

The Musical Work Reconsidered, In Hindsight

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1. Introduction and Outline of the Argument

Certainly, the concept of the musical work has not always existed. Yet deciphering precisely *when* the work emerged has proved an immensely difficult task for musicologists.¹ In particular, the publication of Lydia Goehr's *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works*—in which she famously argued that the work-concept crystallized around 1800—has provoked an endless litany of modifications and outright rebuttals.² In many cases scholars have retained the gist of Goehr's argument but have sought to push the date backwards, often to the period of their own specialization. Several scholars of Baroque music have argued that musical works existed in the seventeenth century (although not before) while several scholars of the Renaissance have argued that the musical work emerged during that era (although not earlier).³ Indeed, there have been attempts—although somewhat muted—to locate the advent of the musical work in the Medieval period.⁴ In particular, the question of whether J. S. Bach composed musical works has received a great deal of attention. Although he died a full fifty years before 1800, several scholars have argued that Bach did compose musical works and have used this argument as a refutation of Goehr's 1800 hypothesis.⁵

Most recent studies have in fact been written as direct confrontations with Goehr's seminal text. Goehr (2000, 2007) herself has occasionally been pulled into the fray and has defended her position valiantly and with gusto. Indeed, there are many reasons to take her arguments seriously and in some ways the historical archive seems to support the 1800 hypothesis. Nonetheless, if we consider the sheer number of scholars who have contested her hypothesis (or at least her dating) there is reason to suspect that perhaps the puzzle has not been adequately solved. In this essay, I revisit this crucial issue by shifting the emphasis from dating (that is, from the question of *when* the musical work emerged) to historiography. If quibbling about the precise date of the emergence of the musical work has proved largely ineffectual, then perhaps it is time to radically rethink our mode of historical investigation. I suggest that one useful way to proceed is to shift the emphasis from a search for origins to a focus on the very notion of historical change.

Every discussion, historicization, or analysis of the musical work must face the dilemma of defining what a musical work is in the first place. Few musicologists today would have difficulty accepting the argument that the musical work is historically contingent, that is, that it is not a transcendental category.⁶ I take it as a given that the musical work is historical and, moreover, contested. One common—and, I would submit, quite reasonable—criticism of Goehr is that she too narrowly defines the parameters of the musical work. Perhaps the work–concept was not operative in the early eighteenth century in the same way that it was in the early nineteenth, but should this mean that there was no conception of a musical work in any way at all?⁷ In other words, could we not argue for a *pluralization* of the very notion of work–ness and subsequently recognize different types of musical works at different historical periods?

It seems to me that we do need a flexible definition of the musical work. It is efficacious, in other words, to move away from a single moment at which *the* musical work emerged and to instead examine various types of related concepts and practices both before and after 1800. At the same time, it is not unreasonable to recognize major musical transformations where they have occurred. And indeed, few (if any) researchers deny that something we may call the musical work (however broadly defined) emerged at some point during the past five hundred years. The question is simply at what point it did so, under what conditions, and to what musical and social ends.

Despite the many disagreements surrounding the musical work, a relatively stable constellation of terms and ideas is readily discernable in recent scholarship on the topic. In particular, music's growing reliance upon the score is almost unanimously understood as a major development in the advent of the musical work. In reality, the score is only one part of a much larger story, which must necessarily also include issues such as compositional (or authorial) control, the possibility of repeatability, the notion of permanence, and the emergence of aesthetic autonomy as a core European ideology.

I will address and complicate many of these issues in the course of this article. At this stage, and at the risk of being overly reductive, it will be sufficient to tentatively characterize the development of the musical work as a transition or even inversion of “where” music is located. When music notation first emerged in the West, inscription was understood as secondary to musical performance. In other words, music was understood first and foremost as an act of performance and the function of notation was to supplement this act, either as a series of more or less (usually less) specific instructions, or as a form of memorialization after the fact. The advent of the musical work marks the point at which this relationship is inverted: now, performance is secondary and attests to a primary (or more fundamental)

“work” manifested most precisely in the form of a score. With this inversion, the basic ontological status of music changes such that individual performances are merely (better or worse) instantiations of a work that exists over and above all of the possible performances that may ever take place. Indeed, a work of music may exist that is *never* performed (as happens all too frequently in the lives of many young composers today).

My aim is neither to celebrate this inversion as a major achievement nor to bemoan it as a transformation complicit with the degradation of music *qua* act. Furthermore, I readily acknowledge that a musicologist could easily focus on aspects different to the ones I have emphasized here or even—as I have implied—dismiss the entire project of historicizing the musical work as so much nonsense, since the “history of the musical work” begs the very question that it seeks to answer. Nonetheless, refuting the inversion to which I point is actually not the primary target of most scholarly debate. On the contrary, scholars generally agree on this important shift in the ontological status of music and the musical score (although often not in exactly those terms) and disagree mostly on the issue of dating.

If we can tentatively assume that the musical work exists in a relatively coherent manner, then when did it emerge? Beethoven certainly wrote musical works, but did Bach? Did Monteverdi? Did Palestrina? What about Josquin, or Ockeghem? It seems to me that instead of answering these questions directly a more oblique response may prove more valuable.

To this end, I draw on the work of the philosopher Noam Yuran and propose a novel approach to the question of historical change. As a way into the argument, I begin by considering a structural analogy between the history of the musical work and Yuran’s analysis of the history of money. I am not arguing for a direct causal relationship between the histories of music and money, nor am I proposing an economic “basis” for music’s history. Instead, I use the analogy with money purely as a heuristic device and as a way to introduce Yuran’s complex ideas.⁸

Yuran begins by observing that economic historians have long documented the use of precious metals as units of exchange in ancient civilizations. In the case of metals such as silver or gold, value was determined through weight. In Adam Smith’s classic formulation, the institution of coins was borne of practicality:

The inconveniency and difficulty of weighing those metals with exactness gave occasion to the institution of coins, of which the stamp, covering entirely both sides of the piece and sometimes the edges too, was supposed to ascertain not only the fineness, but the weight of the metal. Such coins, therefore, were received by tale as at present, without the trouble of weighing. (Smith 1904, 28)⁹

Smith's orthodox explanation is that the symbol (the "stamp") testifies to the material quantity (weight) of the piece of metal. The symbol tells the user about the material substance and by doing so relieves her of having to weigh the substance each time. This rather banal explanation of the institution of coins receives an interesting twist when viewed from the perspective of modern (or "fiat") money.¹⁰ With modern coins (such as the ones we use today), the symbol (currency value) does not signify the material substance as much as the material substance attests to the legitimacy of the symbol.

In other words, directly following the advent of coins with stamps, a suspicion that the stamp (or symbol) was fake led to a suspicion about the material substance to which that stamp attested. If there was something fishy about the stamp on a piece of metal alleging to be gold, then one had every right to suspect that there was something wrong with the piece of metal as well. A dodgy stamp was probably a sign of some kind of counterfeiting, which meant that the metal bit under consideration was either of poor quality or did not correspond to the unit of weight that the (false) stamp alleged. (In the worst case, the metal itself may not be "precious" at all—instead of gold it may just be some kind of slag.)

With modern money, however, the reverse is true: any doubt about the legitimacy of the material substance can lead only to a suspicion that the *symbol* is fake. Put simply: if a one-dollar bill does not have a watermark then it is not worth one dollar. This explains why, when a large quantity of counterfeit coins or notes is discovered, the state's response is to compound and destroy the coins or notes and not simply to scratch off the currency signs. (On the other hand, it would have made more sense in the case of early fake coins to simply scratch off the stamp.)

Smith's history of coins presented above is therefore only interesting when we consider its surprising ending. As Yuran (2014, 133) observes: "The symbol is instituted to attest to its material substance but by this very attestation, it makes the material substance redundant; it renders materiality secondary in importance in comparison to the symbol. The symbol replaces in its function that which it symbolized." In other words, the stamp to which Smith refers *at first* attests to the material substance ("ascertain[ing] not only the fineness, but the weight of the metal," as he puts it), but through this "attestation" something strange happens. Precisely by attesting to the material substance, the stamp becomes more important than that substance, which is now relegated to secondary importance.

The exact same—or at least parallel—unexpected ending occurs in the case of the musical work. At first, the score serves to assist musicians in forthcoming performances of a particular piece or else memorializes a performance that has already taken place. But at some point an inversion

occurs and performances of a piece are understood as an instantiations of that piece—or what we could now call a *work*. In other words, and to paraphrase Yuran: the symbol (score) is instituted in order to attest to a material practice (musical performance), but by this very attestation it makes the material practice of performance redundant, it renders materiality of secondary importance in comparison to the symbol. Of course, strictly speaking neither the material substance of modern coins nor the material practice of performance is redundant. The point is simply that these material “bases” attest to, or are secondary to, their “symbols.”¹¹

Returning to the history of money, we may ask: at what point did things change? At what point did the symbol stop attesting to the material substance and become primary, only to have the material substance attest to *it*? Here, another surprising result announces itself, namely that it is theoretically impossible to discern when the shift from substance supported by symbol to symbol supported by substance took place. I quote Yuran (2014, 133–34) at length:

The only possible temporality of this change is of that which *has already happened*. Indeed there can be points in time when people acknowledge the fact that a change has already taken place . . . A posterior recognition in change implies that a real change has already happened beforehand. Simply put, if we accept that there is a real difference between the two forms of coin in the story, between a gold coin and fiat coin—a distinction which does not seem at all far fetched—then the real transition between them must have occurred sometime. Yet it is theoretically impossible to locate this point in time. (emphasis in the original)

The notion of posterior recognition—which, we will soon see, was already obliquely suggested by Goehr—has tremendous explanatory power in terms of the musical work as well. In a manner structurally identical to money, it is theoretically impossible to determine when the shift from material practice (performance) supported by symbol (score) shifted to symbol (score) supported by material practice (performance). Indeed, I would argue that locating this shift is not only theoretically impossible but also *ontologically undecidable*. In other words, it is not simply that “we” as humans, because we have insufficient reasoning abilities, are unable to determine the shift. Instead, the shift itself is theoretically non-locatable because it did not ever “happen” as such. The best we can say is that the change has already taken place at some prior moment, but we cannot ever locate that moment in time.

If my argument holds any water, then perhaps it is possible to at last understand the frustration over determining the emergence of the musical work, because it is theoretically impossible to discern when the musical work emerged. I will return to this theoretical dilemma later and will suggest a way

to move beyond the impasse. But before doing so, it is necessary to more carefully examine the musicological controversies and debates surrounding the musical work. In the following sections I summarize Goehr's position and then proceed to more carefully evaluate several prominent criticisms leveled against it. In my view, the fact that Goehr's argument has remained standing at all in the face of a kind of total onslaught implies its veracity, if only partial. On the other hand, the fact that her argument has never ceased to provoke scandal seems to imply that there is something truly troublesome, or even aporetic, in the thesis she proposed more than twenty years ago.

2. Synopsis and Critical Analysis of *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works*

Lydia Goehr's *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works* is divided into two sections. The first section addresses strictly philosophical considerations by focusing on the work of aesthetically-oriented analytical philosophers. Goehr's main point in this first section is that all ahistorical approaches inevitably run aground because the musical work is a thoroughly historical concept.¹² I will not devote any more space to the first section of her book (which in any event acts primarily as a foil to the second part) because I assume that the vast majority of readers of this journal require no convincing. That is to say, few musicologists today *don't* believe that the musical work is historically contingent. If there are disagreements, these are only about the "when" of the work and sometimes also on how we should understand this quite complex concept.

In the second part of her book, Goehr turns to the history of the musical work. Her central claim is that the work-concept became regulative around the year 1800.¹³ What, precisely, does this mean? One handy way to unpack the claim is to recall the title of her book: for Goehr, musical works are those that belong in an "imaginary museum."¹⁴ The term "imaginary" immediately disqualifies one common interpretation of her thinking, namely the assertion that for Goehr works are equivalent to scores.¹⁵ The importance of notation and scores notwithstanding, for Goehr musical works are reducible neither to their performances *nor their scores* (nor, in fact, to anything and everything else). Indeed, musical works are "ontological mutants" which:

do not exist as concrete physical objects; they do not exist as private ideas existing in the mind of a composer, a performer, or a listener; neither do they exist in the eternally existing world of ideal, uncreated forms. They are not identical, furthermore, to any one of their performances . . . Neither are works identical to their scores. (Goehr 2007, 2–3)¹⁶

The “object” that we call the musical work was achievable only “through projection or hypostatization.” Because scores and performances are “worldly or at least transitory and concrete items” they can never fully match the status of a musical work, which in the early nineteenth century were understood as the “permanently existing creations of composers.” It is precisely for this reason that the only “museum” capable of housing musical works is an imaginary or metaphysical one (Goehr 2007, 174).

Having said this, the score remains a crucial piece of technology in Goehr’s project. Scores, she says, translate the “ideal of untouchability into concrete terms” (Goehr 2007, 224). In her view, they mediate the relationship between “the abstract (the works) with the concrete (the performances)” (231). Furthermore, although Goehr does not equate works with notation, she does notice that the emergence of the concept of the musical work was closely tied to an increasing reliance on scores. “[A]s long as the composers provided incomplete or inaccurate scores,” she writes,

the idea of performance extempore could not acquire its distinct opposite, namely, the fully compliant performance of a work. Such a contrast emerged fully around 1800, just at the point when notation became sufficiently well specified to enable a rigid distinction to be drawn between composing through performance and prior to performance. (188)

In other words, although Goehr emphasizes that works are not equivalent or reducible to scores, it is the score and not a performance that most authentically mediates the work after 1800.¹⁷

The emergence of the musical work was also closely related to a re-configuration of the category of music itself. For this reason, Goehr devotes a substantial portion of her text to the aesthetic theory of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Among the many defining characteristics of aesthetic theory, one thing stands out: the separation of art from the world of ordinary and mundane experience. In other words, a key factor of aesthetic theory is the *autonomy* of art. Music, as is well known, came to be understood in the course of the nineteenth century as the most autonomous and perhaps most “abstract” of all the art forms, primarily by dint of its alleged non-referentiality.

Nonetheless, music’s autonomy was closely associated with its heteronomy: “the new romantic aesthetic allowed music to mean its purely musical self at the same time that it meant everything else” (Goehr 2007, 157).¹⁸ What Goehr calls the “romantic illusion” presented the possibil-

ity “of an object, a person, or an experience, to exhibit simultaneously the character of the human and the divine, of the concrete and the transcendent” (158). In the case of music, this meant that the “emancipation” from extra-musical meaning was coupled with a counter-gesture in which music came to represent transcendence and the absolute.

Before 1800, by contrast, music was tied to—and in large part constituted by—its extra-musical *function* (Goehr 2007, 122). Performances were judged less in terms of how well a pre-existing work was executed than “on whether an audience had been efficaciously affected in a manner appropriate to the occasion” (192). The activity of performance, tethered to a particular social or political event, was always emphasized over and above the production of a “physical construction,” namely the score (124). The social utility of performance was prized above all else, and the function of a score was mainly to assist in the execution of a successful performance. “[E]ven if musicians were beginning to see composition as an activity that took place quite independently of actual performance activity,” writes Goehr, “they might still have continued to see the former as truly completed only in the latter” (198).

This brief summary of Goehr’s seminal text is, of course, selective. And indeed, her central claim that the work-concept became regulative around the year 1800 can only be understood comprehensibly after a careful analysis of the terms “concept” and “regulative”—I return to those terms later. On the most basic level, though, her argument about the advent of the musical work turns on the same “inversion” that I referred to above. Before 1800, says Goehr, performance was prioritized over inscription. After 1800, by contrast, musical performances attest to a “work” that exists over and above all possible performances. Although Goehr does not equate the work with the score, she does suggest that the score is the material technology that most authentically mediates the metaphysical musical work. As such, although my tentative characterization of the musical work presented in the introduction places more weight on notation than does Goehr, it retains the deeply historical resonances of *The Imaginary Museum*, along with the notion that the work-concept comes—at some point in history—to dominate performance.

In order to more fully elucidate the advantages and limitations of Goehr’s position, and as a pathway towards an elaboration of my own main argument, in the following section I examine in some detail the criticisms leveled against *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works*. One important point of contestation, to reiterate, is *when* the work-concept emerged. Goehr’s answer—“around 1800”—has been the subject of numerous criticisms and it is to those criticisms that I now turn.

3. Conceptual Criticisms of *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works*

Goehr's central claim that the work-concept crystallized around 1800 has been variously termed the "1800 thesis," "the Watershed Thesis" (Dyck 2010), and the "'Great Divide' Hypothesis" (Young 2005, 175). One frequent, and in some ways quite obvious, criticism of the 1800 hypothesis is that history unfolds gradually and that presenting a precise year is thus inherently reductionist. Commenting on the "sharp line of distinction between the concept of music composition as a craft—or *métier*—before 1800, and that of musical practice seen as a transcendental fine art, after 1800," William Erauw asks "whether such sharp distinctions can be made." For him, offering "drastic lines of division in history, i.e. dividing history into blocks, is always dubious"—so much so, he says, that "we could suspect the whole approach as being an anachronistic construction of the historian" (Erauw 1998, 111). Echoing this sentiment, Reinhard Strohm asserts that expressions such as "for the first time" and "at this point"—which, he observes, are used frequently by Goehr—rely on "a demonstration that these things had never happened before." For Strohm, such a demonstration is "manifestly impossible" because all historical change is *gradual* (Strohm 2000, 135). Locating (or claiming to locate) an exact cut-off point is thus, for him, quite illogical.

Goehr is not particularly threatened by this criticism. As she clearly states in *The Imaginary Museum*, "Finding a 'rough' date is satisfactory because conceptual change, like the change in practices, has no sharply defined beginning or end" (Goehr 2007, 110). In other words, she agrees with her critics that historical change is gradual. The date 1800 is for her simply a convenient marker of what she takes to be an obviously much more stretched out historical development. Philip Tagg (2000, 163) thus states that he

is in agreement Lydia Goehr that it *was around 1800*—and, it should be added, primarily among intellectuals in German-speaking Europe—that the concept of "work" (in the sense of musical end product or commodity) started to become more frequently identified with the superior aesthetic values that many keepers of the "classical" seal have attributed to a certain kind of Central European instrumental music ever since. (emphasis mine)

Tagg fully acknowledges that, as he says, "positing a conjuncture of ideas and events . . . cannot be explained in simple terms of linear causality" (162). His Marxian approach recognizes "the conflux of a multitude of

lengthy, sometimes contradictory historical processes in dialectical interaction that crystallise into a more easily perceptible whole at a particular historical time and place” (162–63). For Tagg, none of this means that we should reject the 1800 hypothesis. On the contrary, the 1800 hypothesis simply means that *around that time* important changes took place.

In response to Strohm’s critique, Goehr points out that he risks lapsing into a Sorites Paradox, a type of little-by-little argument. By this she means that if one year cannot be enough for historical change to occur (because change is always “gradual”) then surely two years also cannot. But if two years cannot be enough then three years is also insufficient. From there, we enter an infinite regress in which no amount of time is sufficient for historical change. Thus, Strohm’s argument that saying “at this point” requires a demonstration of absolute newness would lead—by virtue of the Sorites Paradox—to the logical conclusion “that the work–concept existed from the first day of musical practice (whenever that was)” (Goehr 2000, 242). This conclusion, for anyone who believes that the work–concept is historically contingent, is patently absurd. The more reasonable position, Goehr believes, is therefore to propose a “rough” date for a concept’s emergence.

Still, a certain skepticism lingers. Why? Reflecting on *The Imaginary Museum* fifteen years after its publication, Goehr (2007, xxvii) writes:

Even though I explicitly rejected the idea that the history of the work–concept reflected a necessary, determinist, or essential development in music’s history, my thesis was interpreted not only as prioritizing the 1800 turning point to an excessive degree, but also as essentializing the concept according to this singular historical moment.

Her words “to an excessive degree” perhaps betray more than they intend and belie a series of equivocations that run through her work. Consider, for example, her later reflection that she did not “mean (and I thought this would have been obvious) to equate 1800 with a year, a month, a day, or an hour” (xxviii). The apparent innocence of this recollection is undermined by the sentence that directly follows it: “Saying this, however, I had better quickly add that neither did I think that ‘1800’ stood for all time.” In other words, 1800 does *not* designate a particular year, but it also does not designate “all time.” What, then, does it designate exactly? A decade? Two decades? With Goehr’s hastily added caveat to her “obvious” point that she did not intend to specify a particular year (or month or day or hour), the historiographical problems become clear and the critics of the “1800 hypothesis” begin to seem more reasonable.

This is why, to those critics who have argued for pushing the 1800 hypothesis back in time *and* to those critics who have argued for pushing it forward, Goehr (2007, xxxiii) can only respond: “The challenge is

well motivated in both directions.”¹⁹ The question again, is just *how* well motivated and just *how* far back or forward. The entire discussion begins to seem like a game of cat and mouse. Hence, to Goehr’s observation that “[o]n the whole, musicologists recommended that I adopt a greater conceptual perspectivism regarding the work–concept, less, however, to undermine my thesis than to amplify it in a constructive way” (xxx), the question becomes: how much “perspectivism” can the central claim about work–concepts include before it becomes entirely meaningless?

Goehr’s answer, apparently, is not that much. Consider, for example, her response to Elaine Sisman’s quite reasonable request for more historical nuance, a request that might include something like the “opus–concept” alongside the work–concept. Goehr protests that honoring this request runs the risk of “unfurl[ing] into infinite speculation.”²⁰ “Why not go further,” she asks, “and add the composition–concept, the piece–concept, the oeuvre–concept, the tune–concept, the song–concept, the riff–concept, and even the improvisation–concept?” (Goehr 2007, xxxii). To this, I would respond: why *not*, indeed? Surely, this is precisely the kind of work that musicologists should be doing?²¹ And surely serious studies of the song–concept, for example, would only throw *more* (and not less) light on the work–concept, if only by clarifying what is particular to the both?

One final, related point is brought to light by Goehr’s response to Strohm’s admittedly brutal criticism of *The Imaginary Museum*. We have already recounted Strohm’s argument about the gradualness of historical change, an argument that Goehr refuted through recourse to the Sorites Paradox. Elsewhere, she writes:

It is less importantly the specific date of the concept’s emergence to which my thesis is committed than to the historical fact that the concept emerged, and with this at least Strohm has no disagreement. If works existed in 1450 and were named as such, then I am wrong as matter of fact. Still such an error would not undermine my claim that the work–concept should not be assumed naturalistically or essentially to exist in all music practices or whatever sort. (Goehr 2007, xlviiii)

This is precisely the kind of claim that is likely to irk historians of music, for Goehr tells us that her argument still stands even if it is off by 350 years! From a certain perspective her argument is indeed well taken: she means only that *The Imaginary Museum* was primarily targeted against those who believe that the work–concept is ahistorical and that, if Strohm agrees that the work–concept is historically contingent, then in some sense there is nothing more to argue about. Having said this, however, one may tolerate a difference of 50 or even 100 years—but 350?

Surely, the dedicated historian may argue, if a scholar's argument can be off by 350 years and still be untouched then the argument itself must be rather weak?

This raises, once again, what I will call the “specter of nuance.” By this, I mean that although nuance may add to and enrich larger-scale and more general claims (such as the “1800 hypothesis”), it may also have the opposite effect, causing a “central claim” to expand so far that it ultimately collapses. From a certain perspective, the entire “intellectual history” of the work-concept may be summarized by placing scholars along a spectrum of generality (on the one hand) and nuance (on the other). Goehr makes general claims that admit only a limited amount of nuance and will therefore inevitably irk those wishing for more specificity. Sisman, to take an example representing the other extreme, insists on specificity, nuance, and plurality, and therefore simply cannot entertain “central claims” that are as far-reaching and generalizing as Goehr's.

Of course, there is no way to decide which approach is better—it's a matter, in the end, of what kind of scholarship one values, it is a matter of disciplinarity and perhaps even of taste. If this is true, then perhaps the only way to significantly contribute to the debate is to alter its fundamental terms. Allow me to emphasize that in my view changing the terms is the only way to contribute to the *debate*. There are certainly many ways to contribute to the history (or histories) of the musical work—for example, by doing meaningful historical and archival research, by studying the relationship between composers and performers, by looking at issues of copyright and fidelity, etc.. But none of these contributions, it seems to me, will ultimately add anything new to the theoretical debates surrounding the musical work.

As a pathway towards those larger theoretical questions, I turn to what has been perhaps the most contentious question in the intellectual history of the musical work: did Baroque composers compose musical works?

4. The Problematic of Musical Works During the Baroque Period

Several scholars have argued that the work-concept existed during the Baroque period, that is, fifty to one hundred and fifty years before 1800. According to James O. Young, for example, Goehr's assertion that music before 1800 was constituted by its extra-musical function while music after 1800 has been defined in “aesthetic” (or absolute) terms is untenable. In making this argument, Young emphasizes the issue of “attention.” Presenting a very selective—and, I dare say, mildly distorted—reading of *The Imaginary Museum*, he asserts that Goehr's argument revolves around

the assumption that before “the great divide” (Young’s term) “music was typically only one of several objects of attention.” Other objects of attention were extra-musical and included religion, eating, and dancing. As Young observes, Goehr argues that after 1800 music became the “exclusive focus of aesthetic attention,” particularly in the newly invented space of the concert hall (Young 2005, 175).

Although the general outline of Young’s reading is not inaccurate *per se*, it is difficult to understand why he limits his discussion to the issue of *attention*, as though this alone can explain the complexities of Goehr’s history of the musical work. In any event, having reduced Goehr’s work thusly, Young immediately attempts to prove that she was wrong. His argument, in essence, is that it is possible to provide counter-examples. “While evidence can be marshaled for the great divide hypothesis,” he writes, “evidence against it is also available.” He then proceeds to illustrate that even after 1800 some people continued to divide their attention between “music” and other things. Furthermore, by drawing on a few examples from documentation about Handel, he asserts that before 1800 people did occasionally listen “attentively” (Young 2005, 177).

Young, in brief, offers a common rebuttal by providing counter-examples on either side of the “divide.” I leave it to scholars more qualified than myself to evaluate whether or not one can say with any certainty that Handel’s audience listened attentively. (It is easy to verify his other claim: indeed, post-1800 listeners do not always listen attentively.) But I think a more important question is what we gain from a series of counter-examples, even if they are accurate and numerous. What exactly is gained by shifting the “1800 hypothesis” back by fifty years, resulting in the “1750 hypothesis”?²²

A similar question could be asked of Dyck (2010, 6), who rebuts the 1800 hypothesis by arguing, in part, that Goehr’s claim that musical works are created only by “independent masters and creators of their art” is refuted by the “fact” that many Baroque composers owned their music. To be fair, this is only one small part of Dyck’s massive refutation of Goehr’s work, in which he attacks the Professor from all angles—philosophical, historical, cultural, etc.. But with regard to the issue of “independent masters” Dyck’s only response is that 1800 is too late. To this, I would ask again what the value of such a refutation is.

There are, however, other critiques of Goehr that consist of more than simply providing Baroque examples of things that look like works. Harry White’s work stands out in this regard; I will therefore consider it carefully. At first blush, White’s critique does not seem to differ substantially from other Baroque scholars, since he too hones in on one aspect of Goehr’s

work in order to rebut it: where Young focuses on attention and Dyck on ownership, White emphasizes “textual integrity.” Indeed, he refers to “the concept of textual integrity [that] only becomes paramount in the wake of Beethoven’s achievement” as Goehr’s “central claim” (White 1997, 96). (We have seen already that Goehr’s central claim is much more—and perhaps also much less—than this, and that for her the musical work is not reducible to its score, even though it is closely associated with it. But let this point not detain us.)

Like Young and Dyck, White wants to argue that works existed already during the Baroque period. He also—like his two peers—does this through counter-examples. But his argument is of a different order. Rather than accepting Goehr’s definition of the musical work and then showing that it is applicable before 1800, White (1997, 96) presents the unusual argument that Goehr has paid insufficient attention to “the music itself.” “No-one can usefully deny that [J.S.] Bach’s cantatas were more immediately indented to social function than the keyboard compositions of Beethoven,” he writes, “but this does not mean that *Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme* is less emancipated in musical terms than the ‘Waldstein’ sonata. To suggest otherwise, as Goehr does, is to mistake the social function of music for its meaning” (100). At first glance, White’s argument seems fairly reactionary: after all, what is music’s “meaning” outside of its “social function”? To discern musical meaning *outside* of social function, in other words, seems at first rather conservative and smacks of pre-New Musicological ideology. But on closer inspection it is evident that White has something slightly different in mind. Substituting the “work-concept” with the “authority-concept,” he refers to the “periodic censure which Bach’s art induced.” That Bach was the authority of his own music is borne out by the “gulf which lay between his duties as a Kapellmeister-composer and the insistent originality and extremism of his music.” White writes: “Bach stringently tested the norms of the authority-concept (which in Leipzig derived from the canons of orthodox Lutheranism) to the point where they were habitually overtaken by the autonomous signatures of his art” (103). Seen this way, White’s point is not so much that we ought to understand Bach’s music “in itself,” but rather that Bach himself actively resisted the social pressures of his day by composing music that was more stylistically extreme than was expected of him.

I have spent a substantial amount of time on White (1997, 103) because of the conclusion that he reaches: “[I]t is the work itself,” he says, “and not the presence or absence of explicit verbal recognition—which argues the existence of a transcendent concept of artistic autonomy.” In other words, unlike Young and Dyck who simply push the work-concept back fifty or

one hundred years, White proposes that although Baroque composers such as Bach wrote musical works, they themselves did not recognize their compositions as such.²³ This is a heterodox argument and differs substantially from arguments by other Baroque scholars. White's assertion also raises an issue that lies at the crux of this paper: can one say that Bach wrote works if he did not (and was not able) to recognize them as works?

5. On Regulative Concepts

How, then, do we answer the question, "Did Bach compose musical works?" Goehr's response is actually far more radical than is usually assumed. She writes: "Bach did not intend to compose musical works" (Goehr 2007, 8). Although not emphasized in *The Imaginary Museum*, in her new introduction to the second edition Goehr foregrounds the word "intend" (xlii).²⁴ But this does not solve any problems, for it still does not answer the following questions: *Did* Bach compose musical works? Could Bach have composed musical works if he did not *intend* to? What, precisely, does intention mean in this context?

In order to understand this wrinkle—a wrinkle, I would argue, that changes everything—it is necessary to consider the notion of the regulative concept. After all, Goehr is emphatic that Bach's compositions were not regulated by the work-concept. The question is only whether, if he had no work-concept, he necessarily also had no works.

Borrowed rather loosely from Immanuel Kant, Goehr uses the term "regulative concept" to denote the "as if" structure of musical works. When the regulative concept of a musical work is operative, she argues, then works are "treated *as if* they were givens and not 'merely' concepts that have artificially emerged and crystallized within practice" (Goehr 2007, 104; emphasis mine). In other words, a regulative concept is a concept that functions as if it is not a concept.

Strohm takes issue with Goehr's appropriation of this Kantian term, arguing that for Kant the distinction between constitutive and regulative concepts is not amenable to historical considerations. As such, "Kant would reject outright the hypothesis of a historical development from a constitutive to a regulative idea" (Strohm 2000, 144). This faithful reading of Kant forms the basis of Strohm's third "thesis":

Philosophical concepts, and in particular the notion of a "regulative use of transcendental ideas" (Kant), are not suited to make up the criteria of historical chronology. The identification itself of the musical work-concept with one of these regulative [uses of] ideas is spurious. (151)

In her response to Strohm, Goehr recalls that when writing *The Imaginary Museum* she did not intend to suggest that regulative concepts followed from constitutive concepts, nor was she particularly invested in a strict application of Kant.²⁵ Her intentions, it seems, were both more modest and less rigorous: “I wanted merely to capture,” she recalls, “how, around 1800, the musical work–concept became the concept that regulated—dictated or governed—the terms of musical practice” (Goehr 2000, 240).

Before 1800, Goehr insists, music was *not* regulated by the work–concept. Since roughly 1800, however, it has been common to speak anachronistically of pre–1800 compositions as works. It has been common, in other words, to “retroactively impose upon this music concepts developed at a later point in the history of music” (Goehr 2007, 115). Which returns us, finally, to the question of whether Bach composed musical works. It seems to me that a latent answer is discernable in *The Imaginary Museum*, although Goehr herself does not articulate that answer fully. Let us follow her argument carefully.

According to Goehr, only after 1800 could people conceive the music that they produced (or spoke about, or thought about) in terms of works. In other words, only after 1800 did the work–concept become regulative. But this does *not* mean, she emphasizes, that Baroque composers did not produce works. Nonetheless, although she insists that it does *not* mean that Baroque composers did *not* produce works, she has difficulty saying outright that Baroque composers *did* compose works. “*Maybe* Bach composed works,” she writes, “even though he explicitly thought about music in different conceptual terms.” She continues: “That *may* be so, but it is not so in any *straightforward* sense” (Goehr 2007, 115; emphasis mine).

Goehr then seems to pull back somewhat, asking: “*Can* a concept have, in fact, a form of existence, namely implicit existence, over and above explicit existence?” (emphasis mine). Without actually answering the question, she retreats to a much easier point:

Ignoring the impending logical complexities [of whether a concept can have a form of existence over and above explicit existence], I am interested above all in resisting the inclination to say that the work–concept must always have functioned in some matter. (Goehr 2007, 114)

Certainly, but we already knew that the *work–concept* has not always functioned, the question now is whether before the work–concept composers were able to compose works—and this is a question that Goehr seems to continually avoid.

Still, she returns to the question of whether Baroque composers might have composed works, asking whether they may have had some kind of “implicit” understanding. Her answer to this is very interesting. She says that

from an *epistemological* standpoint concepts become explicit first, that is, before their *chronologically* prior implicitness can be detected: “Only with its explicit function realized can we in hindsight see the concept as functioning implicitly” (Goehr 2007, 114). Hence, only after the full and *explicit* development of the work–concept after 1800 could anyone ever say that Bach *implicitly* composed works. In fact, she suggests that if the work–concept had never emerged at all (something entirely possible in her view) then no one would ever have been able to say that Bach composed musical works in any manner at all, even implicitly.

Commenting on her 1992 proclamation that “Bach did not intend to create musical works,” she writes:

Contrary to how this line has too often been read, I did not say Bach did not compose musical works, only that he had not intended to compose them. I certainly did not say what I have most recently been accused of saying, that “there were no true musical works before 1800” (whatever this sentence actually means). The word “intend” was to serve as a placeholder for the idea that when Bach was composing his extraordinarily great music, he was able to think of its production, performance, and reception in terms different from those associated with work–production. (Goehr 2007, xlii)

Notice that Goehr forecloses the question of whether Bach composed musical works—when it comes to the question of whether there were or were not musical works before 1800 she appends the parenthetical clause “*whatever this sentence actually means.*” A similar sentence appears, in fact, in *The Imaginary Museum*, where she writes: “Prior to its explicit emergence, there is no evidence to suggest that persons were *really* (whatever that means) thinking about something in conceptual terms distinct from those indicated by their expressed thought and behavior” (Goehr 2007, 114; emphasis in the original). In brief, the question of whether people were *really* thinking in terms of musical works (although they were not doing so explicitly) is considered meaningless.

In her later reflections, Goehr writes that the question of whether or not Bach composed works has everything to do with the relationship between concepts and objects. “I now think,” she writes,

the problems in shifting between these two ways of talking are probably insurmountable, and therefore irreconcilable. In *The Imaginary Museum*, I kept my claims as best I could at the level of *concepts*, precisely because this left *open* the decision as to whether with or without the work–concept there either are or aren’t works. (Goehr 2007, xliii)²⁶

Here, Goehr states explicitly that the question of whether Bach composed musical works is aporetic. We can speak only of the musical work as a concept, and as a concept the musical work (that is, the “work–concept”) emerged after 1800. As an object, we can say nothing whatsoever about the musical work.

6. Recapitulation and Elaboration of the Main Argument

In the final analysis, Goehr’s writings take us very far but leave us with two fairly substantial “problems.” First, they tell us little about how we might be able to think about works before the work–concept. Recall that for Goehr only after the full and *explicit* development of the work–concept after 1800 could anyone ever say that Bach *implicitly* composed works. But what kinds of music are implicitly works? What kinds of music have the “potential” to become works? Is Bach’s music any more implicitly work–like than anything else? It seems that Goehr forecloses any discussion on this topic because, as she says, she does not deal with objects—she deals only with concepts (and Bach had no work–concept).²⁷

The second “problem” that needs to be addressed is that Goehr presumes a particular form of retroactive—or even “teleological”—historiography in her work. Because teleological historiography is completely anathema to the vast majority of historical musicologists, few who have responded to *The Imaginary Museum* have said anything about this issue at all.²⁸ It seems to me, however, that Goehr’s argument can only be fully understood by *radicalizing* teleological history, and not by shying away from it. To do this requires a complete re–thinking of how history has been practiced by music historians in the past thirty or so years and it requires, moreover, resuscitating teleological historiography without falling into the many traps that haunt that mode of understanding history.

So, let us leave aside the extant debates surrounding the musical work for a moment and look elsewhere. In what follows, I radicalize and sharpen the notion of retroactive history by turning back to the relationship between the history of the musical work and a certain history of economics, outlined in the introduction to this essay. To recall my earlier argument: I suggested that the advent of the musical work marks the point at which the relationship between performance and score is inverted. But as Yuran observes, it is impossible to locate this point. Although there may “be points in time when people acknowledge...that a change has already taken place,” this “posterior recognition implies that a real change has already” taken place. In brief, “The only possible temporality of this change is of that which *has already happened*” (Yuran 2014, 133–34; emphasis in the original).

How, then, might one theorize this peculiar temporality? One answer to the enigmatic question about when the shift from performance (supported by a score) to score (supported by performance) took place is to say that it had “been so all along”: from the moment of inscription, that inscription had already replaced performance.²⁹ But this argument is false based on historical evidence, since people initially acted as if the score supported a more fundamental performance.³⁰

This leads us to ask when the *real* shift occurred? Yuran offers us an ingenious solution to the riddle. “[T]he *real* change,” he says, “*is nothing but the posterior recognition that the change had already occurred*” (emphasis mine). For this paradoxical idea to be meaningful it is necessary to understand recognition as itself eminently historical. As Yuran says: “recognition itself is viewed not only as a recognition of a historical fact (that money is not X but Y) but is viewed as a historical event” (2014, 134). The consequence of this idea is that recognition actually changes the status of the thing that it recognizes (money, music). In the first instance, “material” money (that is, money wherein the material substance is supported by a symbol) was constituted through misrecognition: “it was thought to be material but it was even then already symbolic. Therefore when the posterior recognition complements this missing knowledge, money necessarily changes: it can no longer depend on this specific non-knowledge” (Yuran 2009, 145).

The same can be said of musical works. Even when, initially and at the earliest stages of musical notation, scores supported performances it would have been possible to say—although it was not said—that performances supported scores, or that performances were instantiations of works. The “real” changes takes place, not when performances “actually” begin to support works (because, in a sense, this has always already happened since the moment of inscription) but with the *recognition* that at some prior time performances had begun supporting works.

It therefore seems that a historical investigation of musical works might benefit from reckoning with the notion of posterior recognition, that is to say, of hindsight. Historical knowledge is not reducible to a belated perspective on a stable object. Rather, historical knowledge—that is to say, that mode of thought defined by hindsight—is actually constitutive of historical objects.

This approach goes quite far towards “solving” some of the problems of the history of the musical work. It illustrates, for example, why it is so difficult to determine precisely when the musical work emerged. Furthermore, it sheds light on some of the more opaque aspects of Goehr’s argument. But advocating a retroactive history based on hindsight also harbors certain dangers. It is therefore necessary to more carefully examine what Yuran (2014, 206) terms the “ontological status of the advantage of hindsight.”

7. Hindsight, Teleology, and Historiography

As Yuran suggests, hindsight implies the affirmation of a certain form of teleology.³¹ But surely, the reader may protest, nothing could be worse? In fact, what united so-called New Musicologists of many stripes was a total disdain for teleological history, to the extent that the “messy” contingency of history has become something of a truism in music studies for the past two or more decades. Certainly, there were many good reasons for launching an assault on teleological historiography, not least of which are its often pernicious, Eurocentric, and “phallogocentric” connotations. After all, what else is teleology than the (false) idea of Great Men who progress steadily in history towards Enlightenment and control over other people and over the entire world itself?

With the advent of the New Musicology, then, teleological historiography was seemingly banished forever. Already in the 1980s, Joseph Kerman (1985, 106) spoke derisively about the “heretofore accepted expectation by the Western historical consciousness of stylistic growth, development, progress, and teleology.” And in the years and decades that followed musicologists, music theorists, and ethnomusicologists all had something to say about teleology.³² Although these pointed responses reflected a larger intellectual and cultural shift and were not unique to music studies, musicologists often pointed to homology between teleological historiography and one of Western music’s sacred cows: tonality. With characteristic insight and virtuosity, Susan McClary famously illustrated in numerous texts that teleology haunts not only historical discourse about music but also the very experience of Western music itself. So, for example, in her analysis of the first movement of J.S. Bach’s Brandenburg Concerto No. 5, she begins by drawing our attention to the piece’s “complex harmonic syntax that continually implies what the next cadence in the background ought to be—while deferring the actual arrival until the composer sees fit to produce it.” She then writes that “[t]his *process is intensely teleological* in that it draws its power from its ability to make the listener desire and finally experience the achievement—usually after much postponed gratification—of predetermined goals” (emphasis mine). This musical logic, she suggests, expresses the “social values” of the middle-class, namely “beliefs in progress, in expansion, in the ability to attain ultimate goals through rational striving, in the ingenuity of the individual strategist operating both within and in defiance of the norm” (McClary 1987, 22).

Musicologists have thus critiqued “teleological” processes both within music and in histories and contexts external to it. And of course, if we take teleology (only) to mean beliefs in progress, expansion, rational attainment of goals, and individual strategies, then certainly there is reason for concern. Yuran likewise fully acknowledges the problems with (certain kinds of) teleology, observing for example that teleology “is unacceptable today, among other reasons, because of the religious overtones associated with it.”³³ Furthermore, he says, teleology often “hints at an all-knowing observer of history or at an a-historical entity holding the *telos* of history” (Yuran 2014, 207).³⁴

Nonetheless, it is also possible to discern certain advantages to a teleological view of history—at least if one radically transforms how this teleology functions. For one thing, says Yuran (2009, 112), “eradicating any effect of retroactivity eliminates the uniqueness of historical knowledge.”³⁵ Elsewhere, he continues:

Limiting oneself to recording events as they were “contemporaneously perceived” amounts to effacing the specific historicity of the past. It renders the “pastness” of the past, its position in time, a coincidental, external fact. It makes the past a sort of a present that only coincidentally is positioned in another time. (Yuran 2014, 205)³⁶

Yuran then suggests that hindsight, by contrast, is perhaps what constitutes historical knowledge *qua* historical knowledge, or to put things another way, what makes *historical* knowledge a unique form of knowledge unlike any other. Following this suggestion, he can only lament that “[t]he price for this theoretical achievement is a certain necessary element of teleological form” (Yuran 2009, 112). In other words, to think history *qua* history one must admit a certain strain of teleology.

Of course, there are other ways to write history that avoid presenting “the past as a sort of a present that only coincidentally is positioned in another time.” Gary Tomlinson’s Foucauldian histories of Renaissance music (1993) and of opera over the past few centuries (1999) are exemplary in this regard. Tomlinson argues, for example, that between the Renaissance era and the “classical” age there was a shift in the conditions of possibility for knowledge that constrained and enabled different forms of expressivity, musical practice, and thought. In this Foucauldian view, history is marked by radical ruptures to the extent that we cannot ever fully know, for example, what the relationship between music and magic meant to Renaissance authors and composers.³⁷ Thus, although I propose a specific form of teleology in this article, I do not mean to suggest that this is the only historiographical model available.

Other recent musicological interventions arguably avoid the trap that Yuran finds in non-teleological histories, while simultaneously offering other insights. Of particular interest are interventions that challenge excessively anthropocentric historiography. It may be worthwhile, here, to clearly articulate how Yuran's historical materialist position differs from an approach such as actor-network theory.

A good place to start is Benjamin Piekut's (2014, 19) excellent article, "Actor-Networks in Music History: Clarifications and Critiques," which follows Bruno Latour's call for a "renewed empiricism that does not merely report facts based on evidence, but instead accounts for the multifarious labourers (human and not) that make something true but open to revision." From the vantage point of a renewed empiricism, privileging the work-concept in histories of classical and romantic music is problematic on both theoretical and political grounds. As Piekut suggests, "those who take [the] work concept for granted, simply ignore the many historical, social, and material mediations that occur whenever music is performed" (18–19).

Piekut (2014, 18) argues that the work-concept "denies music's material and social forms" and that it does not "constitute an ontology." The work-concept, he says, is just that—a "*concept* that emerges historically and that eventually regulates musical practice and discourse" (ibid.; emphasis in the original). Thus, one aim of historiography is "*adding back*" overlooked mediators into historical accounts (19; emphasis mine; see also Piekut 2011). In the case of the musical work, this might mean looking beyond works and including discussions of performers, concert spaces, and instruments.³⁸

While Piekut's historiographical model offers an important alternative, it is useful to recall that Goehr had already suggested a different way to understand the word "concept." For Goehr, concepts are not "merely" human ideas. When the work-concept became operative around 1800, she argues, musical works were "treated as if they were givens and not 'merely' concepts that have artificially emerged and crystallized within practice" (Goehr 2007, 104).

Goehr's argument once again directly parallels Yuran's analysis of money. For Yuran, it is too simple to say that money has value only because people believe that it does. Money functions rather as disavowal: even though individuals know that money is just a useless piece of paper, they act *as if* it has value. But Yuran also goes further, drawing out the ontological implications of this "as if" structure. Based on the observation that money functions as money whether you—as an individual—believe in its value or not, he suggests that money is a concept that "confronts

the subject in the *shape of [an] external object*” (Yuran 2014, 56; emphasis mine). Money is therefore a peculiar or even uncanny type of concept: it is an objective concept, or what Sohn–Rethel (1978) would call a “real abstraction.”

As a *historical* materialist, then, Yuran is not interested in “adding back” overlooked actors into an account of economic history. Instead, he focuses his attention on the manner by which social reality *assumes the form of an external object*.³⁹ To summarize: for the historical materialist, a “historical object” is not an “object from the past.” Rather, a historical object is an object penetrated and shaped by history.⁴⁰

My aim is not to advocate historical materialism over actor–network theory. Nor do I believe that Yuran’s analysis obviates the need for alternative historiographical models. One might easily point, in fact, to certain limitations of historical materialism—at least as it is theorized by late twentieth–century Lacanian Marxists such as Yuran. There is something troubling, for example, about the conflation of social reality with reality all told. Furthermore, it would be difficult to see how a rigidly historical materialist position would adequately deal with certain practices of non–Western sound production, such as those of certain Amerindian groups who subscribe to a multinaturalist ontology (Ochoa Gautier 2014). Nonetheless, the mode of historical investigation that Yuran develops remains useful for a historical analysis of the musical work, in part because this construct is deeply embedded within Western modernity. As this paper has shown, debates regarding the history of the musical work have long been stuck in a cul–de–sac. If nothing else, Yuran’s work provides us with one possible way out.

8. Solving the Riddle of The Musical Work—In Hindsight

I conclude by returning to Lydia Goehr’s *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works* and by considering what is perhaps the most complex (and polemical) passage in that book:

Now we can make sense of the basic argument lying behind my central claim that prior to 1800 (or thereabouts), musicians did not function under the regulation of the work–concept. To be sure, they functioned with concepts of opera, cantata, sonata, and symphony, but that does not mean they were producing works. It was only later when the production of music began to be conceived along work–based principles that early operas, cantatas, symphonies, and sonatas acquired their status as different kinds of musical work. And this is why we can meaningfully say, nowadays, that Bach composed musical works. (Goehr 2007, 115)

This statement has usually been understood to mean that nowadays Bach's compositions may be considered works *for us*. Or, stated another way, that today we "conceptualize" Bach's compositions as works—performing them at concerts as works, analyzing them as works, etc.—even though during Bach's time people did not conceive them as such. Indeed, this is perhaps what Goehr had in mind.

But there is also a way to radicalize her statement that "we can meaningfully say, nowadays, that Bach composed musical works." I propose that we understand this statement to mean that even though Bach did not compose musical works in his own time, today we can say retroactively that Bach did compose musical works. Note well: the point is *not*—or at least, not only—that in the late twentieth and early twenty first centuries we can treat Bach's "pieces" as works, for example, by performing them outside of a religious context and standardizing previously improvisatory parts and sections. (After all, it would be possible to do this with any music at all. For example, one could turn bebop recordings into musical works by standardizing them, transcribing them, and canonizing them.) The point is rather that *today we can say that Bach composed musical works in his own time*: although in his own time Bach did not compose musical works, today we can say (or after 1800 people have been able to say) that Bach did compose musical works in his own time. In this view, history itself has changed—in hindsight, we determine something about a historical moment that did not "exist" at that moment.

It is possible to make a similar argument by pointing to Goehr's distinction between emergence and origination. Her claim has always been "that the work-concept *emerged* with its full regulative force around 1800" and she has always "avoid[ed] the assumption that the concept *originated* then." Her claim allows for the possibility that the origin of the work-concept can be found in "periods long before" 1800, but it also emphasizes that those origins can only be identified after the full development of the concept (Goehr 2000, 238). This claim—which is already somewhat heterodox—receives its full force when we acknowledge that the work-concept was not an inevitable development of history and that it may, under different conditions, never have emerged at all.⁴¹ If this is so, then the full development of the work-concept does not only allow for the *identification* of its origins in times prior to 1800; in a sense, the development of the work-concept actually *creates* its origins.

Certainly, the mode of historiography I have proposed in this paper does not solve everything. It does not, for example, help us to understand pre-1800 music "on its own (contemporary) terms." But neither does it foreclose any discussion of pre-1800 music in the way that Goehr pre-

scribes. Instead, it provides an unequivocal answer to the question of whether Bach composed musical works: he *did*. But Bach only composed musical works “because” of a regulative work–concept that fully developed after Bach’s own death. Bach, of course, also composed cantatas, oratorios, and concerti. Today, we can say that Bach composed works as well.

Notes

1. I would like to thank Roger Grant, David Gutkin, and Emily Zazulia for feedback and conversations about earlier drafts of this article. Many thanks also to Thomas Fogg and to an anonymous reader for helpful comments.
2. Goehr’s *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works: An Essay in the Philosophy of Music* was first published in 1992 by Oxford University Press. (In the UK, the book was printed by Clarendon, an imprint of Oxford University Press.) As Richard Taruskin (2007, v) points out in his forward to the 2007 revised edition, judging by the high price of the first edition “Oxford University Press was evidently counting on selling out a tiny press run to libraries.” Nonetheless, a paperback edition followed in 1994 and in 2007 Oxford issued a revised edition including the forward by Taruskin just mentioned as well as a lengthy new introductory essay by Goehr titled “His Master’s Choice.” I will hereafter refer to *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works* simply as *The Imaginary Museum*. All references, unless otherwise stated, are to the 2007 edition. In addition to being the subject of numerous book reviews and articles (many of these will be referenced below), *The Imaginary Museum* was the theme of an important symposium held at the University of Liverpool in 1998. Proceedings from the symposium were later published as *The Musical Work: Reality or Invention?*, and edited by Michael Talbot (2000). This collection contains numerous responses to Goehr’s *The Imaginary Museum* and includes an important debate between Reinhard Strohm and Lydia Goehr.
3. Texts that explicitly argue for the emergence of the work–concept during the Baroque include White 1997; Erauw 1998; and Young 2005. German scholars have long located the advent of the work–concept in Nicolai Listenius’s (1549) *Musica: Ab autore denuo recognita multisque novis regulis et exemplis adaucta*. See, for example, Wiora 1983 and Seidel 1987. (For Goehr’s discussion of Listenius in *The Imaginary Museum*, see 115–19.) Probably the most sustained recent text to argue for Listenius as the key developer of the work–concept is Perkins 2003.
4. Here, I am only referring to those who locate the advent of the work–concept at the very beginning of music writing in the West. See, for example, Perkins 2003.
5. I return to the debate surrounding Bach at great length later in this paper and therefore will refrain from citing the various relevant sources here.
6. That this is the case largely due to the labors of Lydia Goehr.
7. At this point in the paper (since the main terms of debate have not yet been fully explicated), I use the terms “work” and “work–concept” somewhat loosely. As I show later, however, the conceptualization of the musical work was a key moment in its history.
8. It would be entirely possible, on the other hand, to draw more concrete connections. Richard Middleton (2000, 84) writes, for example: “It can hardly be accidental that the rise of the ‘work’ parallels and intermeshes with that of the ‘commodity,’ nor that the history of that sort of ‘individuality’ necessary to the former coincides with that of capitalism, whose success was powered, as the work of Weber and Tawney gives us good reason to believe,

by exactly the same species of property-conscious individualism. Fetishism of the work is not too far away from the fetishism of the commodity to which Marx drew attention, both in its characteristic psychology and in its social basis in the effacement of collective labour. Goehr attributes the success of work thinking to ‘conceptual imperialism,’ but it becomes easier to understand the political power that concepts can undoubtedly possess if we grasp the material forces in which they are rooted and which they help to sustain.” For important examination of the relationship between the musical work and the commodity form, see also Adorno 1997. As an aside, note that Jacques Attali (1986) points to inversions similar to the ones I have mentioned here in his famous book, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*. See, for example, his observation that although recording was first “produced as a way of preserving its trace, it instead replaced it as the driving force of the economy of music” (85).

9. The quote from Smith can be found in Yuran 2014, 132. The following argument draws heavily on Yuran’s work.

10. Fiat money refers to money declared as legitimate by a formal institution, usually a state.

11. I hasten to reiterate that I am not attempting to valorize or celebrate this inversion. Furthermore, I am fully aware that many musicians and musicologists alike would balk at the idea that performance is secondary to a score or work. Indeed, we are currently witnessing a political, aesthetic, an ontological move *away* from the work-concept, a move spurred by increased dialogue with popular and non-Western musics. Having said this, I believe it difficult to deny the hegemonic view, at least within “classical” music, that works are prioritized over performances.

12. I do not mean to suggest that all “philosophical” ruminations of the musical work are useless or without merit. In fact, I believe that we need in a way to revive a more philosophical approach if the discourse is to move forward. Furthermore, it would be naïve to think that purely philosophical approaches to musical work are a thing of the past. On the contrary, such approaches are still frequently published in philosophy journals. The divide, then, is disciplinary. And because Goehr works closely in both philosophical and musicological communities she is forced to confront critics from both sides of the divide constantly.

13. See especially Chapter 4, “The Central Claim.”

14. Goehr borrows this term loosely from André Malraux’s (1978) “Museum without Walls.” See Goehr 2007, 173.

15. Perkins (2003, 16) seems to suggest as much: “And although it may be stating the obvious, I would also suggest that the emergence of the work-concept was intimately linked from the outset with the development of a uniquely European historical phenomenon: an increasing reliance on musical notation for the study and performance of music.” Perkins seems to equate the existence of the musical work with music’s being “fixed.” In making this argument, he draws on Sean Gallagher’s (2000) account of music’s becoming a “textually stable object” (as cited in Perkins 2003, 27–28). Similarly, Talbot (2000, 6) seems to agree that for music after 1800 “the work is its score *tout court*.” By contrast, Wegman (1996, 433) states succinctly about the late eighteenth century: “Writing, as such, was not a defining criterion in this aesthetic: the latter centered on the composer’s ‘idea,’ without which a counterpoint exercise, despite being written, could not aspire to the cultural status that composition then enjoyed.”

16. Goehr borrows the term “ontological mutants” from Tormey (1974, 207).

17. The relationship between works, scores, and performances is clearly extremely complex. Here, it may be useful to add one additional remark, namely that scores are not merely “hypostasized” works but are in fact necessary for the very existence of works. Why is this the case? It is so because even though musical works may be meaningfully understood as the “permanently existing creations of composers” that are irreducible to scores and performances, they nonetheless require a score, or a performance, or some other material supplement in order to continue existing. For example, although Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony (to use Goehr’s favorite example) is not reducible to, or identical with, any possible score or performance, it would be difficult to say that this work still exists if every material trace of its existence is demolished. By “every material trace,” I include not only scores and performances but also recordings and even the minds and bodies of those who remember the piece enough to reconstruct it in the event that all scores somehow disappear. My point, in short, is that although a musical work is not reducible to any or all of its material supplements, each work requires the existence of *at least one* material supplement to continue existing. This means that the “imaginary” museum of musical works—although imaginary—cannot *only* be imaginary. Or, to state things another way, although the works themselves are “imaginary” they require material supplements that are not.

18. This central ambiguity of aesthetic theory has more recently been explored by Jacques Rancière (e.g. 2004, 2009). See also Moreno and Steingo 2012.

19. The full text reads: “Several critics have argued that something more or less like the work–concept was present not only around 1800 but also around 1700—or is it 1600, 1500, 1400, or 1300? Others, looking in the opposite direction, have said that if we take the standardization of the work–concept seriously into account, then instead of focusing on 1800 one ought to focus on 1900 with the onset, say, of ‘high fidelity’ recording. The challenge is well motivated in both directions” (Goehr 2007, xxxiii).

20. Here, Goehr is responding to a public discussion between Sisman and George Lewis. Shortly after the appearance of the revised edition of *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works*, Sisman published a fuller critique of Goehr’s work, a critique that presumably resembles her earlier remarks from the conversation with Lewis. See Sisman 2008, 79–107. For Sisman’s critique of Goehr, see especially 80–81. “That Goehr’s book has had such wide effect,” writes Sisman, “is based partly on the clarity of its ‘central claim’ and the memorable date 1800, partly on the fact that the combination of Romantic music aesthetics and the works of Beethoven did wreak a substantial change of some kind, and partly on the easy critique it allows of the European classical canon (its reification, its hegemony, its eliteness, its composer–centeredness, its claims to autonomy, its museum–like concert halls, its text–based inflexibility, its masterpiece worship)” (81n4). According to Sisman, *The Imaginary Museum* is “based on a problematic understanding of the eighteenth century and a backdating of the idea of *Werktreue* . . .” Sisman argues that Goehr’s “misreading of the evidence conflates and obscures publishing practice, composer intention, ontological status, performance traditions, and reception” (81).

21. Rob Wegman’s (1996) study of a composer–centered musical concept in the Renaissance is exemplary in this regard. Focusing on the opposition between improvisation and composition, Wegman tells us even in the Renaissance period “the composer is seen to exercise authorial control over his work—evidently a projection of the humanist ideals of textual integrity, faithfulness to the original, and the related concern to remove nonauthorial ‘corruptions’” (468). Around 1500, the definition of the composer becomes more clearly defined, and with it the distinction between the “composition as object” and improvisatory practice (477). In a footnote, Wegman seems to suggest that something re-

sembling the work–concept (as described by Goehr) was present in the sixteenth century. About the fifteenth century, he says only that “concept of the musical work is much more problematic” (433n69).

22. Note well: I am not saying that there *is no value* in revising the date of the work–concept. Indeed, there may be major musicological implications in doing this. Furthermore, precision is inherently valuable to any historian. My concern is only that offering up counter–examples (especially in the region of fifty years) to what may otherwise be a major historical statement is perhaps not very productive.

23. Dyck (2010) actually also addresses the issue of recognition. I leave his argument aside in this article, but direct the reader to 62–76 of his essay.

24. I return to the key sentence in question later in this section: “Contrary to how this line has too often been read, I did not say Bach did not compose musical works, only that he had not intended to compose them” (Goehr 2007, xlii).

25. Goehr (2000, 240) includes the following parenthetical remark: “(I was influenced, rather, by Rawls’ adaptation of Kant).” In *The Imaginary Museum*, she writes in a footnote: “I have benefited from J. Rawls ‘Two Concepts of Rules,’ *Philosophical Review*, 64 (1955), 3–32, and Tormey’s ‘Indeterminacy and Identity in Art,’ 210” (Goehr 2007, 102n22). It is interesting to note that in his *Philosophical Review* article, Rawls (1955) mentions neither Kant nor regulative concepts. In fact, his later work seems far more relevant. For example, he writes in *A Theory of Justice*: “Now let us say that a society is well–ordered when it is not only designed to advance the good for its *members but when it is also effectively regulated* by a public conception of justice” (1971, 4–5; emphasis mine). For Rawls, the principles of justice “*regulate* the choice of a political constitution and the main elements of the economic and social system” (7). Later in the same book he writes: “In justice as fairness the original position of equality corresponds to the state of nature in the traditional theory of the social contract. This original position is not, of course, thought of as an actual historical state of affairs, much less as a primitive condition of culture. It is understood as a purely hypothetical situation characterized so as to lead to a certain conception of justice” (12). To this passage, he appends a footnote, which reads: “Kant is clear that the original agreement is hypothetical” (12n5).

26. The basics of this decision were already outlined in the first edition of *The Imaginary Museum*. There, she states that her historical approach “does not obviate the need for ontology.” On the contrary, the importance of ontology remains but is now “reconceived to become inextricably tied to history.” What she sought first and foremost was the *compatibility* of historical and ontological claims, and she adjusted her “methodological approach” accordingly. In executing this approach, she writes, “[t]he major methodological transition is a move away from asking what kind of *object* a musical work is, to asking what kind of *concept* the work–concept is.” See Goehr (2007, 89–90). In “On the Problems of Dating,” she recalled that “My ontology, admittedly, moved from the domain of objects to that of concepts, from the world of objects to conceptual schemes; but this was by no means an unfamiliar or particularly radical move in philosophical method” (Goehr 2000, 236).

27. The impossibility of saying anything at all about what might implicitly be a “work” is evident from a statement in *The Imaginary Museum*, where Goehr writes that a “piece of pottery or pile of bricks” can potentially be “transfigured into a work of art through the importation of relevant concepts.” Just as this transfiguration might take place, she says, so too since around 1800 one can speak of early music pieces as works by retroactively imposing the work–concept: “Implicit existence has become here essentially a

matter of retroactive attribution” (Goehr 2007, 115). But if this is so—if a pile of bricks can retroactively become a piece of art—then surely *anything* can become a piece of art, just as any sequence of sounds can become a work? This, in fact, seems to be Goehr’s point precisely. And again, it says nothing at all about Bach’s own music during his time: this, to take a Foucauldian view, would be to pass beyond the threshold of the knowable. With this logic, anything that falls under the work–concept at any time in history can retroactively be said to have implicitly been a work. Thus, for example, if a free jazz performance is later transcribed and performed note–for–note under the logic of the work–concept, then the free jazz performance was *implicitly* a work. It seems to me that this particular notion is blunt and requires more attention.

28. The only exception that I know of is Richard Middleton (2000, 86), who has suggested (following Richard Williams) that by “by rewriting Miles Davis and Bob Marley in the light of later musical developments,” the bass player and producer Bill Laswell “reveal[ed] what they were ‘really’ (that is, latently) about . . .” “By turning the texture inside out,” suggests Middleton, “Laswell has in one sense certainly discovered elements that were embryonically present and put them in the centre . . .” (68).

29. For a parallel argument about money, see Yuran 2014, 38.

30. Yuran writes that “[t]he claim that the transition occurs at the very beginning solves” the impossibility of locating the exact moment of transition at some later date. “But,” he says, “it is important to note that it solves a fundamental enigma of the story not in a technical manner, by showing a mechanism that allows the transition from matter to symbol. Rather, it solves it by transforming these basic elements of the story, by forcing us to rethink the categories of ‘material’ and ‘symbolic’ that we use in telling the story, and so in this respect constitute it . . . To put it in the simplest terms *it is no longer a story of transition from material money to symbolic money. Rather, the real transition is from symbolic matter to material symbol: from a matter that obscures its own symbolic function to a symbol that obscures its own materiality*” (Yuran 2009, 146; emphasis in the original).

31. See especially Chapters 3 and 4 in Yuran 2014.

32. For an excellent critique from the perspective of music theory, see Christensen 1993.

33. Goehr also recognizes that retroactive histories harbor a certain danger. Referring to the difference between emergence and origin, Goehr writes that, “Strohms does not acknowledge this separation.” And although Goehr herself insists on the distinction, she nonetheless acknowledges that Strohm is “[p]erhaps . . . right not to, given the potentially dangerous consequence he sees. The trouble with engaging in retroactive history—looking backward for origins of a fully developed concept—is that it encourages the tendency to read ideological and aesthetic baggage backward as well. What ‘backward’-looking historians tend to do is to read past history as if it is rationally or naturally developing into the state from which they begin their inquiry” (2007, 238). Of course, Goehr (like Yuran) still *does* advocate a particular kind of retroactive (or what I would call “teleological”) view of history, despite noticing its potential problems.

34. As a student of Slavoj Žižek, Yuran makes use of the notion that history is constituted not by omniscience (all-knowing) but rather by non-knowledge. In his seminal text, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (a book that Yuran has translated into Hebrew), Žižek (1989, 21) addresses this question in a discussion of ideology: “ideology is not simply a ‘false consciousness,’ an illusory representation of reality, it is rather this reality itself which is already to be conceived as ‘ideological’—‘ideological’ is a social reality

whose very existence implies the nonknowledge of its participants as to its essence—that is, the social effectivity, the very reproduction of which implies that the individuals ‘do not know what they are doing.’ ‘Ideology’ is not the ‘false consciousness’ of a (social) being but this being itself in so far as it is supported by ‘false consciousness.’” See also Yuran (2009, 114).

35. Yuran’s ideas are based, in part, on Gordon Graham’s attempt to encourage historians to take the philosophy of history more seriously. Graham writes that “historians may, if they choose, restrict themselves to recording how events were contemporaneously perceived, but . . . a preference for doing so does not show that there is anything illegitimate about constructing a narrative which makes use of historical perspective and the benefits of hindsight. However, such a perspective will commonly employ ideas of success and failure, advance and decline, and these are concepts which frequently require philosophical analysis and conceptual imagination.” See Graham 1997, as quoted in Yuran 2009, 111–12. See also Yuran 2014, 204–205, for a reworking of his earlier ideas.

36. “In this case,” he continues, “historical knowledge in itself has no uniqueness in relation with other disciplines of knowledge of man—it is simply a sociology, anthropology, or economics of the past” (Yuran 2014, 205).

37. This point notwithstanding, Tomlinson’s approach is more flexible than Foucault’s. See his critiques of Foucauldian archaeology (Tomlinson 1993, xi, 35–43, 57–58).

38. As another example, Piekut (2014) considers the case of the musical circle that emerged around Karl Franz Brendel in the mid–nineteenth century. A full account, says Piekut, may include a reader of the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, but also “a cup of coffee, a café, and a text” (6). For Piekut, a coffee cup and a café are not essences, nor are they vibrant materialities whose morphogenetic properties act on the world. Instead, the various actors in his hypothetical account (reader, cup, café, text) constitute a reality when they enter into a network. Reality, from an actor–network theory perspective, is constituted through multiple associations between an ultimately unknown set of actors: “Being means ‘being related’ and ‘being in the world’” (10).

39. In a similar vein, as the work–concept took on a regulative function during the course of the nineteenth century, the “concept” of the work took on the form of musical works themselves—Beethoven symphonies, Wagner operas, and so on. In this way, the work–concept was treated as if it was not a concept at all.

40. For historical materialists like Yuran and Goehr, social reality is materialized within particular objects. Hence, historical materialism does not seek the mysteriousness of history in the places where Latour looks for it. Here is a typical list of “added back” actors for Latour (1988, 198), “the tree that springs up again, the locusts that devour the crops, the cancer that beats others at its own game, the mullahs who dissolve the Persian empire, the Zionists who loosen the hold of the mullahs, the concrete in the power station that cracks, the acrylic blues that consume other pigments, and the lion that does not follow the predictions of the oracle.” (This “litany” is famously quoted in Bogost 2012, 39.) Historical materialism, by contrast, seeks the mystery of the social inside the object. As Yuran (2014, 64–65) says, a thing “assumes a social role precisely insofar as there is a mystery in it that marks that aspect of the social that is not reducible to the perception of individual subjects. It assumes an irreducibly social and historical role precisely to the extent that it is uncanny, that there is something in it that transcends our knowledge of it.”

41. This implies that “teleological history” means only that historical inquiry can benefit from hindsight and *not* that history is predetermined.

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