Introduction

Is there really any need for another study of Bach's Passions, particularly when these (and the Matthew Passion in particular) have inspired nearly two centuries of critical literature? When I first began to consider this project, the one approach that did not seem sufficiently explored was the detailed and comparative analysis of both Passions together. However, the customary methods of approaching Bach's choral works – surveying the compositional history, verbal texts, musical forms, styles and genres – soon seemed inadequate in light of the sheer emotional and narrative scale of the Passions. Perhaps this is partly because they relate to a story that is seminal to Western history. But this could hardly be the entire reason, given that the Gospel narratives have been set so many times to music. Bach's music interacts with the various levels of text in a way that seems to go beyond merely a successful presentation of the story and its attendant affects.

A complex of questions soon began to dominate my thought on the Passions: both of them originated in the relatively local purpose of furnishing the Leipzig liturgical year (they were heard in Leipzig only intermittently between 1724 and 1750), and the vast majority of recent research has centred on details of their composition and performance, together with issues of their original theological purpose and meaning. Yet both Passions have found a deep resonance in a wide range of historical and cultural contexts, most utterly foreign to Bach's Leipzig.[1] To many, this would be because they are of universal value, transcending their original,

[1] In this study I do not consider other Passions, such as the Luke Passion, that have at some point been attributed to Bach; nor those that undoubtedly existed but are largely lost, such as the Mark Passion, or an earlier Weimar Passion oratorio whose traces may survive in the two extant Passions. An examination of the way inauthentic works have been received as Bach's would be an extremely interesting study in itself, and some issues of this kind are already covered in Daniel R. Melamed's *Hearing Bach's Passions* (Oxford University Press, 2005); on the evidence for an earlier Weimar Passion oratorio, see Andreas Glöckner, 'Neue Spuren zu Bachs "Weimarer" Passion', *Bericht über die Wissenschaftliche Konferenz anlässlich des 69. Bach-Festes der Neuen Bachgesellschaft, Leipzig, 29. und 30. März 1994 – Passionsmusiken im Umfeld Johann Sebastian Bachs/Bach unter den Diktaturen 1933–1945 und 1945–1989*, ed. Hans-Joachim Schulze, Ulrich Leisinger and Peter Wollny (Hildesheim, Zürich, New York: Olms, 1995), pp. 33–46.

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local, purposes. But how then could one draw these works into a focus that reconciles their supposed universality with the local particulars of Bach's Leipzig, which remain the focus of so much scholarship? On the other hand, if the universalist thesis is simply mistaken, what remains as the motivation for the intensive scholarly interest in the historical details, something that is hardly evident in relation to the numerous Passion settings by Bach's contemporaries?

To begin with, simply decreeing that works such as Bach's Passions are 'universal' does not necessarily do them justice, even for their most fervent supporters. For the more universal a human artefact is purported to be, the closer it begins to seem to a phenomenon of natural science and thus something to be interpreted at one remove from human concerns. Seeing the Passions more as 'particulars' surely gives us more of a chance of learning how they might resonate with certain aspects of the human condition, shaded as these will inevitably be by a range of cultural and historical variables. Nevertheless, the habit of proclaiming works of this kind to be of universal significance might in itself be telling, as evidence of a particular culture, albeit one of very long duration and broad geographical application. The overall aim of this project – perhaps one that is impossibly ambitious – is to try and understand Bach's Passions in relation to the wider 'particular' field in which they have been attributed some degree of universal significance. This field is, I suggest, *modernity*, a broad mental and cultural attitude that – in some threads at least – links Bach's musical world to the present. My study is 'traditionally' historicist in assuming that Bach's music is best understood within its cultural context, but I am obviously interpreting the notion of 'cultural context' far more broadly and ambitiously than would normally seem sensible for music in the Western tradition. Although I am by no means ignoring the circumstances and presuppositions surrounding the composition, performance and reception of Bach's Passions in Leipzig, I suggest that the context that really matters relates to the mindset that would see these works as significant well beyond their original purposes. But even this wider context does not necessarily bring values that are relevant 'under any skies', even if it may well appear so at first sight.

Many would see the modern world as itself universal, because it has acquired a sort of timelessness through its obvious achievements in the progressive refinement and continuous expansion of knowledge. One fundamental tendency of modernity – to be sceptical towards past authority and to think of itself as always improving on the past – might well have led us to forget where its roots lay, how it is the product of various

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historical processes. Yet current threats to a development that has spread well beyond its origins in the Western world might encourage us to think again. Modernity – whether 'universal' or not – faces serious challenges from a number of angles: from cultures reacting against it with a pre-modern zeal (ones that could, ironically, only have been engendered within the context of encroaching modernity); or from the obvious decline in the natural environment that is caused by the excesses of the modern world. Moreover, there is also the question of modernity's own completion and success, evident in the fall of the Eastern bloc, the untrammelled flow of capital, and the ubiquity of the free market (the almost total breakdown of this system just as I finish this book does not necessarily mean that a new one is about to emerge). The dominance of free capitalism may – in some circumstances at least – have facilitated a transformation into what is sometimes termed a 'postmodern' condition, which shares much with its predecessor, but which distances itself from the values and dynamics of modernity proper in several major respects. After all, if certain traits of modernity become ubiquitous (such as a system whose values can only be measured in terms of market forces), perhaps its sense of restless enquiry and quest for transforming what is at hand begin to dissipate. Perhaps elements from the past and from diverse cultures are now so effortlessly accommodated within the system that they no longer provide any challenge to our assumptions; they are merely a selection of the many components of a self-regulating mass culture, their value entirely defined by their current price.[2] In such a context, Bach's Passions would no longer seem to possess any universal significance; they would merely represent a particular 'lifestyle choice', their validity defined entirely by their level of popularity. Such a situation is surely more than a mere possibility today. In all, then, I do not see any advantage in valuing any music on account of its 'universality', since even if a cultural product were somehow proved to be universal, this quality would by no means

[2] This is what Fredric Jameson calls the 'cultural logic of late capitalism'; see Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 1991). As Charles Whitney suggests in his study of Francis Bacon and the beginnings of modernity, the very suggestion of a postmodern condition brings with it the possibility that modernity as an epoch may be passing away; see his *Francis Bacon and Modernity* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1986), p. 9. However, as Jameson later notes, many who approve of the 'completion' of modernity and glory in the dominance of mass culture, the information revolution and the globalized, free-market economy, do not use the term 'postmodernity' but merely distinguish their own modernity (one of many alternatives, in a world of unconstricted consumer choice) from the 'detestable older kind'; Fredric Jameson, *A Singular Modernity – Essay on the Ontology of the Present* (London and New York: Verso, 2002), p. 12.

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guarantee its survival without some effort on our part. Indeed, it is fatally easy to forget the need to keep any of our 'universals' alive through continual attention to their implications and the cultivation of an ever-developing practice.

What is modernity?

The concept of modernity, which I am trying both to define and co-opt in analysing Bach's Passions, might seem unorthodox within the context of music history. Musicology has generally avoided the term as a broad historical category and tends to associate the 'modern' with the specific stylistic category of 'modernism', as applied to progressive music from the late nineteenth century to the last decades of the twentieth. The rest of music history often falls into the long-trusted art-historical categories of medieval, Renaissance, Baroque, Classical and Romantic, or, in more recent studies, simply into centuries.[3] Modernism is a highly important category of art, one that often seems to intensify aspects of the broader modernity (e.g. formalism, autonomy, a radical 'newness') but which can also take modernity's sceptical attitude towards the past to new extremes of negation. It may well be that musicologists have avoided engagement with 'modernity' and all the broader cultural issues that this implies precisely because of the autonomy that Western music has acquired through that very modernity – namely, a sense that music stands apart from all other considerations, that it is somehow more 'true' than the messy contingencies of politics, society and, specifically, cultural history.[4]

Historians, on the other hand, have long used the broad categorization by which the Ancient World is separated from the Modern World by the Middle Ages.[5] Modernity, in the broad and rather unspecific sense of a 'Modern Age' (which comes closer to the German concept of *Die Neuzeit* than *Die Moderne*, which is a later subset of the former), has its beginnings in the era of the Renaissance and Reformation and is fed by the scientific

[3] See Tim Carter and John Butt (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth-Century Music* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), Preface, pp. xv–xviii.

[4] See Karol Berger and Anthony Newcomb (eds.), *Music and the Aesthetics of Modernity* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 2005), Preface, p. ix.

[5] Jürgen Habermas traces this conception back to Hegel's designation of the 'new age' ('Neuzeit') coinciding with the Renaissance, Reformation and discovery of the New World, all straddling the years around 1500; Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity – Twelve Lectures*, trans. Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, Mass.: Polity, 1987), pp. 5–6.

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revolution of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[6] Culturally, it surely has some real presence in Montaigne, Shakespeare and Cervantes, and in the philosophy of Bacon, Descartes, Hobbes, Spinoza and Locke. It reaches both a peak and a crisis at the time of the Enlightenment and French Revolution and thereafter forges ahead with the Industrial Revolution and the increasing dominance of capitalism.[7] It is therefore tempting to divide it into three historical phases, the first dating from the sixteenth century to the end of the eighteenth; the second, from the time of the French Revolution to the late nineteenth century; and the final phase characterized by modernism (these latter two coincide with the German *Moderne*).[8] The second phase coincides with the type of music that is traditionally termed 'Classical' and 'Romantic'.[9]

However, it is impossible to give the concept of modernity hard and fast chronological markers. After all, is there really such a pronounced change at the time of the Renaissance and Reformation, and does this period really have more in common with, say, the nineteenth century (presumably within the same 'era') than it does with the world an equivalent amount of time before it (back in the 'Middle Ages')? Furthermore, different national traditions might prioritize different starting points: the Reformation, for instance,[10] or Descartes's concept of the self-conscious, reflexive ego, or the political revolutions of the late eighteenth century. The precise bounds of modernity are clearly dependent on the sort of narrative one adopts to explain it, as if it contains the seeds of a story that

[6] The notion that modernity began in the late fifteenth century has been a mainstream historical view in English-language history since at least the publication of Arnold Toynbee's *A Study of History*, vol. 8, *Heroic Ages* (Oxford University Press, 1954); see pp. 106–25, esp. pp. 115–16.

[7] For Karl Marx, modernity was simply capitalism itself; see Jameson, *A Singular Modernity*, p. 80.

[8] The model Michel Foucault consistently followed in his writings makes a further distinction between the Renaissance and the 'Classical age' (from c. 1650 to 1800), which is then followed by modernity proper. For a good survey of the ways in which modernity has been divided into periods or phases, see Barry Smart, 'Modernity, Postmodernity and the Present', in Bryan S. Turner (ed.), *Theories of Modernity and Postmodernity* (London: Sage, 1990), pp. 14–30.

[9] This is the music related to 'our modernity' by Karol Berger, *Bach's Cycle, Mozart's Arrow – An Essay on the Origins of Musical Modernity* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2007), pp. 5, 14.

[10] The Reformation became a strong feature of German conceptions of modernity, under the influence of Hegel's philosophy of history, particularly in the way the latter is grounded on the transfer of spiritual authority from the church to the individual. This conception was soon taken further in German thought on art by the work of Jacob Burckhardt. See also Jameson, *A Singular Modernity*, p. 31.

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can be unfolded in several ways.[11] We should therefore beware of false continuities and also of the sense that each era must have a 'face' to which everything must conform.[12]

Modernity is perhaps better defined as a bundle of attitudes or mindsets that are only secondarily associated with specific eras and places. We might be able to recognize that elements of it might well appear in periods long before any putative 'Modern' age.[13] While the Renaissance, with its restoration of a lost antiquity, might not be considered 'modern' in itself, its new oppositional mechanism – beating the immediate past with the stick of the ancient world – could well have been significant, since this was something that was soon to be engaged against the very antiquity it previously envied. Moreover, pre-modern, anti-modern or simply non-modern attitudes might enjoy healthy traditions within any age or society categorized as 'modern'. I would suggest that modernity is most productive when it interacts with traditions that persist in the societies it affects or which it, in turn, discovers in other cultures. If there is any consistency in the mental conditions defining modernity, these could nonetheless produce entirely different results in different circumstances. While I suggest that chronological boundaries are only secondary in defining modernity, one of the foremost 'mental conditions' of modernity is the notion of progress and the development of human knowledge and society in earthly, chronological, time. Thus it is impossible to disassociate these conditions entirely from the periods in which they developed, since such conditions would have brought a renewed self-consciousness of time and historical change.

Well-worn theories associate the mindset of modernity with various developments in the way the cosmos is believed to cohere: foremost is perhaps the concept of 'disenchantment' (Max Weber's famous formulation), a retreat from the magical significance of the world and human

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

[12] See Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, p. 251, and Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language* (London: Routledge, 1972), p. 9.

[13] A classic example of this approach to modernity (or rather that which is termed 'Enlightenment') is Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (*Dialektic der Aufklärung*, 1944), translated by John Cumming (London and New York: Verso, 1997). The idea of modernity as an attitude was also something emerging in the late work of Foucault, something he characterized as an ironic heroization of the present. This means that the high valuation of the present in modernity is intimately tied to a desperate desire to imagine it other than it is. See Maurizio Passerin d'Entrèves, 'Critique and Enlightenment: Michel Foucault on "Was ist Aufklärung"', in Norman Geras and Robert Wokler (eds.), *The Enlightenment and Modernity* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), pp. 184–203, esp. p. 196.

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practices, the 'extirpation of animism'.[14] With this came the view that the cosmos was not necessarily constructed entirely for mankind's benefit, something that brought a reaction against customary beliefs, particularly against the Augustinian view (reinforced by Luther) that evil exists in the world entirely as a reflex of the original sin of mankind. Now a new form of human initiative would be required to render the natural world amenable to the purposes of the 'disembedded' human. For Hans Blumenberg, 'Die Neuzeit' began when Western man had to take up the 'burden of self-assertion'. With the new development of scientific method, it became necessary to adapt man to the impersonal reality uncovered by repeatable experimentation. The distinction between reality and the human condition also brought with it the contrary tendency: to adapt reality to the needs and purposes of man.[15]

If the pre-modern attitude would see human experience as subordinate to and dependent on a greater reality beyond the world, the modern will tend to associate the real with what is directly experienced and explicitly created within the world; any reality beyond what can be inferred through the emerging methodologies of science is simply unknowable. Moreover, any knowledge whatever remains provisional, to be improved and expanded *ad infinitum*. Progress has no absolute ends or limits in sight. Something of the excitement at the opening of new horizons is captured in the print of the Pillars of Hercules on the title page of Francis Bacon's *Instauratio Magna* of 1620, as Blumenberg notes.[16] One gets the sense of the possibility of breaking out of an enchanted circle of interconnected elements – the 'ready-made' quality of the pre-modern world[17] – and that, having chosen a direction in which to sail, the journey could be potentially endless.

Religious beliefs are not necessarily to be excluded within the modern mindset, rather they are no longer seamlessly connected with whatever happens in the empirical realm, and can inhere in a different sphere, even within personal experience. The fate of religion is symptomatic of a more general separation of the various forms of order, belief and specialization

[14] Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 5.

[15] Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age* (*Die Legitimät der Neuzeit*, 2nd rev. edn 1976), trans. by Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge, Mass. and London: MIT, 1983), pp. 137–8, 209. I borrow the term 'disembedding' from Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 2004), pp. 49–67, where it is related particularly to the way the individual becomes distinct from received notions of community and society.

[16] Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, p. 340.

[17] See Andrew Bowie, *Music, Philosophy, and Modernity* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 48.

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within modernity. Hence, in modernity, one could be active as a rational scientist while attuned to the feelings and traditional practice of religion, without necessarily feeling the need to reconcile the two; religion simply becomes a private matter, with its own rules and practices, which do not necessarily connect or interact with all other aspects of life. In Bach's time, the notion of religion and reason representing two separate spheres of knowledge and truth was already evident in Pascal's unfinished writings, and such a separation was recommended by Johannes Bredenburg as a way of protecting revealed religion from the threat of radical atheism that was inferred from Spinoza's writings. The most robust attempts at reconciliation were made by Gottfried Leibniz: to him (and perhaps Bach, too), all the contradictory elements would somehow cohere once they were viewed from God's point of view. Bach's Leipzig compatriot Johann Christoph Gottsched (who clearly embraced a much more fashionable aesthetic position than Bach) took a moderate stance that still left open the possibility of magic and the work of the Devil, but did not lay any particular stress on this.[18]

The coexistence of practices that are in their strongest sense contradictory – even within a single human subject – invariably gives each a new, specifically autonomous, quality. The ongoing, unlimited development of each could engender a new sense of openness in terms of both external reality and the human mind.[19] Pragmatically, the separation of activities could also be exercised in the name of efficiency, something most obviously demonstrated in the division of labour necessary for industrialized production. In such ways, modernity typically drives a wedge between the natural world and human civilization, by which humankind is progressively alienated from the secure and harmonious place in the natural order that our cultural memories always seem to evoke. Hans Robert Jauss usefully relates this line of thinking to a trajectory leading from Rousseau to Adorno, suggesting an intellectual epoch characterized by a profound ambivalence towards modernity (a dialectic that is born of nothing but modernity itself), stretching from the eighteenth to the twentieth century.[20] By this token, 'full' modernity would belong to the era beginning just after Bach. My approach is to suggest, rather,

[18] See Jonathan I. Israel, *Radical Enlightenment – Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650–1750* (Oxford University Press, 2001), esp. pp. 355, 372, 514.

[19] Eric Voegelin, *Collected Works*, vol. 23, *Religion and the Rise of Modernity*, vol. 5 of the *History of Political Ideas*, ed., with an introduction, by James L. Wiser (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 1998), pp. 136–7.

[20] Hans Robert Jauss, 'Der literarische Prozess des Modernismus von Rousseau bis Adorno', in Reinhart Herzog and Reinhart Koselleck (eds.), *Epochenschwelle und Epochenbewußtsein* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1987), pp. 243–68, trans. by Lisa C. Roetzel as 'The Literary Process of Modernism from Rousseau to Adorno', *Cultural Critique* 11 (1988–9), 27–61.

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that such chronological distinctions are not so absolute, and that Bach, and much of the environment to which he belongs, are of specific interest because of the way modern and pre-modern elements interact within them.

The critique that modernity continually turns upon itself partly derives from its ongoing suspicion of unquestioned reliance on past authority. If this represents an antipathy towards tradition in general it is also clear that modernity has spawned many of its own traditions (not least that of being suspicious towards the past).[21] This was certainly the case with the Reformation, which overthrew recent tradition in the process of attempting to restore what it saw as the worldview of early Christianity. Luther's turn against the established church and towards the self-assertion of the individual through personal faith was articulated in the service of the Augustinian doctrine of original sin and the sense that all that is wrong with the world stems from this.[22] Very few of the components of the Reformation (as a 'proto-modernity') were actually new – there had been many forms of anti-ecclesiastical spirituality before – but the fact that they rose to institutional level in their own right did indeed produce a new situation, one that established a pluralism that could become the bedrock for a diversity of beliefs and various degrees of scepticism.[23]

Roughly simultaneous with the type of self-assertion that was emerging with the Reformation was the breakdown of the medieval chivalric tradition and the complex customs and interactions of various classes, dominated by aristocratic and military etiquette. Cervantes' satire on the old order, *Don Quixote*, clearly demonstrates how this had irrevocably

[21] The suspicion of past authority is obvious throughout the work of Descartes and it is also strongly evident in the work of Thomas Hobbes; see his *Leviathan, or, Matter, Form, and Power of a Commonwealth Ecclesiastical and Civil* (1651), ed. by Nelle Fuller (Chicago, Auckland, London: Encylopaedia Britannica, 2nd edn, 1990), especially Chapters 21 and 46. See also Robert P. Kraynak, *History and Modernity in the Thought of Thomas Hobbes* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), pp. 28–31, and John J. Joughin, 'Shakespeare, Modernity and the Aesthetic: Art, Truth and Judgement in *The Winter's Tale*', in Hugh Grady (ed.), *Shakespeare and Modernity – Early Modern to Millennium* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 61–84, esp. p. 78. Eduardo Mendieta, paraphrasing Habermas, aptly suggests that 'the tradition of modernity is the critique of tradition for the sake of tradition'; see Jürgen Habermas, *Religion and Rationality – Essays on Reason, God, and Modernity*, edited, with an introduction, by Eduardo Mendieta (Oxford: Polity, 2002), pp. 16–17.

[22] The notion of humans as being guilty by virtue of their very existence is still very strongly evident in much of the text of the Matthew Passion, particularly in chorales stressing man's guilt, e.g. 'Ich bins, ich sollte büßen' (10); 'Was ist die Ursach aller solcher Plagen?' (19); 'O Mensch, bewein' (29).

[23] Voegelin, *Religion and the Rise of Modernity*, pp. 134–6.

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declined by the early seventeenth century.[24] What is less obvious is what the disintegration in this order actually led to, although it clearly left a space for new ways of defining the self. Some commentators point to the steady breakdown of the assumption of resemblance and interconnectedness between all facets and dimensions of the world and universe (a central target of Cervantes' satire). This has been most famously theorized by Foucault in recent times, but was already clearly central to Descartes's critique of inherited modes of thought: 'Whenever people notice some similarity between two things, they are in the habit of ascribing to the one what they find true of the other, even when the two are not in that respect similar.'[25] The issue of resemblance – and the interconnectedness of all elements of the world – is particularly important in relation to a study of the Bach Passions, since many analyses will claim specific connections between aspects of the music and theological concepts. If it is plausible that Bach intended or intuited such connections, this would imply a pronounced pre-modern attitude in his mindset. More significantly, the fact that many scholars so enthusiastically embrace such connections shows the extent to which pre-modern thinking is still an essential component of our contemporary world. Indeed, the concept of resemblance has undergone many forms of revival within even the strongest eras of modernity, most significantly in various forms of musical Romanticism.

If, in one sense, modernity led to the sense of independent development in an infinite number of directions, there was also the contrary tendency to imagine that all such diversity could be comprehended as a whole by being brought under a single, quasi-mathematical system. As Descartes suggested, if things can be represented by a system that no longer betrays any direct resemblance to that which it represents, then such a system could translate everything into a neutralized, objective form of representation.[26] Modernity is thus frequently related to the development of

[24] For an analysis of *Don Quixote* and its relation to modernity, see Anthony J. Cascardi, *The Subject of Modernity* (Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 72–124.

[25] René Descartes, *Regulae ad Directionem Ingenii* (c. 1628), Rule 1, in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vol. 1, trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff and Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 9. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things – An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (unattributed translation of *Les Mots et les choses*, 1966), (New York: Vintage, 1994). See also Dalia Judovitz, *Subjectivity and Representation in Descartes: the Origins of Modernity* (Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 41. Judovitz is sceptical of reductionism on the part of both Foucault and Descartes, observing that writers from Plato to Montaigne were well aware of the way resemblance could produce illusion, and suggesting that Foucault merely relied on Descartes's approach, which itself lacked a systematic critique of resemblance.

[26] Judovitz, *Subjectivity and Representation*, p. 48.

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instrumentalized rationality, the ability to adapt rational principles from one situation and apply them in another, in order to progress the material comforts of humankind (Max Weber's description of equal temperament as an essential element of rationalization is, of course, of particular interest for anyone interested in the role of Bach in the unfolding of modernity).[27]

If the world is to be mapped and increasingly controlled through a system that treats all things equally and dispassionately, any resulting representation can only be useful and practical if it takes account of how the object will appear from different viewpoints. The sense of accurate portrayal relative to a specific viewpoint is obvious – to the point of truism – in the development of perspective in painting. But this shows precisely how 'representation' becomes a particular issue within modernity, since it involves the sense that there is no longer any direct means of duplicating or mirroring reality; any attempt at depicting or imitating it is fundamentally a human construction that partly shapes and colours that which it represents. This clearly makes it important to understand the human subject position in more detail. Indeed, the period from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century shows the development of a specifically modern form of human subject, one characterized by its sense of individuality and autonomy, and which in some forms appropriated the pre-existing concept of the single, divine standpoint.[28]

To summarize: there are clearly many ways of defining modernity, and the concept is only going to provide illumination if I draw together those aspects that resonate with the concerns of this study. Foremost is the notion of the human born into a world that provides it with no specific place in a broader, enchanted, cosmic order (regardless of one's beliefs in what such an order might be); nor should the social order into which one is born provide any necessary constraints on what one can do or think. The natural world is accessible through reason, but the range of potential knowledge is infinite. Both social structures and the development of the individual contain elements that are necessarily artificial, tailored to effect a sense of change or progress in real time. Each area of knowledge and experience can be developed along its own trajectory, engendering a new sense of autonomy. Such a sense can begin to colour both the character of

[27] Max Weber, *The Rational and Social Foundations of Music* (*Die rationalen und sozialen Grundlagen der Musik*, appendix to *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, written 1911, published Tübingen, 1921), trans. and ed. Don Martindale, Johannes Riedel and Gertrude Neuwirth (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1958). For an excellent, if idiosyncratic, study of the origins of musical modernity, see Daniel K.L. Chua, *Absolute Music and the Construction of Meaning* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), esp. pp. 8–28.

[28] See Habermas, *Religion and Rationality*, p. 148.

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the individual (in the direction of increasing independence from inherited traditions, but also in the opposite sense of being a powerless component within divided labour) and the human artefact. Pieces of music might start to acquire an aura that somehow transcends their original purposes or the intentions of the composer; such an aura might be a factor both of the composer's attitude to the music and of the way it is heard and received. All these factors are in constant circulation, so there is no sense of any having an identity that is absolutely fixed.

I have already suggested that modernity is not primarily a historical category, even if any description of it can hardly avoid falling into a narrative; a historical trajectory seems to follow to the degree that a modern mindset is in place. Although my emphasis so far has been on modernity as a mindset, this is obviously impossible to pin down in terms of individual historical persons; it is unlikely that anyone has consistently and exclusively identified themselves with the array of features I have highlighted (disembedded humanity, a sense of potentially infinite knowledge, etc.). Most people surely also carry in their minds many 'non-modern' thoughts, feelings and opinions. Modernity describes an exceptional attitude, a supplement to a broad range of non-modern human conditions. It is primarily a theory, something that is plausible to the degree that it serves to illuminate a number of human tendencies; it is also inevitably and continually refined by the material with which it interacts.

Modernity and music

Musically, we could look for some of the historical origins of modernity in the sixteenth century. Certain genres of polyphonic church music developed musical processes by which music seemed to acquire a degree of autonomous development, and composers became increasingly concerned with the ways in which music could relate to text. Most obvious – at least in retrospect – might be the deliberations of the Florentine Camerata, the birth of opera, and Monteverdi's conscious effort to codify a new style that supplements the old, the *seconda prattica*. Music became directed towards presenting narratives and emotions, developed in real time; its newfound humanity rendered it the servant of text rather than the analogue of extra-worldly proportion. Examples of this kind of music were to be heard in church too. Yet its direct connection with texts and their attendant emotions was perhaps not as secure as the reformers might initially have imagined. For, as new formalizing procedures emerged from

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the interplay of traditional techniques of musical construction, rhetorical presentation, dance patterns and newly expressive gestures, music seemed capable of pursuing a life of its own. It could certainly continue to parallel human emotion and the implications of text, but seemed to acquire the potential to go beyond these. As Walter Benjamin has suggested in relation to German tragic drama, perhaps in the seventeenth century a deep-rooted intuition of the problematic nature of art was emerging as a reaction to its self-confidence during the Renaissance.[29] Karol Berger perceptively notes how Monteverdi's *L'Orfeo* actually seems to end with the reaffirmation of the *prima prattica*; Orfeo achieves bliss not through the music that aims to express the passions of the speaking subject, but rather through the sonorous harmony of the spheres, his beloved's resemblance to be seen in the sun and stars.[30] But perhaps there is more than this sense of restoring the 'modern' Renaissance cosmology of music (where music resonates with a reality that is only partially seen) – since so much about the opera seems to suggest the triumph of music as a system in its own right. For instance, the instrumental display can be heard as an end in itself and the recurring ritornelli that seem initially to encapsulate a particular emotion or situation later reappear in different contexts. However much humanist reformers at the end of the sixteenth century (together with many later critics) might have prized music for its supposedly 'natural' qualities, what were becoming increasingly effective were precisely its independent aspects, its deviations and its modification of supposed natural principles (whether of the broader, if hidden, reality – *prima prattica* – or of human passions – *seconda prattica*). With this potential for autonomy came the sense that musical works were individuals, following their own implications and potentials, and almost of a piece with the emergent individuality of those who created them.

Although the fully fledged concept of originality – essential to the type of genius usually associated with the Romantic era – was not yet fully in place, it might be possible to infer that seventeenth-century composers were less wary than their predecessors of the potential accusation of 'secondary creation'. The notion of everything stemming from the single God's creative act had been strongly enforced since the early centuries of

[29] Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (*Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*, 1963), trans. John Osborne (London and New York: Verso, 1998), p. 176. Chua, *Absolute Music*, pp. 23–8, relates this sense of anxiety to the dividing mechanisms of early modernity, by which music and speech were no longer unproblematically connected to the divine truths of the heavens.

[30] Berger, *Bach's Cycle*, pp. 25, 40–1.

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the Christian era, as a way of protecting against any tendencies towards Gnostic dualism (by which the god of salvation was correcting and improving the work of a less benevolent god of creation).[31] It was the gradual overcoming of the notion that one should not enquire beyond the bounds of established knowledge, or create outside the bounds of established practice, that might describe the move from a pre-modern to a more modern concept of musical composition. This is not to say that earlier music cannot be startlingly original or clearly impressed with the signature of unusual musical talent or curiosity, nor that later music is always unique and autonomous; my point concerns rather the intentional attitude underlying the creation and reception of the music.

Music's customary prestige as a mirror and analogue of the universe rendered its ancient roots specifically durable and left it a comparative latecomer on the stage of modernity. In this respect, the 'timeline' approach to modernity is entirely appropriate, by which a fundamental change happens – in the musical world at least – in the latter half of the eighteenth century. This is the approach of Andrew Bowie, who describes music's transition towards modernity as the analogue of the growing view of language as no longer directly representative of reality. If language cannot precisely relate to a pre-existent reality, then music's linguistic role (whether as a servant of language or as some original language in its own right) becomes cloudier, and the priority of texted music over untexted is gradually reversed.[32] Bach's more abstract collections that research a particular issue of compositional theory might seem to presuppose an even earlier mindset (i.e. that predating the era when music served text), which assumed a continuity between the fabric of the music and the structure of the cosmos, and thus the survival of a form of musical thought that was yet to be disenchanted. Nevertheless, most of the pieces in *The Art of Fugue* or *The Musical Offering* display some signs of 'finish'.[33] This might be a consistency of figuration going beyond the contrapuntal tasks at hand, or a sense of trajectory, tension or culmination – all of which give the pieces a sort of individuality or 'self-consciousness', as a supplement to their didactic purposes. There is a hint that Bach, even at his most archaic, somehow writes music that chimes with the sensibilities of a much later age.

[31] Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, pp. 128–30.

[32] Bowie, *Music, Philosophy, and Modernity*, pp. 51–4.

[33] For a study of 'modern' aspects of Bach's *The Art of Fugue*, including aspects of affective unity and motivic development, see Bernhard Billeter, 'Modernismen in Johann Sebastian Bachs *Kunst der Fuge*', *BJb* 87 (2001), 23–53.

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Bach's relationship to musical modernity

The feature that I consider especially important in discerning issues of modernity in music (or at least in the attitude it seems to display) is the notion of artificiality, the idea that progress can be achieved by acknowledging the imperfections of nature and modifying the systems at hand to improve things from a human perspective. This is perhaps the one area where we have specific evidence from the Bach circle of the composer's participation in the aesthetic debates surrounding the constructions of musical modernity. This was the public dispute with Johann Adolph Scheibe, who accused Bach of tempering the natural element of music with too much artifice. Bach's response (articulated through the mouthpiece of Johann Adam Birnbaum) was that art such as his served to perfect those aspects of nature that were unfinished or imperfect (see p. 63). Here, two particular movements in modernity as it was developing in the early eighteenth century – the concept of nature as a ruling system to which mankind needs to conform and that of human artifice as a means of improving nature – clash in the earliest stage of Bach criticism.

Bach doubtless saw his task as a composer as one that involved perfecting and improving whatever musical techniques or idioms he had inherited. From his (largely pre-modern?) viewpoint, this might have meant reconciling actual pieces of music with the perfection of a God-given harmony that already, to all intents and purposes, existed as part of Creation. Perhaps his thinking resembled that of Leibniz, for whom the world and all of creation were freely chosen by God as the best of all possible worlds. Even if this were to contain significant hardship, evil and dissonance, these all conspire – in the larger order of things – to produce the best possible result. But the actual result in Bach's case was a profound change in the materials, through their reworking and interaction – in other words, a sort of development in the way music could be defined, and in the effects it might have on the listener. This clashes somewhat with the traditional Lutheran injunction to focus on the faith of the individual at the expense of a world that is irredeemably flawed and barely worth improving in itself. The model of progress to which Bach was contributing seemed rather to suggest that 'improvement' – at least in the world of his music – could provide a means of developing the individual's faith or virtue. This conforms to Blumenberg's idea that progress within modernity requires a reversal of the causal relation between moral and physical evils: evil and human hardship in the world are no longer consequences of

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the Fall and the inherent sinfulness of mankind; instead, improving the material worldly realm makes it easier to become a better person.[34] Bach evidently set great store by personal improvement, and his restless search for new musical experience seems almost to be unprecedented. His obituary, largely constructed by his son Carl Philipp Emanuel, may well have rendered this story stronger than it actually was, but it is clear that both father and son together reflect a historical trend towards the virtues of self-improvement and even the notion of individual genius.[35]

One of my crucial presuppositions is already obvious: that the condition of modernity does not exclude or supersede the pre-modern (or even, simply, the 'non-modern'), but that many such elements are newly inflected, energized or transformed within a modern outlook. Most significantly, the older elements often become spheres of knowledge and practice developed along their own specialist trajectories (hence the flurry of treatises on fugue in the years after Bach's death?).[36] Bach's Passions are therefore not specifically of value to the degree that they contain modern elements ('the more up-to-date/ahead of their time, the more impressive'). This would be something reminiscent of the old trope of Bach as a 'progressive' composer, even if – or even because – he appeared archaic to his contemporaries.[37] Adopting the notion of 'Bach the progressive' too wholeheartedly could bring with it the uneasy corollary that – in a world governed by progress – nothing is more outmoded than yesterday's progressive. I am trying to move away from defining musical modernity in terms of specific contents – say, identifiable motives, harmonies or gestures – by seeing it more in a certain attitude, even in a certain result, and one to which diverse components might contribute.

I nevertheless retain at least a trace of the progressive model by suggesting that modernity is a historical particular that links some of our concerns to Bach's, albeit in ways that he could not possibly have

[34] Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, p. 54.

[35] For a study of the way Bach's official obituary was designed to demonstrate his isolated and lifelong quest for musical self-improvement, see Peter Williams's biography, *J.S. Bach – A Life in Music* (Cambridge University Press, 2007).

[36] Habermas makes a useful distinction between 'spheres of knowing', 'spheres of belief' and those of legally organized and everyday life; see *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, p. 19. Charles Taylor separates secularization – the end of society structured by dependence on God or the beyond – from the continuation of religion in both public and private life, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, pp. 187–8, 193–4.

[37] The clearest formulation of this position is Robert L. Marshall's 'Bach the Progressive: Observations on His Later Works', *Musical Quarterly* 62 (1976), 313–57, revised in Robert L. Marshall, *The Music of Johann Sebastian Bach: the Sources, the Style, the Significance* (New York: Schirmer, 1989), pp. 23–58.

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anticipated. This involves a particular energy that still seems to render such music, simply, *modern* – a sort of immediacy that retains its newness in a variety of presents, and quite apart from how archaic the content might be.[38] It may come down to the sense that, although this music is firmly grounded in experience of the past, it is somehow orientated towards the future.[39] If Bach is to be credited with some sort of 'modern' insight, it is more a question of his intuition of the broader conditions of a specific historical attitude than his invention of musical techniques or ideas that are 'ahead of their time'. Moreover, there is a blurring of the sense of agency: between what Bach intended to do, what the musical processes he set in motion did and continue to do, and what we read and hear in the music.[40] I associate this sense of a continually circulating process (i.e. nothing is absolutely fixed, nothing stands still, least of all in this type of music) with the modern: there is no fixed meaning, sense or emotion lying encrypted in the music. But the meanings and senses that the process sets in motion can be of the most intense kind – indeed all the more so because of the circulation involved.

It is impossible to gauge exactly what Bach's own listeners might have heard in this music. The apparently distracting behaviour of certain parishioners in the Leipzig church services might seem remote from the attentive listening context of later concert practice. But, as Tanya Kevorkian has noted, 'careful listening was not equated with silence' in

[38] See Jameson, *A Singular Modernity*, p. 35, for the comparison of the notion of 'modernity' with something analogous to an electrical charge: 'to isolate this or that Renaissance painter as the sign of some first or nascent modernity is . . . always to awaken a feeling of intensity and energy that is greatly in excess of the attention we generally bring to interesting events or monuments in the past'. A similar charge was suggested by Mikhail Bakhtin in the context of the novel; see M.M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination – Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist and trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), p. 31: 'the novel has a new and quite specific problematicalness: characteristic for it is an eternal re-thinking and re-evaluation. That center of activity that ponders and justifies the past is transferred to the future. This "modernity" of the novel is indestructible', and p. 421, 'Thanks to the intentional potential embedded in them, such works have proved capable of uncovering in each era and against ever new dialogizing backgrounds ever newer aspects of meaning; their semantic content literally continues to grow, to further create out of itself.'

[39] Habermas notes how historians such as Reinhart Koselleck often relate modern time consciousness to the sense of a 'horizon of expectation' that replaces the experiential space of the pre-modern world; see *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, p. 12.

[40] Naomi Cumming makes a very similar point, although couching it in the more formalist language of Peirce's semiotics, by which the listener is the 'interpretant' who completes the musical 'sign', in 'The Subjectivities of "Erbarme Dich"', *Music Analysis* 16/1 (1997), 5–44, esp. 8–17.

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the secular practice of Bach's time, so the same was doubtless true of church.[41] Putting together the Lutheran injunction to cultivate the faith of the individual, on an urgent day-by-day basis, with the affective and narrative techniques developed in opera, Bach may have been instrumental in the development of a new, intensive, form of musical listening, one that may have been only partially realized by the members of his own congregation. If there is any evidence that Bach was indeed 'ahead of his time' in terms of the type of listening he both presupposed and helped to constitute, it lies in the fact that the intensity of the reception of his music in the nineteenth century was of an entirely different magnitude from that of his own time.

A close study of anything in relation to 'the modern' is always in danger of provoking the insinuation that any pre-modern elements are to be devalued; this danger is particularly acute in a society where we are continuously enjoined to 'modernize' (often nowadays a euphemism for assimilating all values towards what some term 'the postmodern' condition of seamless capital).[42] But many of our specific problems in the contemporary world stem precisely from some of the unintended (and, at their worst, intended) consequences of modernity. This is something surely acknowledged in contemporary reactions against modernity, such as the desire to return to traditional crafts – albeit often funded by the surplus generated by capitalism and industrial production – and to prize cultural difference over global standardization.[43] Music that comes from pre-modern contexts may have specific value for us on account of its relating to aspects of life, experience and belief that have survived from before the modern era, that are contrary to the modern, or that have somehow been revived within it. Pre-modern music may even have gained ground in our time as a consequence of the overcoming or completion of modernity – an issue that could equally apply to the exponential growth in non-Western, pre-modern or – most significant of all – popular music. Therefore, the many 'pre-modern' elements we could intuit in Bach's Passions might be equally as valuable as the modern ones, as part of the comforting 're-enchantment' that our circumstances often encourage, while some of the more 'modern' elements could now seem curiously dated.

[41] See Tanya Kevorkian, *Baroque Piety: Religion, Society, and Music in Leipzig, 1650–1750* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 29–52, quote from p. 41.

[42] Jameson, *A Singular Modernity*, pp. 9–10.

[43] See John Butt, *Playing with History – the Historical Approach to Musical Performance* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 157–8, 165–217.

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One thing that Bach's Passions might seem to achieve in the process of performance is a sort of counterpoint of modern and non-modern, something that stretches well beyond the mere combination of musical lines. To take the most obvious example of this sort of counterpoint, the religious element of Bach's Passions is clearly inherited from pre-modernity (without our falling into the generalization that modernity necessarily excludes or unremittingly threatens religion),[44] while their elements of autonomous musical form – perhaps parallel with the sort of autonomy being developed by the individual human from the seventeenth century onwards – represent a more specifically modern development.

This crude picture becomes more complicated if we consider that Christianity, in its own split from the traditional association of religion with a particular community, provided some of the seeds of the modern condition and its conception of independent individuals, able to develop themselves in contexts beyond that into which they were born. In Christianity uniquely within the ancient theistic religions, the divine became both a transcendent viewpoint, unified and omnipotent (but invisible to the world as we know it), and also humanly present in the world through the ministry of Jesus.[45] The Gospel should be proclaimed to all who are competent to receive it, regardless of background, race or birth; existing laws are neither to be blindly followed nor overturned without subjecting them to the scrutiny of personal experience and faith; and progress can be achieved by exploiting the contradictions in the inherited laws. This new situation can therefore give temporal and ethical goals to the individual within the actual span of one's life and irrespective of birth or cultural circumstances. If we consider the fact that the principal source relating to Jesus' life, ministry, death and resurrection is fourfold (or, bearing in mind the close relationship between the three synoptic

[44] Habermas, *Religion and Rationality*, pp. 148–51, sees Christianity as more than merely a precursor or catalyst for modernity, viewing modernity's ethic of freedom, universal justice, individualist conscience and democracy as representing the direct combination of Judaic justice with the Christian ethic of love. Modern faith, if it endures, changes into something more self-reflexive, one's religious standpoint relativized by secular knowledge and the awareness of other religions. From this viewpoint, fundamentalism cannot belong to the modern condition. Blumenberg, on the other hand, feels that attempts to describe the modern age as a secularization of Christian categories do an injustice to the legitimacy of modernity. He suggests, instead, the notion of 'reoccupation', by which modern categories might indeed fill conceptual spaces that were previously occupied by religion, but the positions thus occupied are themselves prior to the religious occupants. See *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, pp. 27–51, esp. p. 49.

[45] One surely does not have to be an atheist to see at least some of the seeds of secularism in the development of a specific, subjective position combined with the drawing of the divine towards the world of human actuality.

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Gospels, at least twofold), the eminently 'modern' notion of taking account of plural perspectives in viewing a singular phenomenon is already latent in the Christian tradition. It made the notion of relativizing one's own perspective and traditions a fundamental facility of Western culture.[46]

A counterpoint between religious and subjective-autonomous elements in Bach's Passions means that neither automatically predominates, and this sort of balance – or productive tension – is perhaps part of the durable quality of these works. If we are indeed living in an era after the main thrust of modernity, there may be some sort of parallel between our time and Bach's – on opposite sides of an era, as it were. As Harvie Ferguson has suggested, the Baroque age was rich in its anticipations of cultural discoveries in a way that curiously parallels our own; it also established a richly pluralistic attitude that was in some sense 'interrupted' by later forms of modernity that imposed a greater degree of rationalization and uniformity on some aspects of bourgeois life.[47] While this line of thought is certainly stimulating in relation to a study of Bach's Passions, the notion of a pre-modern/post-modern parallel has become something of a cliché in studies of early modern culture, particularly in literature.[48] Hugh Grady stresses that it is all very well noting that we have an affinity with the type of subjectivity found in Shakespeare, because his imperfectly formed human subjects – yet to be solidified into the stereotypical 'bourgeois subjects' with fixed identities – have something in common with our more fluid postmodern subjectivity. But there are plenty of writings from within modernity proper that exhibit subversion, transgression and the undermining of authority.[49] One of the most pernicious pieties of some self-proclaimed postmodernists is the assumption that everything within

[46] For examinations of the use of the term 'modern' within the early Christian era, see Jameson, *A Singular Modernity*, pp. 17–18; Whitney, *Francis Bacon and Modernity*, pp. 8–10. On the West's capacity to decentre the individual's own perspective, as moulded by the Judeo-Christian tradition, see Habermas, *Religion and Rationality*, p. 154.

[47] Harvie Ferguson, *Modernity and Subjectivity – Body, Soul, Spirit* (Charlottesville and London: Virginia University Press, 2000), pp. 194–8.

[48] This is a particular feature of Stephen Greenblatt's brilliant early study *Renaissance Self-fashioning – From More to Shakespeare* (University of Chicago Press, 1980, new edn 2005), e.g. pp. 174–5, 'We sense too that we are situated at the close of the cultural movement initiated in the Renaissance and that the places in which our social and psychological world seems to be cracking apart are those structural joints visible when it was first constructed. In the midst of the anxieties and contradictions attendant upon the threatened collapse of this phase of our civilization, we respond with passionate curiosity and poignancy to the anxieties and contradictions upon its rise.'

[49] See introduction to Hugh Grady (ed.), *Shakespeare and Modernity – Early Modern to Millennium* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 12–13.

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modernity necessarily points towards an ordered regulation of obedient, individualist subjects, always on the brink of some new Auschwitz. What seems to have been forgotten is the fact that many examples of art – even some of the most supposedly canonical – articulate a resistance and oppositional character that represent the complex tensions of modernity far more vividly than many theoretical generalizations.[50] Most attempts at repudiating modernity themselves exemplify modernity's own totalizing tendencies and remain entirely 'insensitive to the highly *ambivalent* content of cultural and social modernity', as Habermas has observed.[51]

It may seem that I am attempting to find a way of resurrecting the old belief that 'the music itself' in the classical tradition lies somehow apart and beyond any individual valuation and that I am trying to shore up that tradition by giving it some sort of generalized cultural meaning, a useful content. But my thesis is that this music is significant not so much for any specific cultural content or meaning (or some sort of transcendent meaning, divorced from human concerns), but rather in the way its various elements relate within a process created and heard in time. It is this interplay of various elements, not least those that are specifically part of a performance, that makes this music a 'hook', with the potential for resonating with, reconciling, or tempering a broad range of meaning and belief. Music of this kind doesn't necessarily 'contain' any specific ideology or meaning, but its dialogic implications strongly encourage us to attach these from the outside. The definition of the composer, his intentions, the effect of the music and our own sense of being gained through it are all part of a process that is never entirely static.

Does this presupposition that the Passions do not 'contain' anything mean that I am trying to sidestep some of the difficult cultural issues that surround them, such as the frequent perceptions of anti-Semitism in the John Passion?[52] I certainly do not intend to neutralize these issues as such, although this might be part of the net result. For I maintain that music cannot possibly contain a specific ideology or meaning, at least not in the sense of one poured into it by the composer or his environment, enduring in the notated trace, and then heard again – without fail – in any act of reception. Of course, this is not to say that the John Passion cannot be

[50] This is undoubtedly one of the ways in which Adorno's outlook, developed partly through an intense and exhaustive consideration of music, continues to have a signal relevance in an age when most of his worst fears about commodification and the domination of the 'administered society' seem to have been realized.

[51] Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, p. 338.

[52] See Michael Marissen's searching study *Lutheranism, Anti-Judaism and Bach's St John Passion – With an Annotated Literal Translation of the Libretto* (Oxford University Press, 1998).

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used in a particular way or within a particular environment where it will reinforce specific prejudices on account of its text and the seemingly violent effect of the music. Moreover, to the extent that anti-Semitism has played a part in the Christian tradition, seeded in the Gospels themselves, anything that is created within this tradition will inevitably carry something of this risk. More significantly, a particular brand of anti-Semitism has surely been one of the by-products of modernity itself as this has played out in the West, so again anything that shares in some of the mechanisms of modernity will always carry the risk of serving its darkest sides as well as its most positive aspects.[53] From this point of view then, to identify the obvious barbarism lying as part of the origins of works such as Bach's Passions is a sort of truism: that is, something undoubtedly true but which does not therefore explain how such works have the power they do or whether their barbarous traces have (or have ever had) any effect as such.[54]

The significance of the Passion story as one of the most fundamental narratives in the Western tradition renders Bach's settings especially suitable for the approach I am adopting. They connect with broader cultural issues than anything else within Bach's output. Unlike most seminal narratives and mythologies, the Passion story is based on an event with some likely historical basis, and to many it is the central component of a supreme truth, higher than all others. Yet what makes Bach's Passions so striking is not their truth content as such. What could possibly count as 'truth' in music, in any case? Perhaps, following what were almost certainly Bach's own beliefs, we might affirm that the inherited laws of harmony and counterpoint are necessarily 'true' and become more so the more perfectly and ingeniously they are realized. But this stance does not accommodate the formal manipulation of musical ideas, or even necessarily the extent of the tonal system as it evolved over the course of Bach's life. In other words, the impressive element of Bach's Passions, that which makes whatever truth the story contains so much more real, is their artifice, the 'fictional' constructions of the arias and choruses and the pronounced tonal contours of the recitative. Many of the inventive tools at Bach's disposal came directly out of the traditions of Baroque opera, a genre which is fictional in its utmost essence, often exploiting its own

[53] See, esp., Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

[54] See Joughin, 'Shakespeare, Modernity and the Aesthetic', pp. 62–3, where, following Andrew Bowie, he notes that works such as Shakespeare's can sustain interpretations that are diametrically opposed, so that even indisputable relations with barbarism cannot tell us all there is to know about such works or about the way they continue to exert power over us.

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self-conscious artificiality in what some consider a prototype for the twentieth century's 'culture industry'.[55] Bach's Passions thus bring to a head the tensions between truth and fiction, nature and artifice, a confrontation that very much complicates their relation to the norm of religious truth. It is precisely this tension that might render them so productive within debates about modernity.

Much of my attitude in this study is directed toward the possibility that Bach's writing acquired its apparent power precisely through doing musically what the modern novel was doing textually, as a sort of fiction that brought its own, new, form of 'truth'. This music creates a sort of believable fiction through its own world of emotional and sensual gesture; it evokes a sort of consciousness sustained and developed in time and delineated by autonomous musical procedures or forms. This powerful musical fiction brings the various levels of verbal text alive in ways that would have been entirely foreign to most previous forms of music. Catherine Gallagher relates the development of the 'true fiction' of the novel specifically to modernity, to that attitude of speculation and scepticism that led the reader of novels to contemplate the believability of characters and actions, to hypothesize about motives and outcomes. This sort of fictionality stimulated the reader towards gauging the likelihood of possible scenarios, something vital in negotiating new forms of commerce and enterprise.[56] As Gallagher perceptively notes, ordinary people had to exercise the ability to disregard claims that all 'truths' were literal truths even in order to accept paper money. Consequently, most of the developments associated with modernity required precisely the kind of 'cognitive provisionality' developed in the novel, a sort of fiction that was accepted and fostered for some sort of practical convenience. The characters of novelistic fiction are open, inviting the reader to bring them to life, internalized in a way that would be impossible were they to represent actual people. This sort of internalization is not necessarily the direct identification with the characters that many critics of the perceived 'bourgeois sensibility' of the novel have assumed, but something much more open and flexible, enabling the reader to reflect on his or her own unfathomability in contrast to the knowability of the novelistic character. It is an exercise more in flexible self-creation than in recognizing a completed model of oneself behind the text. Moreover, as Descartes tried

[55] Bryan S. Turner, 'Periodization and Politics in the Postmodern', in Turner, *Theories of Modernity and Postmodernity*, pp. 1–13, esp. p. 9.

[56] See Catherine Gallagher, 'The Rise of Fictionality', in Franco Moretti (ed.), *The Novel*, vol. 1, *History, Geography, and Culture* (Princeton University Press, 2006), pp. 336–63.

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to show in *Le Monde* (first published, well after his death, in 1664), the notion of fictional worlds becomes the prototype for the way we gain our knowledge of the real world, as if we were imitating God's creative capabilities, trying them out on a fictional world in order to adapt them to the real world. The Cartesian representation of the world becomes a form of metaphor, a representation of what things ideally should look like, rather than something essentially of a piece with nature, as metonymy.[57]

Having brought up the relation of music, not only to modernity as a broad cultural attitude, but also to the novel, I am perhaps beginning to fall victim to a common problem in recent music scholarship. This is the tendency to translate music into other phenomena, to reduce it to more concrete and readable models, particularly the verbal. However, having used such models as analogies in order to bring music out of its habitually autonomous territory, I propose that the type of music I am addressing is specifically important because it also helps to constitute modernity in the actual process of reflecting, opposing or interacting with it. Taking the novelistic analogy as a starting point, it is clear that most forms of music relate to narrative in the broadest way (that is, to a human sense of organization in time, rather than necessarily to the specific implication of a storyline) and also to some sort of voice.[58] Indeed, the latter can – as in novels – be overtly multiple, but, given the way lines and gestures may be combined simultaneously in music, this can present multiple voices and associated viewpoints in a way that is entirely unique. While some forms of musical narrative can come closer to the novelistic than others – sonata form, for instance, in its relation to novels of the Enlightenment era – what is significant is that a narrative element is palpable in music precisely because it is performed in time.

A 'modern' listener might try to piece together elements of narrative in any music that contains a plethora of events and gestures (even if the emerging temporality is relatively static or recursive). Indeed, it is the implication of a stronger form of listenership – akin to the reader of a novel – that makes music so significant in the development of the modern subject. In hearing relationships both between figure and ground and

[57] Judovitz, *Subjectivity and Representation*, pp. 92–4, 189–90.

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

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between events passing in time, one is not just testing out a possible world, as one might in reading a novel, but exercising a real form of consciousness over time. And what is specifically significant about this form of consciousness is that it is purposely artificial, based on fictional musical events. This is a consciousness different from – say – an exercise in co-ordinating one's listening with an assumed harmony of the spheres or with a model that amplifies our prior sense of identity.

Issues of reception

Bach's Passions are also significant on account of their history of reception: the Matthew Passion was absolutely central to the canonization of Bach in the nineteenth century, when it was retroactively defined as one of the masterpieces of classical music. Virtually everyone connected with Mendelssohn's restoration of the Matthew Passion in 1829 had no doubts that they were dealing with a musical work of the highest value – even the greatest of all time, according to the singer of the part of Jesus, Eduard Devrient, and the music journalist A.B. Marx.[59] What was particularly unusual about this situation was the fact that Bach's Passion was considerably older than the type of music these commentators normally considered 'great works'. Older music could undoubtedly command great respect, not least if it provided a sort of model for compositional technique (Bach's music was particularly useful in this regard), but to accord a piece of music a century old the same sort of status as a Beethoven symphony was clearly something very different. The Matthew Passion gained a prestige in 1829 that it could never have had before, yet this prestige was itself historically conditioned, something that might be here one year and gone the next.[60] Even within this historically conditioned definition of 'great' musical works, an urgent issue still remains: if the Matthew Passion was so attractive in 1829 it must surely have contained or represented elements that resonated with the Classical–Romantic work concept, elements that Bach might not necessarily have intended and that

[59] See Celia Applegate, *Bach in Berlin – Nation and Culture in Mendelssohn's Revival of the St Matthew Passion* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 2005), pp. 1, 8 (n. 14), 119, 121.

[60] Carl Dahlhaus suggests using the concept of the *point de la perfection* as a way of describing the *kairos* or high-water mark in the reception history of a particular work or repertory. This is particularly useful in capturing the fact that the reception of pieces of music is not necessarily a history of ever-increasing value and influence. See his *Foundations of Music History*, trans. J.B. Robinson (Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 156–8.

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were fortuitously misread/misheard by Mendelssohn and his colleagues. This issue relates back to the historiographical relation between modernity as a broader age stretching back to the Renaissance (to which Bach would, unremarkably, belong) and a stronger sense of 'the modern' most commonly associated with the later eighteenth century, together with the nineteenth century and much of the twentieth. Part of the argument of this book is that the stronger modernity is partially constituted through Bach's musical embodiment of the productive tension between premodern and modern elements.

The success of the Matthew Passion (within classical music culture, at least) also generates questions about the John Passion, which was equally available for restoration in 1829. This clearly did not command anything close to the same respect as the Matthew Passion, enjoying far fewer performances and often written off as a hurried and functional work.[61] Nonetheless, this smaller Passion did begin to gain ground during the twentieth century, with, for instance, Friedrich Smend's exhaustive study in 1926 of what he believed to be its profound theological content,[62] and also the espousal of the Passion by prominent musical figures (e.g. Benjamin Britten). By the time the historical performance movement was in full swing in the 1970s, the John Passion tended to be treated as a viable alternative to the Matthew Passion, on absolutely equal terms. Theologians such as Jaroslav Pelikan couched the difference between the two Passions in terms of theological attitude rather than musical quality (in his view, atonement as 'satisfaction' in the case of the Matthew Passion, and as 'Christus Victor' in the John Passion).[63]

All this was surely not just a matter of critics perceiving qualities in the John Passion that had somehow been missed before, but a change in the way musical quality was valued. In some sense, this must be a factor of the type of relativistic flattening that any historicizing movement can bring (where everything from the past tends to be equally valued), but there must be more to it than that. Perhaps the John Passion became attractive on account of a newly found interest in alternatives to the 'standard' classical canon. Reciprocally, the Matthew Passion no longer has the central place in the repertories of symphony orchestras that it had

[61] Philipp Spitta, for instance, opined that the 'St John Passion is far inferior to the St Matthew, or even to the St Luke . . . as a whole, it displays a certain murky monotony and vague mistiness'; see his *Johann Sebastian Bach – His Work and Influence on the Music of Germany, 1685–1750*, trans. Clara Bell and J.A. Fuller-Maitland (London and New York: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1889, reprinted 1951), vol. 2, p. 526.

[62] Friedrich Smend, 'Die Johannes-Passion von Bach', *BJb* 37 (1926), 105–28.

[63] Jaroslav Pelikan, *Bach among the Theologians* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), pp. 89–115.

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before the advent of historical performance. The public disgrace of not performing in the 'approved' historical style was simply too heavy to bear for cash-strapped orchestras; moreover, the Passion's traditional outing on Good Friday began to make much less sense as the public grew ever more indifferent to the notion of such a Friday. Greatly valued and still performed the Mathew Passion might remain, but no longer as an unquestioned part of mainstream repertory.

Already this thumbnail sketch of the reception of the two Passions suggests that much must surely lie in the changing values of different times and places: the clear preference for one Passion over the other during the nineteenth century becomes increasingly modified in the later twentieth, as the place of both works is reformulated, both slightly estranged from the canonical mainstream, as if fenced off in the historicist nature preserve of early music. The Bach Passions thus sit astride the fields of rediscovered 'early music' and the canon of so-called 'classical music' (itself fed by a process of rediscovery in the case of Mendelssohn's 1829 performance of the Matthew Passion); they lie both inside and outside the tradition, but in slightly different ways.

It might then begin to seem that the understanding and valuation of all types of music are purely a function of the reception in any particular time or place, that works are somehow inaccessible 'in themselves'. Although this currently fashionable view has been a major corrective to the modernist tendency to fetishize works of art, there is surely something unsatisfactory about an approach that always knows the answer in advance ('the meaning/value of X lies in its reception at time T, by people P'). Fill in the blanks and you have understood all there is (or that is legitimate) to know about Bach's Passions. Surely, pieces of music are like any other form of human construction: whatever the patterns of intention lying behind them, they instantaneously acquire an element of autonomy whether we wish them to or not.[64] I would suggest that pieces of music, or of any art for that matter, can affect us in ways that we could not expect – not because they have some secret property that only posterity reveals, or

[64] This point is made very strongly by Bruno Latour in his study of the history of science, *Pandora's Hope – Essays on the Reality of Science Studies* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999). He suggests that even in so apparently verifiable a field as science there is a constant dialectic between fact and artefact (p. 125), and between a constructivist epistemology and a realist one (pp. 129–32). Following his reasoning for the world in general, it is the case neither that there is music 'out there' waiting to be described and understood correctly once and for all (p. 141), nor that everything we can say about music is entirely a function of our cultural presuppositions, but that the interaction between music and reception is both subtle and unpredictable.

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purely because our climate of reception predisposes us to see or value something that was irrelevant before, but because there is an unpredictable and circulating relation between the piece and its reception – it is not merely a one-way process. From this point of view, the favourable reception of the Matthew Passion in 1829 might have involved as many elements that were unexpected – not hitherto formulated as carrying cultural value – as those that resonated with current concepts.

How, then, does the sequence of my chapters address the basic question of Bach's dialogue with modernity? As I have already stated, any developing definitions of modernity work in a circular relation with the musical study, each aspect informing the other. Given the predominant function of the Lutheran liturgy as a means of cultivating and reinforcing the individual's faith, an obvious starting point is the question of the way this music relates to the individual. The solidification of the individual consciousness as something with its own degree of independence and autonomy is an essential aspect of modernity, one which was partly seeded in the Reformation itself. But is not the variety of individualities within modernity so extremely great as to render the concept of a 'modern subject' meaningless? Charles Taylor provides a useful starting point by linking the growing sense of internalization with the move against an external, pre-existent order that is 'found' and that determines our station and role in life, and more towards a form or order that is made, or internally discovered, within our own minds. This is something made overt in Descartes's work on subjectivity, particularly in the *Discours de la Méthode* (1637), and later developed on a much more complex scale by Kant.[65]

Something of this inward turn was already evident in Augustine (a fundamental inspiration for Luther's Reformation), but with him it was coupled with a sense of our moral sources as lying outside us (like Plato's cosmos), moral sources that are by definition good. A telling comparison can be made between Augustine's *Confessions*, on the one hand, and Rousseau's, on the other: Augustine's are carried out according to a particular type (e.g. the convert who, through various temptations, eventually finds the right path to a divine, pre-existent, truth), while Rousseau's are a search for that which is specifically unique to the self.[66]

[65] Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self – The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 124, 152.

[66] See H. Porter Abbott, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 132–5.

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Charles Taylor suggests that there were two discernible sides to emergent modern subjectivities around 1700, thus when Bach was reaching adulthood: self-control and self-construction on the one hand and the sense of the self as a unique particular waiting to be discovered, on the other.[67]

The focus on the individual as someone with specific responsibilities of self-development and constructed through the application of a discipline (from both within and without) is endemic to Protestant practice in general. Moreover, this tendency underwent particular developments closer to Bach's own age, both at the macro level (the increasing emphasis on the absolute monarch at the expense of inherited structures of aristocratic and municipal government), and at the level of the individual (with the new emphasis on personal feeling and conversion within the broader Lutheran movement, and specifically within Pietism). The sense of subjectivity at both these levels is specifically pertinent to Bach's Passions: the central subject of both Passions is undoubtedly Jesus himself, represented not just in the way his words are set and sung, but also by the way the music *around* his characterization works to magnify his presence. The Evangelist's narration of his harrowing fate, together with the strongly felt reactions and personal statements of the ariosos and arias in 'our' present, are part of the same musical event that brings him to representation. Within the political climate of Bach's own time, the increasing focus on the absolute ruler would have been nothing without the attitude of the subjects around him, 'authorizing' his power, to adopt a term from Hobbes. While in appearance this might seem similar to traditional structures of order, in which everyone has his or her pre-established place, Hobbes's monarch has power by virtue of the authorization from below, rather than exercising a natural power that is distributed downwards.[68] Bach's 'musical commonwealth' creates for its 'monarch' a degree of presence that has scarcely been exceeded, yet this presence lies in the

[67] Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 185.

[68] See Kraynak, *History and Modernity*, pp. 179–80: the 'author' (individual subject) is the 'real' person with real power, while the 'representative' (monarch) is the artificial construct, but whose commands thus bind the author as if these were ordained by the author himself. While, in one sense, the concept of absolutism deprived the individual of certain powers and rights, in another it intensified the individual's activity by greatly developing the precise role he (and normally 'he' in the seventeenth century) was expected to play. This was something particularly evident in military organization under absolutism, which Bach himself seems to have envied in his comments about the musicians of Dresden, who were only expected to play one instrument within the court orchestra, but at the highest possible level. See Ulrich Siegele, 'Bach and the Domestic Politics of Electoral Saxony', in John Butt (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Bach* (Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 17–34.

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world created by the music; it is not something that the music merely reflects or depicts.

Equally striking are the individual characters themselves, given voice in the arias and meditative choruses. These are presences that invite us to share in their experience, even to become one with them. The role of subjectivity in this music is not merely a question of representing historical personages, or even the typical citizen to whom Bach and his librettists addressed their works, but involves the development of emotion and consciousness on the part of any individual listener who is prepared to give the music some degree of attention. This is something subtly different from the standard role of a listener empathizing with the representation of a character within an operatic role, since the characters developed within the 'present' of Bach's Passions are themselves listeners and witnesses to the representation of Jesus' Passion. They stand, like us, in the time of the storytelling rather than in the secondary time of the represented story.[69]

Given this emphasis on types of subjectivity emerging in the process of the performance, the next obvious topic is therefore the way in which time is involved in the development of the various kinds of individual consciousness and how the temporality of performance relates to the larger-scale implications of a religion dating from the latter years of the ancient world. Do the Passions create a sense of linear time, everything changing irrevocably in the course of performance, or do the recurring and repetitive elements suggest something more cyclic, governed by eternal truths and laws?[70] Do the notions of progress and change, undoubted tendencies of the modern age, mean that the Passion story has to be interpreted in a transformational way that could not have been possible before? Does Christian eschatology somehow coincide with some of the more utopian ideals of modern progress?

How does this relate to the personal, subjective consciousness of time? If Christianity itself already occupies some of the modern forms of subjectivity, it may also have provided some of the impetus for the development of the modern notions of subjective time, especially if Augustine's perceptive meditations on time are anything to go by. With the neo-Augustinian emphasis on personal development engendered by

[69] Karol Berger, *Bach's Cycle*, p. 107, observes that, since it is the narrator who brings the story to life, the 'time of the storytelling is ontologically prior, more fundamental, than the time of the story told'.

[70] One of the central theses of Berger's *Bach's Cycle, Mozart's Arrow* is that Bach's Matthew Passion shows the composer's determination to subvert the linear principle to the cyclic and eternal. This issue will be explored further in Chapter 2.

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the Reformation, there was increasing attention on the way time was harnessed towards the cultivation of sustained consciousness and awareness of being. Time became for the soul what, in early modernity, extension became for the body; the soul became a living biography of itself.[71] It may well be that Bach's music can demonstrate the subjective consciousness of time, in terms both of the abstract consciousness represented by each singer–personage in the actual process of singing and, particularly, of the way this could be mapped by the attentive listener. Time consciousness did not become a matter of sustained intellectual study until the turn of the twentieth century (in, for instance, the literature of Proust and the philosophy of Husserl and Bergson); but modern novelists and philosophers undoubtedly built their systems on much that had already been articulated through the arts, and especially in music.

Having explored some of the parameters of subjectivity as part of what is both represented and potentially developed by the listener, through the interaction of musical and subjective time, how are we encouraged to interpret what we experience? Does the music simply transmit obvious meanings latent in the texts (whether biblical or of more recent origins), or does it encourage us to find deeper meanings lying behind the literal sense of the text? Does the music involve the sorts of connection that had been part of the Christian hermeneutic tradition right from the time that Paul (and indeed Jesus himself) co-opted the Old Testament in the service of the New? If music can indeed perform this wider hermeneutic function – making connections and relationships in its own right – does this not mean that it can 'slip its moorings'[72] and tell us many more things besides?

This possibility of infinite significance, going beyond the seemingly closed parameters of the assumed function and purpose of the music, is perhaps one of the ways in which music might work within modernity. The sense of almost threatening infinitude was something directly stimulated by the new sciences, with the closed universe already destabilized by the Copernican revolution. The most heretical scientists and philosophers of the seventeenth century often adopted a 'maximalist' approach to existing knowledge and conceptions, pushing these to their limits, and thereby changing the assumptions and purposes with which they began.[73]

[71] See Ferguson, *Modernity and Subjectivity*, p. 94.

[72] I borrow this phrase from Charles Taylor's *Sources of the Self*, e.g. pp. 371, 373.

[73] For a study of parallels between Bach's musical thinking and that of philosophers who likewise pushed the existing conventions into unexpected territories, see my '"A Mind Unconscious that It Is Calculating"? Bach and the Rationalist Philosophy of Wolff, Leibniz and Spinoza', in John Butt (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Bach* (Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 60–71.

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In Bach's case, it is as if he had entered into a 'Faustian pact', by which he sought for his music an extraordinarily strong power in articulating and enhancing faith within the Lutheran religion, but in doing so gave to music an autonomous logic and referential power that goes well beyond the original purpose and which could equally well serve perspectives antithetical to dogma.

One way in which Bach's music surely works on us is through its contrapuntal nature, something that goes well beyond the specifically musical technique of combining melodies. Not only are texts combined in various ways, both simultaneously and in linear sequence, but each musical line and gesture brings a host of historical associations and connections which mutually inflect one another. Through this ready-made conversation, which even in strictly historicist terms contains considerable openness, the listener is invited to make connections and inferences, inevitably introducing his or her own perspectives and experiences. A listener or scholar armed with the 'correct' theological presuppositions will not fail to draw the 'correct' spiritual and theological meanings from the works – no one can doubt their supreme significance for those who are attuned both to music and to the Christian message. But, my argument runs, with this development of hermeneutic depth through combination, polyphony and allusion, something richer in its potential meanings and implications emerges, something very different from most music of the pre-modern world. Bach was creating something that had the potential to adhere to many more contexts and cultural expectations than much previous music.

This music invites a form of 'soft' hermeneutics – as defined by Carolyn Abbate – by which it contains gestures, associations and allusions that might correspond to what we can construct as the reaction of a historical listener. But rather than necessarily fading into a 'low' hermeneutics (where music is assumed to function like a code, so that what the composer encoded now yields definite meanings),[74] the 'soft' hermeneutics can lead in the opposite direction, towards the potentially infinite interplay of gestures that even singly seem to connote a broad range of possibilities. What is striking, then, is not the possibility of specific meanings as such, but an increased sense of 'meaningfulness' (similar to what Abbate aptly calls 'stickiness'). This artistic enhancement of religious

[74] Carolyn Abbate, 'Music – Drastic or Gnostic?', *Critical Inquiry* 30 (Spring 2004), 505–36, esp. pp. 516, 523, and 'Cipher and Performance in Sternberg's *Dishonored*', in Karol Berger and Anthony Newcomb (eds.), *Music and the Aesthetics of Modernity* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 2005), pp. 357–92, esp. p. 367 (and p. 388, n. 15).

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practice – perhaps to unprecedented levels – brings with it the potential detachment of the work from its specifically religious context (something that was amply demonstrated by the nineteenth-century revival of Bach's Passions).

The type of polyphony that seems to emerge from the hermeneutic approach has something in common with the most innovative literary genre to emerge around the time of Bach (even if it blossomed in Germany a little while after his death), namely the modern novel. The openness of meaning and the multiplicity of voice in the novel lead me on to consider the voices we hear in the Bach Passions, and their types: do we hear the voices of specific characters, the voices of individual singers themselves or a guiding authorial voice, which we might infer to be Bach's, or the Evangelist's, or even that of God himself (since, for many, God is the source of all Scripture)? And, if there is indeed the sense of voice, or several voices, what sort of authority does this voice have and how is it mediated or shared? Examination of Bach's original scoring for both Passions suggests that, in his own performances at least, the voices that became most prominent were those of the main singers themselves, each sharing several roles but each profiled through his or 'her' individual consistency of sound (Bach's singers were all male, but there are clear textual allusions to the female subject position).

Beyond this immediate sense of voice in performance, I suggest that the most 'modern' aspect of the musical style, the development of a fully flexible and flowing tonality, gives the music its own sort of authority as a voice in its own right, with its varying pace and 'modulation'. This modulating voice brings the verbal narrative to presence, mirroring the sort of third-person authority that the writer of each Gospel confers on the story he narrates. Again, it is the mechanism of tonal narrative rather than any specific character or 'code' that provides this semblance of authority, a specifically artificial element that renders both the story and its simultaneous interpretation that much more immediate and convincing. Ironically then, a story that, from the Christian point of view, must necessarily be true, is given a particularly modern sense of reality through the mobilization of a rationalized, historically conditioned system. Bach may unwittingly have demonstrated Hobbes's view that no man can submit himself to Scripture without committing himself to a specific worldly interpretation.[75] Just

[75] See Hobbes, *Elements* II, quoted in Kraynak, *History and Modernity*, p. 72. This is also a central claim of Spinoza's *Tractatus theologico-politicus* (1670): see Benedict de Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, ed. Jonathan Israel, trans. Michael Silverthorne and Jonathan Israel (Cambridge University Press, 2007).

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as music is devised to depict a particular reality in as deep and committed a manner as possible, it imparts something of its own form or flavour on that of which it is presumed to be the effect, a phenomenon that has also been observed as a characteristic of the 'naturalistic' turn in painting within Western modernity.[76] Perhaps this might give us some insight into the way in which Bach's intuitions of the potential of modernity go beyond the naturalism of his critic Scheibe's party: acknowledging the significance of nature is undoubtedly part of the modern condition, but it was the Bachian approach that showed that nature is as much constituted through art – that is, as a human construction – as providing the model that art must faithfully depict.[77]

If this music does indeed seem authoritative and convincing, it obviously shares something with the field of rhetoric, which has long been a topic of interest in Bach studies. Again, it is a question of mechanisms working in time rather than the specific content or 'message', on which so many rhetorical studies tend to concentrate. Much about this music seems to reinforce itself through emphasis, variation and repetition, yet there is also surely an element of the unexpected and open. In other words, this music is clearly composed from a rhetorical perspective, designed to reinforce a truth that is already presupposed and believed by the listener (an archetypally 'pre-modern' stance), but the result is not always merely a reinforcement of the pre-existing message. In other words, this music is also dialectical in nature, something most obviously suggested by the dialogic elements (already emerging in the John Passion and entirely essential to the Matthew Passion), but working on several other levels besides. It takes to the highest level the sense of certainty that so much of the pre-modern world seemed to assume, but it thereby results in a kind of openness and subtle change that is endemic to modernity. Bach's attitude towards musical invention is to explore the potential in the material that seems to underlie each musical piece or movement, as if this were somehow already latent, merely awaiting the composer's realization. But far from this being a compositional process that relies on a specific system or methodology, the resulting structures are startlingly individual, neither the direct exemplification of rhetorical recipes nor the confirmation or

[76] See Christopher Braider, *Refiguring the Real – Picture and Modernity in Word and Image 1400–1700* (Princeton University Press, 1993), esp. pp. 5–6, for the association of this reversal with the Western experience in all its phases.

[77] See Laurence Dreyfus, *Bach and the Patterns of Invention* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard University Press, 1996), pp. 219–44, for a perceptive study of how Bach's music can be heard as a critique of the Enlightenment, at least in its more simplistic, naturalistic phases.

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subversion of established forms (as would characterize much of the music towards the end of the eighteenth century). This contributes to the dialectical nature of Bach's Passions, the way in which music and text not only complement but also inflect one another, the way in which the relationship between singer and instruments and between different aspects of musical inventions, all result in a sense of change. Such a sense of change is all the more remarkable against the background of a musical style that still places consistency of texture and evenness of event continuum at a premium. This is a music that seems supremely wedded to a world of certainty and interconnectedness, yet its results, for many listeners at least, seem to be utterly unexpected and transformative. Again, it is not a matter of Bach being specifically progressive, up to date or 'ahead of his time' but rather that he seems to have embodied the mechanisms of a modernity that is crucially dependent on the materials of the past, transforming these through processes of combination, expressive intensity and dispassionate 'research'.

What, then, emerges as my purpose in writing a study of this kind? There is no point in denying that I am writing from a particular standpoint within our contemporary condition, one that is conscious that there are many elements of modernity that are worth maintaining and regenerating. While it is absolutely obvious that there are also many sides to modernity that merit considerable criticism – its rigidity of method, its abstract, dehumanizing tendencies – it is also clear that the wholesale rejection of it by self-proclaimed postmoderns has not led to an improvement in the human condition and, if anything, has accentuated some of the worst aspects of modernity itself (such as the tying of all value to capitalist, market forces, and crediting this as a sort of democracy, even when its motivations are entirely those of greed). Through their counterpoint of modern with pre-modern elements, Bach's Passions perhaps provide a critique of modernity, almost in the manner of a 'prior corrective', as some have suggested for Shakespeare's achievement.[78] What is most valuable about the modern condition is certainly not its rigid methodologies and rationalization of every aspect of the life world, but the way it generates new opportunities through the combination and inflection of diverse elements and perspectives – an attitude of permanent dialogue.

[78] See Lars Engle, '*Measure for Measure* and Modernity: The Problem of the Sceptic's Authority', in Hugh Grady (ed.), *Shakespeare and Modernity – Early Modern to Millennium* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 85–104, esp. p. 85.

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