songwriters and even lyricists.

Finally, in 2009-10 the Federal Australian government spent two million dollars on Music Composition and Publishing, compared with the 600,000 dollars gifted by only four of the six states and two territories. [14] If we include an estimated at-best additional $100,000 for local government subsidy to this specific vocation the combined total spent on composition (and music publishing), would be 2.7 million dollars. With the total Arts sector combined all-levels of government expenditure of 6.6 billion dollars, composition (and yes, music publishing, just to underline the point) claims a mere 0.045%. To add even further scale, with a 2010 Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of 1,238 billion dollars in 2010[15], Australia spent 0.005% of GDP on the entire Arts including film, radio and television and heritage, and a microscopic 0.0000021% on music composition (and publishing).

[13] *APRA Financial Report 2010*, at http://www.apra-amcos.com.au/About/CorporateDocs.aspx accessed on 28 January 2012

[14] *Cultural Funding by Government, Australia, 2009-10*, Australian Bureau of Statistics, accessed January 30 at http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/4183.0

[15] *Australia Fact Sheet – Economy and GDP 2009*, at http://www.dfat.gov.au accessed January 14, 2012

Tiny fish in a big ocean

What then, can we draw from this numerical and statistical data that might commence our reading of the composer? To start with, in economic terms the composer is an amoeba, tiny and at the very bottom of the economic food chain. The composer plays a very minor role in the cultural life of the nation if based purely on income status. The composer lives like most artists in Australia never far from the bread line, but is comparatively more capable of managing their limited resources around their quotidian needs than other artists. The composer is almost exclusively employed as a free-lance artist, who regularly supplements their income with casual work that often has fewer benefits than regular employees. The composer is largely satisfied to be a member of royalty agencies that fail to return anything of financial significance. Despite their precarious financial condition, composers are less likely to seek funding support than others artists, and when they do, they fare worst. The composer overall presents as a financially paradoxical creature.

Merciless Economy

Hans Abbing writes that like all artists, composers are caught in a state of economic exception, going so far as to claim that the Arts as "merciless" economy. Merciless insofar as the sector entirely financially and psychologically exploits its workers in ways few other professional sectors do, or are by permitted to by law.

> The clearest sign of a merciless economy in an objective sense is low average income and the fact that poverty is structural. Some people can earn extremely high incomes and yet average income is much lower than in comparable professions. Income is often so low that it doesn't even cover the costs of the profession, like instruments, materials and studio rent. Average incomes are not only low; they are virtually fixed.[16]

He goes on to speak of the implicit promise that is made to young artists, a promise that remains an elusive, ephemeral pursuit of recognition, based squarely on the need to sacrifice in the short term for the promise of later reward, which, Abbing plainly contests, is not guaranteed and almost never financial.

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[16] **Hans Abbing**, *Why Are Artists Poor? The Exceptional Economy of the Arts,* Amsterdam University Press, 2002 p284-5

> The hardships of financial poverty may be compensated by non-monetary rewards - such as private satisfaction and status. Personally, I'm convinced that a considerable amount of poverty is not compensated for, and is exacerbated by the presence of misinformation.[17]

The misinformation of which Hans Abbing speaks, he maintains is delivered by apparatuses educational and social, individual and institutional alike. High earning individuals in the Arts are such a small percent of the working sector that they are analogous to sovereigns. Their anomalous status, their monetary success and career recognition should throw the harshest light onto the wretched desperate end of the sector. In fact, it blinds those wishing to enter the sector to the reality of the low, crowded, economic space, where above all others, the composer reigns abject. The composer then, is like an anti—sovereign, independent more through precedent than choice, and in economic terms a systemic cast off to which standardised rules of labour value do not apply. Carrying a value beyond money, in a fiscal state of exception, and to whom precariousness is a constant companion, the composer is an allegorical *homo sacer*. This idea is to be taken up, in the intermezzo that follows this chapter.

Speaking of money

On March 5, 2010, former Hawke government Arts Minister Barry Cohen responded to Throsby and Zednik's credible and respected data and analysis with an opinion piece in The Australian newspaper entitled *Sorry, but some have to suffer for their art*. In dismissing their study, Cohen offers little more than further evidence of a widely held free market view that "it has always been thus and will remain so."[18] Cohen believes that the order of the day for all artists is necessitous sacrifice. He goes so far as to offer his own post-politics output as a example when he writes "It's been a nice little earner, but thank God it wasn't my only source of income…I write because I love writing. Would I continue if there was no longer a market? Almost certainly, because of the pleasure it brings and not because of the financial

[17] **Abbing**, Why are artists poor? p.150

[18] **Cohen, Barry** "Sorry, but some have to suffer for their art.", in *The Australian*, at http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/opinion/sorry-but-some-have-to-suffer-for-their-art/story-e6frg6zo-1225837133035, accessed September 20, 2011

reward."[19] There is no mention of the role played by his annual tax-free $85,000 parliamentary pension in supporting his practice, but Cohen did inspire me to re-read some Rousseau for the first time in many years:

> I conceive that there are two kinds of inequality among the human species; one, which I call natural or physical, because it is established by nature, and consists in a difference of age, health, bodily strength, and the qualities of the mind or of the soul: and another, which may be called moral or political inequality, because it depends on a kind of convention, and is established, or at least authorised by the consent of men. This latter consists of the different privileges, which some men enjoy to the prejudice of others; such as that of being more rich, more honoured, more powerful or even in a position to exact obedience. [20]

Composers can, and occasionally do talk directly about this inequality, and mostly when they do, they speak through money. Composers recognize that it is in money and not aesthetics or technique where they will find any hope of being understood. It remains difficult for even the most enlightened individual though to provide any objectivity where their livelihood is concerned. *The Economic Disempowerment of Australian Composers*, a modest article originally published by composer and writer Derek Strahan in The Journal of the Fellowship of Australian Composers in 1977 was revised and expanded and clarified for publication on revolve.com.au in 2004. Since its revised publication, dimensions of Strahan's argument that relate to seeking parity of opportunity with regard to donations have largely been addressed through initiatives like the Australian Business Arts Foundation's Australian Cultural Fund which allows tax deductibility status to patrons. Nonetheless Strahan's article still provides some interesting and relevant comments on compositional practice in contemporary Australia. A dominant argument is that aesthetics ought not play a role in the monetary valuation of composers labour, and yet having stated that, his belief is that government money ought be prioritised for the composition of music

[19] **Cohen, Barry** Ibid.
[20] **Rousseau, Jean-Jacques** *A dissertation on the origin and foundation of the inequality of mankind* http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/economics/rousseau/inequality/ch01.htm#s1 accessed December 14, 2011

that is "innovative, risk-taking and ahead of its time"[21] In other words music that may not have an immediately commercial or palatable aesthetic. Strahan valorises music that does not directly serve capitalism, or more specifically market driven principles. Given that government funding set aside for composition increasingly invites genres like jazz and pop to drink from the funding pool, Strahan is valiantly defending an ever-shrinking platform. Strahan's position highlights one side of a dialectical argument about the core objective of state funding in Australia. He articulates clearly that there ought remain a protectorate around funds made historically available by the state to the sector for work whose aesthetics are not driven by populism at the expense of quality musical thought. The other side of the political argument is that taxpayer's money ought go to music that has the broadest appeal. While there is a universe of gradients in between these polarities, the key problem in any objective analysis about monetary value of the labour of composition is almost universally conflated with precisely the kind of subjective aesthetics that Strahan protests ought not be part of the discussion. It is an argument that cannot be won or lost, but rather should be seen as a warning sign that as increasing numbers of "popular" musicians and composers line up for state support, then the industry must have less and less capacity to support creative practice across *all* genres.

Poverty or Asceticism?

Cohen and Strahan both accept a condition of asceticism in the creative process. Cohen lays it bare in the title of "Sorry, but some have to suffer for their art". While I suspect he is not actually sorry, his position crudely rearticulates a common idea around creative practice to which the composer as creative practitioner is subject. Strahan believes though that composers "are there own worst enemies when it comes to acting collectively to create a sound basis for earning a living" due to the fact that they are "primarily materialistic" focussed on how best "to corner the funding market by a claim to priority based on fashion". In this way, Strahan implies necessitous asceticism, by valorising solidarity and

[21] **Strahan, Derek** *The Economic Disempowerment of Australian Composers* 2004, accessed www.revolve.com.au on January 31, 2012

financial modesty over individual gain. Neither Strahan nor Cohen fundamentally question that government has a role to play in fostering excellence, and neither call for an increase in government investment. Strahan believes in the unlocked potential of private patronage and the importance of the new and unexplored (the civilising model), whereas Cohen believes in supply and demand (the free market model). Given their opposing political ideologies, their inadvertent convergence appears to be in blaming artists themselves for their situation: Strahan citing a lack of collegiate solidarity, Cohen citing oversupply in the labour market. Essentially, both play out a sort of violence on subjects already struggling to operate under a fixed system of exchange where they have extremely limited capacity to incite structural change. In different voices, they fail to acknowledge that artists operate in a state of economic exception. In Strahan's defense, he is not responding to the Throsby and Zednik data, whereas Cohen attempts to invalidate their data and analysis, by adopting a tone that dismisses a sector populated by highly skilled, educated and motivated people as speaking "nonsense and the sooner the arts community stops whining about how their talents are not being rewarded the better."[22] I believe what ultimately links these two commentators is a normalization of secular asceticism that Max Weber views as having directly evolved out of Anglo-Celtic Puritanism. Weber wrote as early as 1905 that…

> …the entire ascetic literature of all denominations is imbued with the attitude that faithful work, even for low wages, by those to whom life has dealt no other opportunities, is highly pleasing to God. Protestant asceticism added nothing new to this. But it did add tremendous depth to the view and created the psychological drive for this norm to achieve its effect by interpreting such work as a calling, and as the sole means of making sure of one's state of grace. It also legalized the exploitation of this characteristic willingness to work by interpreting the employer's moneymaking as a "calling" too. Obviously, the "productivity" of work in the capitalist sense of the word was given a powerful boost by this exclusive striving for the kingdom of God through fulfillment of the duty of labor as a calling and through strict asceticism, since Church discipline naturally imposed this on the impoverished classes in particular. Treatment of work as a "calling" was as characteristic for the modern worker as the corresponding view of commerce was for the employer.[23]

[22] **Cohen, Barry** "Sorry, but some have to suffer for their art."
[23] **Weber, Max** *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, 1905 Trans. Baehr P. & Wells, G.C. Penguin, 2002 p 119-20

From Church to State (and there is always show business)

In Weber's argument individuals undertake to improve their standing in Gods eyes, which is precisely the sort of "truth" modification to the self that Foucault speaks of and upon which this inquiry was launched. The Throsby/Zednik data certainly provides a clear picture of a contemporary sector that is populated by composers willing to work beneath labour value parity of most other sectors. The idea then, that capitalism enabled employers to drive down the cost of labour by exploiting activities that had previously been the province of religion, finds easy traction to the reading of the composer. Western art music is widely understood to have flourished under the patronage of Christianity from the end of the Middle Ages onward. The earliest modern political economic statement to argue for the conscious transfer from church and court to the state as patron and protector of the arts must be composer Richard Wagner's *Art and Revolution*. Published one year after the 1848 revolutions unleashed enormous civil unrest across Europe and Scandanavia, Wagner writes:

> So long as money is indispensable for all the needs of life, so long as without pay there remains naught to man but air, and scarcely water: the measures to be taken can only provide that the actual stage-performances, to witness which the populace assembles, shall not take on the semblance of *work paid by the piece*, - a mode of regarding them which confessedly leads to the most humiliating misconception of the character of art-productions, - but it must be the duty of the State, or rather of the particular Community, to form a common purse from which to recompense the artists for their performance as a whole, and not in parts.[24]

Wagner's essay, reaching back to the virtues and models of antiquity, calls for revolution not restoration. Yet despite the bravura and socialist rally cry of Wagner's vision to raise all citizens to equal enlightenment through Art, Wagner's legacy apparatus, the Bayreuth Festspielhaus was the direct result of exceptional royal patronage. Bavarian King Ludwig II "conferred upon him personal cash gifts estimated at 500,000 marks…" – a staggering 31,450,000 dollars in today's purchase power – "…along with substantial loans, later repaid, to finance the construction of and heavy losses of Wagner's Festspielhaus in Bayreuth."[25] As the loans were repaid, and the Festspielhaus today, some 129 years after Wagner's

[24] **Wagner, Richard** *Art and Revolution* trans. W. Ashton Ellis, 1895 accessed at http://users.belgacom.net/wagnerlibrary/prose/wagartrev.htm March 10, 2012

[25] **Scherer F.M.**, *Quarter Notes and Bank Notes* p.65

death remains the site of a global pilgrimage, with the annual festival sold out a decade in advance it is possible to take a long term view of Ludwig II as an astute venture capitalist and Wagner, an entrepreneur and showman par excellence. F.M. Scherer's book provides a rare, or perhaps slightly forgotten glimpse of the composer as entrepreneur. Many historically prominent composers –including Beethoven, Tellemann, Bach, Mozart, Vivaldi – all, with varying fortunes, speculated as presenters of their own and others music. While successful presenters like Handel could offer complex subscriptions series to opera and oratorios, most composer presented one-off concerts, for which a programme would be published in search of a public. Cancellations were common if the programme failed to draw sufficient advanced sales, a standard precondition to most commercial presentation even today. Scherer describes harrowing conditions where failure and ruin were more likely, and where even successful ventures were full of risks generally far greater than any reward. Scherer highlights Berlioz, who in 1844 gambled very close to complete ruin with a concert featuring a thousand musicians that on the day of presentation drew walk up sales that covered all his significant expenses, but out of the 32,000 francs raised by sales "…800 remained for Berlioz as organiser and composer."[26] Money problems more common than not, Scherer observes that Franz Liszt, who amassed an early fortune, lead, in the latter half of his career an ascetic life, living modestly off well advised investments and performing to raise money for charities or simply for free. Liszt though remains an exception, and in most cases when composers engaged directly as impresario of their own music, the economic journey was extreme, and mostly unsustainable, leading often to debt, bankruptcy, health deterioration and even death.[27] *Quarter Notes and Bank Notes* painstakingly collates ample evidence to demonstrate that while asceticism featured prominently if not consistently over the career course of some of the most historically celebrated composers it was neither desired nor ever really welcome.

[26] **Scherer, F.M.** *Quarter Notes and Bank Notes* p.61
[27] **Ibid.**, p.63

Risk and Reward

There is logic then to be considered that the concept of risk versus reward forms part of an internal negotiation that is hard wired into the composer *paraskeuē*. The internal discussion may sound something like: *I do not choose to be a composer in order to live an ascetic life in the long term, but because part of me believes that as a composer I will eventually become rich and famous and thus receive financial, social and political reward for my initial sacrifice*. A triangular set of pre-conditions underpin this inner monologue: that risk, reward and sacrifice are somehow irrevocably connected and make part *of* the *paraskeuē*, in that achievement, financial or otherwise are false without initial suffering. The dialectic relationship between risk and reward can be seen in the adage "Nothing ventured, Nothing gained" as early as 1374 in Chaucer[28], which I would suggest it is able to be linked even further back as Seneca[29]:

> It is base to flinch under a burden. Wrestle with the duties which you have once undertaken. No man is brave and earnest if he avoids danger, if his spirit does not grow with the very difficulty of his task.

The Risk/Reward ratio is a dominant and defining algorithm in Modern Portfolio theory that offers a mathematical navigation through fluid market uncertainties with the aim to deliver a surplus on investment. It presupposes investors desire minimal risk and maximum reward[30]. Composers are people, and this presupposition can be applied to them on the broadest sense as it is for investors. There is no evidence to suggest that composers intentionally desire high risk entrepreneurial efforts to *not* deliver a return that will provide them with the maximum return. While investors may lose money on paper that may mean amount to real losses, the losses themselves generally start from money that is already surplus. Composers, as the Scherer shows start from, and very often end in a place of debt.

[28] **Titelman, Gregory Y.** *Random House Dictionary of Popular Proverbs and Sayings*, Random House, New York, 1996
[29] **Seneca, Lucius Annaeus**, Gummere, R.M.(trans) *Moral Epistles,* The Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard UP, 1917-25 accessed at http://www.stoics.com/seneca_epistles_book_1.html January 28, 2012
[30] **Edwin J. Elton and Martin J. Gruber**, *Modern portfolio theory, 1950 to date*, Journal of Banking & Finance Vol 21, Elsevier Publications, 1997

The choice is yours, so suffer.

Aside from individuals like Bohuslav Martinu who were compulsively driven to compose music through a sort of "high-functioning autism"[31], embarking on a vocation as a composer is an act of will. Whether this decision results from the accumulative achievements of student progressing with encouragement through various standardized and financially supported educative (transformative) processes, or any number of unidentified narratives that convince someone to self identify thus, it remains a conscious *act*. One does not accidentally become a musician or composer. Yet it would seem the choice carries certain unspoken "agreements" including the individuals need for extremely specialized training and skills, ongoing practice, and the self-sufficiency without guarantee of any secure employment, even where capacity is acknowledged and awarded. The Scherer and Abbing both broadly show that the composer and musician begin their practice from financial indenture without the immediate vocational means to directly support set up costs as basic as the musical instruments themselves. This leads us back to the third figure in the pre-concept, a subtle and elusive spectre that haunts the concepts of risk and reward: sacrifice. The conscious renunciation of short-term financial returns in the pursuit of long-term success is the spine of the risk reward equation. Reward seldom materializes and the sort of asceticism that is lived through the life of the composer is not at all abstract. Sacrifice is enacted upon the body of the composer in a bio-political sense that I believe is so historically entrenched that composers unquestioningly accept financial sacrifice as a vocational precondition. The potency of "suffer now, succeed later" must be partly due to a collapse, or at least conflation of the realms of the symbolic (sacrifice) and the material (reward), where "risk" is the fluid apparatus of a sort of reversed auto-Faustian pact. What then is the figure of the composer's relationship to sacrifice, given that "nowadays sacrifice is outside the field of our experience and imagination must do duty for the real thing"[32]. We have observed the composer set outside the labour chain, outside of effective remuneration systems, and outside of comparable entrepreneurial and funding structures. To extrapolate from the Bataille citation, if sacrifice is career conditional for composers,

[31] **Rybka, F. James** *Bohuslav Martinu: The Compulsion to Compose,* Scarecrow Press, Plymouth, 2011. p.345
[32] **Bataille, Georges** *Erotism: Death & Sensuality*, Dalwood, M. trans., City Lights, San Francisco , 1986

then surely sacrifice, or more specifically the imaginary that stands in for sacrifice, is what separates the composer from more standardized labour and monetary experiences? If this is the case, then the composer, named from the Latin *compenere*, literally the one who puts things together, ironically operates under a historical identity that is actually more about being put aside, than put together: consecrated not constructed.

Intermezzo - Shaffer's Salieri

Where letters, essays and the accounts of witnesses may form the spine of historically verifiable inquiry (even bookkeeping as FM Scherer demonstrates), representation, that is *portrayal*, of historical figures in an age blurred by digital tools, is an equal and worthy route of inquiry. These revised, semi-fictional fantasy spaces prove potent to readings of the composer, moulded as they are with mythic resonance and period costume and wigs: a powdered space where simulacra hold more power than empirical history. They are texts aimed at popular consciousness born of collective memory. They dazzle with their trans-historical amalgams of aesthetic and behavioural habits: they mine the sub and conscious public memory to crudely re-present what reads as a composer.

Milos Forman's 1984 three-hour film adaptation of Peter Shaffer's *Amadeus* indelibly turned fiction into history when it blended biographical and musical events from Mozart's narrative with the speculative rumour of his death at Salieri's hands that rumbled throughout Europe in the late 18th and early 19th century. In contrast the source work, Pushkin's *Mozart and Salieri* from 1831, (which also in 1897 became a short opera in two scenes by Rimsky-Korsakov [1]) take a mere ten minutes to unfold. The apocryphal incident that inspired the Pushkin miniature and in turn informed the Shaffer/Forman epic is as solid a simulacrum as one might find. Powdered wigs and dresses, and of course film, converge around a Best of Mozart soundtrack, aimed squarely at an MTV-primed public and the voting members of Academy Awards™, who dutifully ingested the fictionalised allegory as representative and historically authentic. The movie bled so radically over reality, it has doubtless informed perceptions of the composer *specific* (Mozart) and the composer *general*. If this far-reaching, popular work was able warp history and reset perception, a branch for future inquiry would be to test whether *Amadeus* also fundamentally reset the narrative prospects of composers too? Dr. Karen Burns once astutely stated that the greatest problem of Holocaust cinema

[1] **Taruskin, Richard** "Realism as Preached and Practiced: The Russian Opera Dialogue". *The Musical Quarterly* LVI (3): 431–454, 1970

was that it normalised survival[2]. *Amadeus* and other films that followed in its lead (Immortal Beloved etc.) likewise normalise poverty, jealousy, eccentricity, insanity and suffering for the figure of the composer. And powdered wigs.

Cain and Abel, Daedalus and Perdix, Apollo and Pan – strong structural elements of all abound in *Amadeus*. Mozart's divine musical power as well as the brutal indifference to his death run analogous to the Orpheus myth as well, insofar as like Orpheus who was devoured by the Maenads, the body of Mozart is untraceable and we are left only with his head, which itself is uncertain in its accuracy: "No earthly remains of Mozart survive save for a few wretched portraits, no two of which are alike; the fact that all the reproductions of his death-mask, which should have shown him as he really was, have crumbled to bits"[3].

Amadeus is a parable that warns composers (and anyone of individual vision and aspiration) of the vigilance one must maintain in relation to close colleagues (friends, family, lovers). It is Caesar and Brutus. But this is not merely a parable of misplaced trust. The power ultimately of the *Amadeus* narrative must lies in the economics of his demise; the indifference of the capital industrial world to such classical ephemeral genius. The martyrdom of Mozart is categorical, socially wired into us since ancient times since "Tragic guilt is more than just subjective guilt, it is inherited guilt. But inherited guilt, like original sin, is a substantial category, and it is this substantiality that makes the sorrow deeper"[4] (Kierkegaard).

The persistent portrayal of Mozart's martyrdom requires an agent, an executioner. The greater sacrifice then, is not the historical Mozart, whose music which is unquestionably the work of genius, nonetheless benefits greatly from his perennial portrayal as abject victim. The greater sacrifice is the historical Salieri, whose music is drowned out by the

[2] **Burns, Karen,** Artist in the World Lecture at VCA, 2004
[3] **Einsten, Alfred,** *Mozart: His Character, His Work,* trans. Mendel, Arthur and Broder, Nathan, Oxford Press 1962
[4] **Kierkegaard, Søren** , from "Ancient Tragedy's Reflection in the Modern" *Either/Or – A Fragment of Life*, Hannay, A. trans., Penguin Books 1992 p.149

strength and weight of his fictive portrayal as jealous murderer. Had he possessed fore knowledge of the posthumous fantasy that would engulf his life's work and reputation, the *real* Salieri would surely have enacted Mozart's murder, if only to experience the one pleasure left to him in the inevitability of his destined misrepresentation.

> "Salieri is absolutely right: perfection and grace (that of Mozart) are criminal, and must be destroyed. This insult to universal mediocrity must be avenged. Salieri's is a cry of protest against the inequality of destinies we suffer. But democratic redemption is just as unacceptable."[5]

The Salieri that Baudrillard refers to though, is of course Shaffer's.

[5] **Baudrillard, Jean**, *Cool Memories IV 1995 -2000*, Turner, C. trans., Verso, London, 2003

Chapter 4 "TAILS" – Myth and the composer

He was of those singers (such was also Novalis),
Who in their dreams see themselves as heirs to lyres,
To whom at the dawn of ages obeyed
Spirit, stone, tree, beasts, water, fire, ether.

Osip Mandelstam, from "*To the memory of Scriabin*" [1]

In the opening pages of *Oblivion*, Marc Augé launches his inquiry into the nature of memory by categorically stating the importance of forgetting. He believes that "one must forget the recent past in order to find the ancient past."[2] In the spirit of this idea I would now like to put aside the statistical data, ascetic and labour value analysis explored in the previous half of this paper and turn instead to an examination of some ancient myths in which representations of proto-musical figures feature. If "Enlightenment also recognizes itself in the old myths"[3], it is likely that modern figurations of the composer, like so much of Western civilization, can be traced from, or at the very least resonate with the supple structures and archetypes present within ancient mythic narratives.

Myth and Music: I

Jacques Attali refers to the "supernatural and civilizing powers" of music in antiquity and how " music was inscribed with precision into…the political hierarchy"[4] in the stories of Amphion, Arion, "Pythagoras and Empedocles (who) cured the possessed. David cured Saul's madness by playing the harp". His interest in myth is to demonstrate links that position music as a prophetic social and political structural indicator.

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[1] From **Terras, Victor** "The Black Sun: Orphic Imagery in the Poetry of Osip Mandelstam" in *The Slavic and East European Journal*, Vol. 45, No. 1 (Spring, 2001), pp. 45-60

[2] **Augé, Marc**, *Oblivion*, de Jager, M. trans., University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2004

[3] **Horkheimer, Max** and **Adorno, Theodor,** *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Jephcott, E. trans., Verso, London 1997

[4] **Attali, Jacques** *Noise: A Political Economy of Music* Massumi, B. trans., University of Minnesota Press 1985 p.13

However, a key influence foregrounding the relationship between music in the myth in my inquiry comes from anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss who argued for music to be read as a fundamental mythic metaphor.

> Music and mythology bring man face to face with potential objects of which only the shadows are actualized, with conscious approximations…of inevitably unconscious truths."[5]

While terms like "conscious approximations" may sound dangerously out of place in musicological discourse this enquiry is more concerned in pursuing interpretation than empiricism. In reiterating this, it nonetheless remains important to navigate carefully through the murky waters of myth; a *charbydis* and *scylla* for any researcher. In order to avoid descending into mythopoeic political discourse, that is: "an ideologically marked narrative which purports to give true accounts of past, present or predicted political events"[6], I shall, as stated at the outset of this paper, be less concerned with unlocking truths than offering interpretative links. These links will offer my inquiry the chance to illuminate some of the shadows to which Levi-Strauss refers, foregrounding implicit vestigial associations which time and repetition have carried forward as dormant passengers. Mythic figures associated with music have the potential to unlock unconscious truths about the composer, if we accept that "the very principle of myth…(which is) to transform history into nature"[7] is itself reverse tracable. Related to Foucault's interest in the *paraskeuē* that was mentioned at the head of this research paper, another ancient term and concept that was important to his research in *The hermeneutics of the subject*, that of *parrhēsia*. This term refers to that "which allows the master to make a proper use, from the true things he knows, of that which is useful or effective for his disciple's work of transformation."[8]

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[5] **Lévi-Strauss, Claude**, *The Raw and The Cooked : Introduction to a science of mythology: 1*, Weightman D and J (trans) Penguin, London, 1986 p.18

[6] **Flood, Christopher,** Political Myth, Routledge, New York, 1996 p.44

[7] **Barthes, Roland**, *Mythologies,* trans, Anette Lavers, Paladin, 1972

[8] **Foucault, Michel** *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France 1981-82*, Burchell, Graham trans., Picador, New York 2005 p 238

Parrhēsia is fundamental to philosophical rhetoric since "when we employ the *logos*[*] there is a necessarily a *lexis* (a way of saying things)". I believe too, that it is of equal significance in the educative realm of music. The one to one knowledge transfer that remains the dominant and most effective method of music pedagogy (where the principal objective is that of *paraskeuē*), can be read as paradigm of *parrhēsia*; an essentially unchanged and unchallenged mode of musical instruction since antiquity. The master having already been a disciple to a previous master, adds part of their *paraskeuē* to the student through the *parrhēsia*, like mother dough acting as the starter for tomorrow's bread. Within myth, one does not need to travel to far to find a myriad of connectivity around music figuration and the significant role pedagogy plays in that domain.

Step 1 - Hermes

To even the most casual nose the word hermeneutics smells of myth and antiquity. Hermes, after whom this field is named, was the mediator between humanity and the gods, and led the souls of the dead to the underworld, including, most famously, Eurydice. Amongst an array of other attributes he was god of language, speech and metaphors: three portfolios that not by accident feed into the field of hermeneutics. Hermes also invented the lyre, which his brother Apollo was so seduced by that he agreed to let Hermes keep some of his stolen cattle in exchange for the instrument, which Apollo went on to master. Hermes, while a shepherd invented the syrinx that were then bestowed to his son, Pan, whose name become synonymous with the pipes. Hermes also invented the flute that in some version of the narrative Apollo also coveted[9]. As such Apollo offered in exchange his golden wand to Hermes, which then became the latter's oracular staff. Here, embedded in the etymology of the principal methodology of this inquiry – hermeneutics – there is direct evidence of behavioral prototypes of prodigious invention, of technical mastery, of trade politics, barter economics and prophecy, all in the orbit of music. If we accept Levi-Strauss' concept of

[*] By Foucault's understanding: "the level of the rational structure of discourse" *Hermeneuticsof the Subject* p 239
[9] **Leadbetter, Ron** *Hermes* @ http://www.pantheon.org/articles/h/hermes.html accessed March 30, 2012

music as mythic metaphor then these prototypes become a potential source of great influence in reading the composer, and how also the composer might behaviorally align.

Step 2 - Apollo

Apollo the ancient Greek god of music, song, prophecy and poetry, also bore the houses of plague and disease. While it was characteristic of polytheistic cultures to assign elements and attributes amongst the many deities, there is no direct evidence that suggests a rationale for specific or relational assignment. Allegorical examples abound though, with a pertinent link between disease and music found in Plato's *Laws*, where The Athenian Stranger identifies:

> …in music there first arose the universal conceit of omniscience and general lawlessness; - freedom came following afterwards, and men, fancying that they knew what they did not know, had no longer any fear, and the absence of fear begets shamelessness. For what is this shamelessness, which is so evil a thing, but the insolent refusal to regard the opinion of the better by reason of an over-daring sort of liberty? [10]

Laid bare in a foundational Western text, a scathing assertion of music as the source of all social corruption, the disease of the body politic. The musician and the composer can therefore be read as agents of this corruption: a fundamental anti-social, or at least anti-establishment force. Apollo provides important insights into the power and violence that erupt from within the realm of Music when in several narrative accounts provide we witness violence bleeding directly from the same source as inspiration. Richard Leppert notes that Apollo's "brutality emerged when his authority was challenged"[11], and no finer example of this can be found than in a series of musical contests, where the dominance of Apollo's musicianship was challenged. Pan, Marsyas and Cinyras, in sometimes-interchangeable accounts, all sought to rival Apollo, and all suffered harsh consequences for their actions. Pan's lover Midas, who was the only jury

[10] **Plato,** Laws Book 3, **Lovett, B**. trans, at http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/laws.3.iii.html accessed October 28, 2011

[11] **Leppert, Richard** "Music, Violence, and the stakes of listening" in *The Oxford handbook of the new cultural history of music*, Jane F Fulcher Ed. Oxford University Press, New York, 2011 p. 40

member to not endorse Apollo's victory was punished by having his ears turned into those of a donkey. Cinyras, the legendary King of Cyprus, committed suicide after his failed contest. Leppert catalogues multiple representations in Western painting, sculpture and poetry of Apollo's inverted flaying of Marsyas, who, forced to a second round play off against Apollo, fails the impossible task of playing his flute upside down. Naturally, Apollo plays his lyre upside down without issue.

As I noted earlier Pan was Apollo's nephew, and the anti-nepotic dimension of their contest finds a parallel in of the mythic tales of Daedalus. The master craftsmens and inventor grew so jealous of the skills of his nephew Perdix, who flourished under Daedalus' tutorage that the master pushed the boy from a tower. "Some students rebel against their piano teacher. But their parents force them to practice art, and so Professor Kohut can likewise use force" wrote Elfriede Jelinek in her novel *Die Klavierspielerin* (The Piano Teacher). In the Jelinek novel the destructive pedagogical jealousy and repressed sexual desire of the teacher for the student can be reverse traced into these Apollonian contests, which represent a proto-variation on the Eisteddfod. *Die Klavierspielerin* critiques the educational apparatus of the conservatoire by quite appositely portraying the educational environment with an Apollonian viciousness. The greater number of professional musicians and composers commence their *paraskeuē* at a very early age. This guided, disciplinary self-transformation is an unbroken line of continuity in all adult musicians backwards through to the child they were. This transit arc sets musical training aside from virtually every other field of study or practice. The institution is also unlike any other training structure. The conservatoire ripples with the resonances of Apollo and his would be challengers. Any challenge to the order of the system will not be accepted and even the greatest virtuoso to emerge remains less than the authority and pedigree of the machine that produced them. It is the environment where the parent and the quasi-parental dialogue trade the child in mute third party - "His whole demeanour was frightening and bizarre to me: emotional, intense, demanding, expressive. The affront

he gave me was such indeed that, for a year, I could not speak in his presence, though he became my teacher during that time."[12] This is neither a description of Apollo, nor Jelinek's protagonist Erika Kohut: it describes Claude Dunand, the former lead second violin of the Melbourne Symphony during the 1970s. Now a mere footnote in music in Naomi Cumming's unique inquiry into musical identity and semiotics, the passing portrait of her violin teacher are reminders of how violence and fear remain key active forces that run like a deep vein of gold in the bedrock of music *parrhēsia*, where the gift of instruction is played out in an un-sublimated agonic struggle between the disciple and master. This agonic struggle is even more extreme for the composer where their *paraskeuē* ought demonstrate not only individual 'voice', but also the digestion of lateral and linear musical canons, a knowledge gained to specifically *avoid* resemblance. An instrumentalist can specialize in Mozart. A composer cannot.

Step 3 - Orpheus

It is fair to speculate that having a God as an instructor may provide any student a handicap. The adolescent Orpheus, bequeathed the lyre from his older lover Apollo, became so accomplished that he found he could use his musical ability to charm all people, animals, even inanimate stones. In the right hands, we can thus read, music can tame nature; proliferating the idea of music as anti-nature, or at the very least as not *of* nature. The knowledge transfer through the lyre, the instrument, the apparatus, can be analogously read in parallel through the intergenerational intimacy implicit in their consensual union which in antiquity would have been viewed as "common tribal bond that links the boy into manhood through the older male."[13] The "common tribal bond" diffuses contest into consecration. I suggest that Apollo is not threatened by Orpheus' capacity to wield the political power of music because he is the very source of that power. Apollo has set aside Orpheus from others. He endorses him. Arguably then

[12] **Cumming, Naomi** *The Sonic Self: musical subjectivity and signification* University of Indiana Press, 2000 p.6

[13] **Sandfort, T. Brongersma, E,** and **van Naerssen, A.X.** (Eds.), *Male intergenerational intimacy: historical, socio-psychological, and legal perspectives*, Routledge, New York, 1991 (Editors Introduction)

it is Apollo's pedigree that allows Orpheus to successfully negotiate with Hades and retrieve his beloved Eurydice from the underworld. Apollo, the sun god shines light on the shadows of the underworld through the otherworldliness of music, imbibing his vehicle Orpheus with the power of a god, namely to transcend death. Seduced by hubris, Orpheus fatally miscalculates the extent of his powers, breaks the oath he made to Hades and his loss, is proportionately epic. One can certainly read Orpheus as a cautionary tale, the sacrifice made that others might not suffer the same fate. With each retelling of the mythic story, the tragedy more emphatic, the sense of loss, never lost. The currency of music is more than incidental. The myth allows a reading that suggests no matter how talented the student musician or composer, no matter how deep or how far even the most powerful instructor's hand reaches, the discipline itself requires respect. Music - of the muses - is capricious and indifferent, and like fire can burn flesh as equally as fuel alchemy. Music, not the musician, not the composer, not the teacher or student is the true master. Music, ever present, nonetheless originates from beyond human threshold and retains the capacity to evade even its most virtuosic disciples.

Myth and Music II

In older myths than the Greeks we can trace further insight. 藍采和 (Lan Ts'ai-ho), the ambivalently gendered Chinese Immortal was often depicted as a singer whose lyrics could accurately foresee future events[14]. In Egyptian mythology Hathor was the house of music and also welcomed the dead to the afterlife, and displayed other Hermes-like qualities when she received a prophetic communication from Ra warning her of an uprising that would culminate in the Pharaoh's assassination. So angry was Hathor at this potential threat to the order of authority that she transformed into the war goddess Sekhmet and began an almost unstoppable and bloodthirsty tirade of violence against the people.[15] Violence has been touched on earlier as part of my inquiry into

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[15] **Wilkinson, Toby A. H.** *Early Dynastic Egypt: Strategies, Society and Security,* Routledge, New York, 2001 p.312

the myth of Apollo. The proximity of music and prophecy then, can be seen as recurrent throughout all of these summary myths. Jacques Attali's central argument of music possessing a prophetic ability to express new forms itself that act as agents of change to shape and order new social structures must be restated here. In reviewing Attali's essay, Ronald Radano, while excited by the intellectual risk of *Noise*, nonetheless found it unclear "how the musicians relates to the process of change. Attali seems to believe in a direct, causal relationship between music and society. Following that logic, one would assume that the musician's views are incidental to the larger ordering."[16] Prophecy is never accurate: it is a shape, a sense, a guess. I believe that what Attali was predicting, conscious or not, was if not an actual *disappearance* of the composer (something the first chapter maps could suggest is very much underway in financial terms) but rather a *déplacement*. Certainly a *déplacement* from vocational to research models of training is observable. As is broadly noted, composers have been increasingly taught within university systems as opposed to conservatoires, so much so that many consveratoires have been reduced to department within the university system. The principal focus of conservatoires is training with the aim of vocational application. The principal focus of universities is research towards stock of knowledge. While there are natural crossovers in the results of both pursuits when it comes to creative practice, the fundamental distinction between modalities is not insignificant. Composition, once the exclusive province of practising musicians, emerged as a sub-discipline with methods closer to technical education (artisanal) than philosophical. Given its hybrid identity, part of the disappearance (for want of a better word) of composition runs in parallel to vocational education's decline "in almost every educational system in the world" in an increasingly post-industrial context.[17] Simultaneously over the last fifty years universities themselves have been re-oriented by the demands of external forces such as governments and the labour market towards "applicable" skills: "liberal education has been more fundamentally displaced by

[16] **Ronald M. Radano**, in *Ethnomusicology*, Vol. 33, No. 1, Winter,University of Illinois Press 1989, pp. 161-163
[17] **Benavot, Aaron** "The Rise and Decline of Vocational Education" in *Sociology of Education* Vol 56, No.2, April, American Sociological Association, University of Iowa, 1983 pp.63-76

scientific education buttressed by the demands of global competition."[18] There is an irony to this double displacement: composers shift from vocational to research institution only to find the research institution (the imagined sanctuary) reoriented toward vocational focus. If there is a lack of comprehension around what it means to be a composer, then the uncertainty generated by this action of educational grafting must be considered. Once again the composer finds herself in the territory of exception in that she "cannot be defined as a situation of fact or as a situation of right, but instead institutes a paradoxical threshold of indistinction between the two."[19] The repurposing of this Agamben citation regarding the *homo sacer* prefigures further exploration in the final chapter.

With the arrival of technological apparatuses of the digital age[*], where "the "listener is the operator" and " to listen to music…is to rewrite it…"[20] the identifiable vocational status of the composer is also in further retreat, resigned by Attali from historical creator into myth status by no longer occupying an operational axis in the world. It is a conceit that is founded on the now mythologised miscalculation that technological devices "replicate all the modes by which humans process information."[21] It is not that the composer has become redundant, but rather that their primary labour tasks have been reorganised within a new technological context that is not only incomplete, but has been conflated by a broader capacity for participation. Technological devices and softwares currently allow participants to *compose* insofar as they can use semi or pre-built elements to produce sound. While these participants are unlikely to identify as composers, nor I speculate necessarily consider their output to be music, their activities further distance career composers from being able to differentially clarify their vocation without relying on very ancient descriptors. This reliance on pre-digital

[18] **Deneen**, **Patrick J.** *Science and the Decline of the Liberal Arts*, The New Atlantis: A Journal of Technology and Society accessed at http://www.thenewatlantis.com/publications/science-and-the-decline-of-the-liberal-arts

[19] **Agamben, Giorgio** *Homo Sacer Sovereign Power and Bare Life* Heller-Roazen D. (trans) Stanford University Press 1998 p.18

[*] Indeed there is so much to be explored in the political economics of digital file sharing, what I describe as "hyper-potlatch culture" that it is an area of inquiry that I regretfully relinquished pursuing in this current research.

[20] **Attali, J.** *Noise*. p,135

[21] **Levy, Frank and Murnane Richard J.** *The new division of labor: How computers are creating the next job market* Princeton University Press, 2004

discursive exemplars only serves to further mythologise the composer, because "…music is not only a modern substitute for myth; it was present in myths in their time, revealing through them its primary operationality as a simulacrum of the ritual sacrifice and as an affirmation of the possibility of social order."[22] The further one is from operationality in this schema, the closer one is to being myth.

[22] **Attali,** *Noise* p.29

Chapter 4 "TAILS" – Myth and the composer

He was of those singers (such was also Novalis),
Who in their dreams see themselves as heirs to lyres,
To whom at the dawn of ages obeyed
Spirit, stone, tree, beasts, water, fire, ether.

Osip Mandelstam, from "*To the memory of Scriabin*" [1]

In the opening pages of *Oblivion*, Marc Augé launches his inquiry into the nature of memory by categorically stating the importance of forgetting. He believes that "one must forget the recent past in order to find the ancient past."[2] In the spirit of this idea I would now like to put aside the statistical data, ascetic and labour value analysis explored in the previous half of this paper and turn instead to an examination of some ancient myths in which representations of proto-musical figures feature. If "Enlightenment also recognizes itself in the old myths"[3], it is likely that modern figurations of the composer, like so much of Western civilization, can be traced from, or at the very least resonate with the supple structures and archetypes present within ancient mythic narratives.

Myth and Music: I

Jacques Attali refers to the "supernatural and civilizing powers" of music in antiquity and how " music was inscribed with precision into…the political hierarchy"[4] in the stories of Amphion, Arion, "Pythagoras and Empedocles (who) cured the possessed. David cured Saul's madness by playing the harp". His interest in myth is to demonstrate links that position music as a prophetic social and political structural indicator.

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[1] From **Terras, Victor** "The Black Sun: Orphic Imagery in the Poetry of Osip Mandelstam" in *The Slavic and East European Journal*, Vol. 45, No. 1 (Spring, 2001), pp. 45-60

[2] **Augé, Marc**, *Oblivion*, de Jager, M. trans., University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2004

[3] **Horkheimer, Max** and **Adorno, Theodor,** *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Jephcott, E. trans., Verso, London 1997

[4] **Attali, Jacques** *Noise: A Political Economy of Music* Massumi, B. trans., University of Minnesota Press 1985 p.13

However, a key influence foregrounding the relationship between music in the myth in my inquiry comes from anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss who argued for music to be read as a fundamental mythic metaphor.

> Music and mythology bring man face to face with potential objects of which only the shadows are actualized, with conscious approximations…of inevitably unconscious truths."[5]

While terms like "conscious approximations" may sound dangerously out of place in musicological discourse this enquiry is more concerned in pursuing interpretation than empiricism. In reiterating this, it nonetheless remains important to navigate carefully through the murky waters of myth; a *charbydis* and *scylla* for any researcher. In order to avoid descending into mythopoeic political discourse, that is: "an ideologically marked narrative which purports to give true accounts of past, present or predicted political events"[6], I shall, as stated at the outset of this paper, be less concerned with unlocking truths than offering interpretative links. These links will offer my inquiry the chance to illuminate some of the shadows to which Levi-Strauss refers, foregrounding implicit vestigial associations which time and repetition have carried forward as dormant passengers. Mythic figures associated with music have the potential to unlock unconscious truths about the composer, if we accept that "the very principle of myth…(which is) to transform history into nature"[7] is itself reverse tracable. Related to Foucault's interest in the *paraskeuē* that was mentioned at the head of this research paper, another ancient term and concept that was important to his research in *The hermeneutics of the subject*, that of *parrhēsia*. This term refers to that "which allows the master to make a proper use, from the true things he knows, of that which is useful or effective for his disciple's work of transformation."[8]

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[5] **Lévi-Strauss, Claude**, *The Raw and The Cooked : Introduction to a science of mythology: 1*, Weightman D and J (trans) Penguin, London, 1986 p.18

[6] **Flood, Christopher,** Political Myth, Routledge, New York, 1996 p.44

[7] **Barthes, Roland**, *Mythologies,* trans, Anette Lavers, Paladin, 1972

[8] **Foucault, Michel** *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France 1981-82*, Burchell, Graham trans., Picador, New York 2005 p 238

Parrhēsia is fundamental to philosophical rhetoric since "when we employ the *logos*[*] there is a necessarily a *lexis* (a way of saying things)". I believe too, that it is of equal significance in the educative realm of music. The one to one knowledge transfer that remains the dominant and most effective method of music pedagogy (where the principal objective is that of *paraskeuē*), can be read as paradigm of *parrhēsia*; an essentially unchanged and unchallenged mode of musical instruction since antiquity. The master having already been a disciple to a previous master, adds part of their *paraskeuē* to the student through the *parrhēsia*, like mother dough acting as the starter for tomorrow's bread. Within myth, one does not need to travel to far to find a myriad of connectivity around music figuration and the significant role pedagogy plays in that domain.

Step 1 - Hermes

To even the most casual nose the word hermeneutics smells of myth and antiquity. Hermes, after whom this field is named, was the mediator between humanity and the gods, and led the souls of the dead to the underworld, including, most famously, Eurydice. Amongst an array of other attributes he was god of language, speech and metaphors: three portfolios that not by accident feed into the field of hermeneutics. Hermes also invented the lyre, which his brother Apollo was so seduced by that he agreed to let Hermes keep some of his stolen cattle in exchange for the instrument, which Apollo went on to master. Hermes, while a shepherd invented the syrinx that were then bestowed to his son, Pan, whose name become synonymous with the pipes. Hermes also invented the flute that in some version of the narrative Apollo also coveted[9]. As such Apollo offered in exchange his golden wand to Hermes, which then became the latter's oracular staff. Here, embedded in the etymology of the principal methodology of this inquiry – hermeneutics – there is direct evidence of behavioral prototypes of prodigious invention, of technical mastery, of trade politics, barter economics and prophecy, all in the orbit of music. If we accept Levi-Strauss' concept of

[*] By Foucault's understanding: "the level of the rational structure of discourse" *Hermeneuticsof the Subject* p 239
[9] **Leadbetter, Ron** *Hermes* @ http://www.pantheon.org/articles/h/hermes.html accessed March 30, 2012

music as mythic metaphor then these prototypes become a potential source of great influence in reading the composer, and how also the composer might behaviorally align.

Step 2 - Apollo

Apollo the ancient Greek god of music, song, prophecy and poetry, also bore the houses of plague and disease. While it was characteristic of polytheistic cultures to assign elements and attributes amongst the many deities, there is no direct evidence that suggests a rationale for specific or relational assignment. Allegorical examples abound though, with a pertinent link between disease and music found in Plato's *Laws*, where The Athenian Stranger identifies:

> …in music there first arose the universal conceit of omniscience and general lawlessness; - freedom came following afterwards, and men, fancying that they knew what they did not know, had no longer any fear, and the absence of fear begets shamelessness. For what is this shamelessness, which is so evil a thing, but the insolent refusal to regard the opinion of the better by reason of an over-daring sort of liberty? [10]

Laid bare in a foundational Western text, a scathing assertion of music as the source of all social corruption, the disease of the body politic. The musician and the composer can therefore be read as agents of this corruption: a fundamental anti-social, or at least anti-establishment force. Apollo provides important insights into the power and violence that erupt from within the realm of Music when in several narrative accounts provide we witness violence bleeding directly from the same source as inspiration. Richard Leppert notes that Apollo's "brutality emerged when his authority was challenged"[11], and no finer example of this can be found than in a series of musical contests, where the dominance of Apollo's musicianship was challenged. Pan, Marsyas and Cinyras, in sometimes-interchangeable accounts, all sought to rival Apollo, and all suffered harsh consequences for their actions. Pan's lover Midas, who was the only jury

[10] **Plato,** Laws Book 3, **Lovett, B**. trans, at http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/laws.3.iii.html accessed October 28, 2011

[11] **Leppert, Richard** "Music, Violence, and the stakes of listening" in *The Oxford handbook of the new cultural history of music*, Jane F Fulcher Ed. Oxford University Press, New York, 2011 p. 40

member to not endorse Apollo's victory was punished by having his ears turned into those of a donkey. Cinyras, the legendary King of Cyprus, committed suicide after his failed contest. Leppert catalogues multiple representations in Western painting, sculpture and poetry of Apollo's inverted flaying of Marsyas, who, forced to a second round play off against Apollo, fails the impossible task of playing his flute upside down. Naturally, Apollo plays his lyre upside down without issue.

As I noted earlier Pan was Apollo's nephew, and the anti-nepotic dimension of their contest finds a parallel in of the mythic tales of Daedalus. The master craftsmens and inventor grew so jealous of the skills of his nephew Perdix, who flourished under Daedalus' tutorage that the master pushed the boy from a tower. "Some students rebel against their piano teacher. But their parents force them to practice art, and so Professor Kohut can likewise use force" wrote Elfriede Jelinek in her novel *Die Klavierspielerin* (The Piano Teacher). In the Jelinek novel the destructive pedagogical jealousy and repressed sexual desire of the teacher for the student can be reverse traced into these Apollonian contests, which represent a proto-variation on the Eisteddfod. *Die Klavierspielerin* critiques the educational apparatus of the conservatoire by quite appositely portraying the educational environment with an Apollonian viciousness. The greater number of professional musicians and composers commence their *paraskeuē* at a very early age. This guided, disciplinary self-transformation is an unbroken line of continuity in all adult musicians backwards through to the child they were. This transit arc sets musical training aside from virtually every other field of study or practice. The institution is also unlike any other training structure. The conservatoire ripples with the resonances of Apollo and his would be challengers. Any challenge to the order of the system will not be accepted and even the greatest virtuoso to emerge remains less than the authority and pedigree of the machine that produced them. It is the environment where the parent and the quasi-parental dialogue trade the child in mute third party - "His whole demeanour was frightening and bizarre to me: emotional, intense, demanding, expressive. The affront

he gave me was such indeed that, for a year, I could not speak in his presence, though he became my teacher during that time."[12] This is neither a description of Apollo, nor Jelinek's protagonist Erika Kohut: it describes Claude Dunand, the former lead second violin of the Melbourne Symphony during the 1970s. Now a mere footnote in music in Naomi Cumming's unique inquiry into musical identity and semiotics, the passing portrait of her violin teacher are reminders of how violence and fear remain key active forces that run like a deep vein of gold in the bedrock of music *parrhēsia*, where the gift of instruction is played out in an un-sublimated agonic struggle between the disciple and master. This agonic struggle is even more extreme for the composer where their *paraskeuē* ought demonstrate not only individual 'voice', but also the digestion of lateral and linear musical canons, a knowledge gained to specifically *avoid* resemblance. An instrumentalist can specialize in Mozart. A composer cannot.

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It is fair to speculate that having a God as an instructor may provide any student a handicap. The adolescent Orpheus, bequeathed the lyre from his older lover Apollo, became so accomplished that he found he could use his musical ability to charm all people, animals, even inanimate stones. In the right hands, we can thus read, music can tame nature; proliferating the idea of music as anti-nature, or at the very least as not *of* nature. The knowledge transfer through the lyre, the instrument, the apparatus, can be analogously read in parallel through the intergenerational intimacy implicit in their consensual union which in antiquity would have been viewed as "common tribal bond that links the boy into manhood through the older male."[13] The "common tribal bond" diffuses contest into consecration. I suggest that Apollo is not threatened by Orpheus' capacity to wield the political power of music because he is the very source of that power. Apollo has set aside Orpheus from others. He endorses him. Arguably then

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Myth and Music II

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With the arrival of technological apparatuses of the digital age[*], where "the "listener is the operator" and " to listen to music…is to rewrite it…"[20] the identifiable vocational status of the composer is also in further retreat, resigned by Attali from historical creator into myth status by no longer occupying an operational axis in the world. It is a conceit that is founded on the now mythologised miscalculation that technological devices "replicate all the modes by which humans process information."[21] It is not that the composer has become redundant, but rather that their primary labour tasks have been reorganised within a new technological context that is not only incomplete, but has been conflated by a broader capacity for participation. Technological devices and softwares currently allow participants to *compose* insofar as they can use semi or pre-built elements to produce sound. While these participants are unlikely to identify as composers, nor I speculate necessarily consider their output to be music, their activities further distance career composers from being able to differentially clarify their vocation without relying on very ancient descriptors. This reliance on pre-digital

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[19] **Agamben, Giorgio** *Homo Sacer Sovereign Power and Bare Life* Heller-Roazen D. (trans) Stanford University Press 1998 p.18

[*] Indeed there is so much to be explored in the political economics of digital file sharing, what I describe as "hyper-potlatch culture" that it is an area of inquiry that I regretfully relinquished pursuing in this current research.

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discursive exemplars only serves to further mythologise the composer, because "…music is not only a modern substitute for myth; it was present in myths in their time, revealing through them its primary operationality as a simulacrum of the ritual sacrifice and as an affirmation of the possibility of social order."[22] The further one is from operationality in this schema, the closer one is to being myth.

[22] **Attali,** *Noise* p.29

5. Codetta

"There is a moment in the life of concepts when they lose their immediate intelligibility, and can then, like all empty terms, be overburdened by contradictory meanings."[1]

Any text that stands as a "singular whole may be compared to an object, which may be viewed from several sides but never from all sides at once".[2] In the sense that this research paper has aimed to be a progenitor text, I have chosen to title this final section of my "object", *Codetta*, a conceit borrowed from the sub-titular designations of Lev-Strauss' *The Raw and the Cooked*. More of a fermata, than the fully-fledged cadence of a coda, it serves in the absence of a finale, where there is only an immanent threshold. My inquiry began with a commitment to not delivering a universalising "truth", but rather to explore a central figure through interpretation theory. It would be inappropriate then to succumb to mere functional necessity by drawing to a close this preliminary inquiry - this effort *towards* a hermeneutics of the composer - to reiterate the many interpretations that have been brought into play. However, it would also be remiss not to attempt to synthesize some of what I have sought to locate; a further test of how resonances these readings might be elsewhere applied. In the first chapter I listed Venetian scholar Giorgio Agamben as a key influence, and if I have failed to mention him more, it is because so many of his ideas have weaved themselves into the background of my discourse, and much of his terminology has been folded into my working language. In lieu of an end, I offer then an exit: out the hermeneutic space I have started to open around the composer, and into the space in which the key subject of Amagben's inquiry, the *homo sacer*, waits. I believe there are some intriguing parallel features between these figures that provokes future inquiry beyond the limits of this paper.

[1] **Agamben, Giorgio** *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* Heller-Roazen, D. trans., Stanford University Press 1998 p.80
[2] **Ricoeur, Paul** *Information Theory: Discourse and the surplus of meaning* Texas Christian University Pres, 1976 p.77

Threshold

In *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* Giorgio Agamben explores the collapse of logic behind problems of social and political ethics, which he contests have lost or become detached from their original, often ancient, religious, cultural or metaphysical sense. Agamben's book is dedicated to an encounter with the potent limit concepts around the vestigial enigmatic figure of the *homo sacer*. An abject designation in Ancient Roman law, *homo sacer* was an individual stripped of all civil rights, essentially expunged from law. Once designated, the *homo sacer* might be killed by anyone with impunity, except in the context of ritual sacrifice, where their death was strictly prohibited. The paradox of this figure is not immediately comprehensible because as previously mentioned through reference to Bataille, sacrifice can only be understood today through the imaginary. Agamben believes that the "originary juridico-political dimension that presents itself in *homo sacer*…(is) …covered over by a scientific mythologeme". By this Agamben means that the ancient discourse of *homo sacer* possessed contextually comprehensible religious, legal and political intersections that he theorises were reset into French sociology in the first decades of the 20th century by way of certain late Victorian anthropological revisionist framings of the original significance and meaning of *sacrifice* and *the sacred*.

> In modernity the principle of the sacredness of life is thus completely emancipated from sacrificial ideology, and in our culture the term "sacred" continues the semantic history of *homo sacer* and not that of sacrifice (and this is why the demystifications of sacrificial ideology so common today remain insufficient even though they are correct).[3]

We have seen in Attali an argument for the transfer of signification of ancient ritual sacrifice onto its simulacrum, music. Similarly, Agamben argues that as a result of politico-historical conversion from ancient juridical to modern socio-anthropological discourse, significantly different sensibilities of exclusion and inclusion converged around the concept of the body of the sacred. This action created an uncertainty aura

[3] **Agamben**, *Homo Sacer* p.114

which he suggests might be called a 'theory of the ambivalence of the sacred"[4] fuelled by ethnographic concepts of taboo. Quintana Paz too speaks of a similar transmutation of the role of music in ancient society which "was more than teaching how to produce or consume music: it was teaching, by analogy, the particular laws of the human heart, soul and spirit, and the particular ways in which heavenly objects fit with each other and with human inner life."[5] He continues by stating that a repurposing of music as early as the 17th century, heralds the modern view that the only purpose of Music is "to amuse" and that Music stopped serving "to understand the natural world any longer" and that "to understand music itself, the reasons why it pleases us, or how sound is generated, it (was) necessary to resort to the newcomer science that now does accomplish the explanation of the natural world: Physics."[6] This highlights a striking parallel in law and music between the respective socio-political revisions of the *homo sacer* and the composer.

In order to better sense what this *homo sacer* is, Agamben couples it to another ancient figure that has been significantly revised by modernity, the sovereign. He believes that imbedded within the defining capacity of sovereignty lies the body of the *homo sacer*: that who can be killed with impunity, but not sacrificed.

> The sovereign sphere is the sphere in which it is permitted to kill without committing homicide and without celebrating a sacrifice, and sacred life – that is, life that may be killed but not sacrificed – is the life that has been captured in this sphere.[7]

The less immediately legible aspect of the *homo sacer* is how the figure remains regulated by the very laws from which he is excluded. Expunged to the extent that life can be taken without punishment to the killer, yet unable to be sacrificed. The death enacted then is neither homicide nor sacrifice. "Just as the law, in the sovereign

[4] **Agamben**, *Homo Sacer* p.75
[5] **Quintana Paz,** *On Hermeneutical Ethics and Education* p.4
[6] **Ibid** p.16
[7] **Agamben** Ibid. p.83

exception, applies to the exceptional case in no longer applying and in withdrawing from it, so *homo sacer* belongs to God in the form of unsacrificeability and is included in the community in the form of being able to be killed."[8] Financially, the composer presents a symbolic semi-reversible variation on this idea: unable to be killed, but may be sacrificed by anyone with impunity. And due to a historical confusion in the transfer of vocational responsibility between church and state, it is reasonable to say that the composer, like the sovereign and *homo sacer* takes the form a double exception from the sphere of the profane *and* the sphere of the divine.

Sovereign and *homo sacer*: heads and tails of the same elliptic coin, inside and outside the system, outside of quotidian jurisdiction and values, at least operationally so in antiquity. Mirrored bodies, bound by a double nature presenting "two symmetrical figures that have the same structure and are correlative: the sovereign is the one with respect to whom all men are potentially *hominess sacri*, and *homo sacer* is the one with respect to whom all men act as sovereigns."[9] The sovereign today exists in orbit, removed from the ancient reach of their power and function because the "sacredness of life, which is invoked today as an absolutely fundamental right in opposition to sovereign power, in fact originally expresses precisely both life's subjection to a power over death and life's irreparable exposure in the relation of abandonment."[10] The right to life has bio-politically asserted itself, annulling the sovereign's ancient claim. The political impotency of the sovereign today makes them mostly spectre, yet they remain a figure, at least symbolically comprehensible. Logic then suggests that today the *homo sacer* must also be a spectre. Yet having always been defined through his assignation to bare life (the simple fact of living rather than a political life), he now returns "as the phantom of our past – in sum, our memory, the silhouette of a ghost who not only appears to us…but an *invisible* past, hence a past that can speak to us in an icy voice 'as

[8] **Agamben** *Homo Sacer* p.82
[9] **Ibid.** p.64
[10] **Ibid.** p.83

if we were hearing ourselves'."[11] While perhaps slightly literal an observation, one of the enduring movements to emerge in the last 50 years in composition has been spectral music. Though a name dipsuted by many of its key proponents, a key characteristic of spectral music foregrounds *timbre* as structural agent and as a driving force for musical argument.

Agamben traces *homo sacer* to pre-Roman figurations and notes the parallel to the ancient term "outlaw", who could also be killed with impunity, their actions automatically defining them as outside of law and jury. A key sense that Agamben unlocks in the ancient meaning of the word sacred, is that of being consecrated, set aside, reserved. We have seen how Attali places the composer outside of the labour chain, how Abbing places the composer in an exceptional economy, and how easy it is to connect artistic asceticism to the idea of a subject seeking allegorical redemption, particularly if the subject operates under strict modes of subjugation as part of the training and ongoing practice. *Homo sacer* and sovereign, simultaneously within and beyond law, their social and physical bodies indicate the silhouette presence of a systemic threshold regulated by a paradoxical topology not unlike that of the composer. Agamben argues that *homo sacer* and sovereign share "the first properly political space of the West distinct from both the religious and the profane sphere, from both the natural order and the regular juridical order."[12] While the composer's candidacy as a third member of this outlier space remains speculative, here only partially tested, I believe further research can only strengthen an argument for his inclusion.

As to the role composers play in reshaping, or more completely understanding their hermeneutic inheritances and capacities, I return to Quintana Paz, who in relation to music education tantalisingly suggests that in the interpretation of the work of others,

[11] **Derrida, Jacques** *The Politics of friendship*, Collins.G trans., Verso, London, 2005 *(his italics)* p.287
[12] **Agamben** *Homo Sacer* p.82

imposition of our own understanding is pointless. By adapting to the terms and arguments of the work as it present will allow us to…

> get rid of our *own* free will or style in order to approach the one that suits *it* best – this is what Eco has labelled *intenctio operis* –, and, therefore, we must walk away from our own self and relativize it once more.[13]

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[13] **Quintana Paz,** *On Hermeneutical Ethics and Education* p.42 (his italics)

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