ROYAL NORTHERN COLLEGE OF MUSIC

WHAT CAN AESTHETICS TELL US ABOUT THE SYSTEM FOR ASSESSING GCSE AND A LEVEL STUDENTS' COMPOSITIONS IN ENGLAND?

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by

LUCY RHIANNON HALE

This dissertation is my own work and has not previously been submitted for assessment at this or any other institution

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ABSTRACT

This project explores the composition element of English GCSE and A Level courses through the lens of aesthetics, arguing that the current system does not, and cannot, reward work which exhibits true aesthetic merit, and in some cases actively discourages the creation of such work. This is achieved by contrasting influential arguments in the field of aesthetics with publications from the four exam boards which offer music GCSE and A Level courses in England, the qualifications regulator (Ofqual), and the Department for Education. The project goes on to discuss some of the implications of such a flawed composition education and assessment system, and finally to imagine what form a new system, informed by the aforementioned arguments in aesthetics, could take.

WHY APPLY AESTHETICS TO COMPOSITION ASSESSMENTS IN EDUCATION?

The intention behind this research is to consider the validity of composition marking at GCSE and A Level in England in light of multiple influential theories on aesthetics. My interest in this area arose from many discussions with tutors and colleagues surrounding the perceived inaccuracy of assessments of students' compositions, particularly in relation to secondary education, along with my own experiences of composition marking discrepancies. In relation to A Level in particular, there are data which bear this out. A study reported by the Incorporated Society of Musicians found that 90.1% of music teachers and examiners surveyed have been surprised by one or more of their pupils' grades for A Level composition, with the most commonly cited reasons for this surprise being that students' 'grades seemed either too low or too high' (Devaney & Fautley, 2015, pp. 1-2).

These discussions suggest that there is a general consensus that the current system is not fit for purpose, though there is little agreement on what precisely needs to be reformed or on the shape such reforms could take. Discussing notable theories on aesthetics, and comparing course specifications and the wider examinations system to these same theories, will highlight some of the ways in which our current systems for marking students' compositions are failing, leading to speculation about the implications of such a flawed system for students and for the new music sector. Crucially, examining seminal writings on aesthetics may help us to imagine ways in which we could create a composition education and assessment system without the flaws which are endemic in the current model.

This is a vast topic which cannot be addressed in its entirety in a single project of relatively limited size. It will therefore be examined through the lens of selected themes,

with the arguments surrounding each theme represented by one or more relevant thinkers. The chosen themes are whether or not art should serve some social, moral, or intellectual function; the impact that an extrinsic purpose, or lack thereof, has upon an artwork's aesthetic validity; how an artwork's formal properties should play into aesthetic judgements about that artwork; the respective validity of aesthetic judgements made by interested versus disinterested individuals; and the roles played by emotion, meaning, context, and ideology in the creation and judgement of artworks.

These themes have been selected due to their particular relevance to the making of aesthetic judgements in educational contexts. Education itself arguably exists to serve social, moral and intellectual functions, and all artwork created in education serves a purpose by definition. Markers at GCSE and A Level are also required to consider the formal properties of a work as a central part of their assessment, and, due to the way in which the English examinations is organised, markers are not in a position to make disinterested judgements, nor are they given enough information and guidance to consider context and ideology in their assessments. Ultimately, the intention of this project is to demonstrate that, regardless of the aesthetic position to which we ascribe, there are myriad problems with current systems for assessing the merit of students' compositions at GCSE and A Level in England.

OVERVIEW OF EXISTING THEORIES ON AESTHETICS RELEVANT TO THE CHOSEN THEMES

AESTHETICS OF THE ARTS IN GENERAL

Broadly speaking, existing theories on aesthetics have been concerned with five central stands; what constitutes an 'aesthetic object'; how we can give reasons to support our aesthetic judgements when these judgements are based on sensory perceptions; identifying the distinctions between aesthetic and practical attitudes; understanding the relationship between aesthetic value and aesthetic experience; and the relative of importance of representational versus phenomenological content in aesthetic experiences (Shelley, 2017, para. 1). For the purposes of this investigation, we will be focussing on the first three of these strands.

Various theories about what makes a work of art an 'aesthetic object', and whether all artworks are aesthetic objects by definition, have been posed over many years. Among the earliest theories recorded in the Western philosophical tradition are those of Plato and Aristotle. Both thinkers considered the highest aim in the life of any citizen to be the ability to serve the good of society, and that the highest happiness is to be found in this servitude. They therefore based their aesthetics on their perception of art's ability to influence its audience's actions for or against the good of society (Senyshyn, 2008, pp. 179-180).

Plato's aesthetics, like much of his philosophy, is predicated upon his 'theory of forms' (Stroux, 1993, p. 1328). Briefly, the theory of forms holds that the world as it appears to our senses consists of flawed imitations of true, perfect concepts referred to as 'forms' or 'ideas' (Kraut, 2017, section 1). Plato suggested that music and poetry could take hold of us, causing us to act for good or ill depending upon the work in question and on our upbringing (Senyshyn, 2008, p. 179). He therefore argued for the restriction of musical education only to music which 'partakes of the idea of the good' (Stroux, 1993, p. 1328). His arguments surrounding how and why different musical works do or do not partake of the idea of the good rely on his account of Ancient Greek musical modes and their connotations, the specifics of which we sadly are unable to fully understand today due to the limitations of surviving record from the period (Senyshyn, 2008, p. 182). We could, however, apply Plato's theories on good versus bad music to any style or genre by simply replacing the Ancient Greek modes and their connotations with the formal characteristics of an alternative style and their connotations. For instance, in Western Classical music the use of the snare drum has distinct militaristic connotations. We therefore could argue that pieces with a snare drum are morally good or morally bad, depending upon our view of the military, and endorse or restrict access to such pieces accordingly.

Aristotle was in agreement with Plato regarding art's ability to shape the character of an individual (Senyshyn, 2008, pp. 179-180), though he is somewhat less wary of this capacity. He argued that the value of art lay in its ability to elicit emotions, particularly those of pity and fear. Through eliciting such emotions, Aristotle believed that art reduced the audience's susceptibility to emotions which were seen as 'unbalancing' in everyday life. He also believed that emotions contributed to learning, experience and understanding, and that pleasure was derived from this understanding (Malm, 2012, pp. 269 - 271). For Aristotle, art was a tool in developing ethical, learned citizens who ultimately would be able to contribute to their society in its political and legal spheres (Senyshyn, 2008, p. 179).

The aesthetics of Plato and Aristotle do raise problems for us in the context of this investigation, which is concerned with applying aesthetic theories to the assessment of

music in a twenty-first century Western context, and what could be gained from the application of aesthetic theories to such assessment. Principal among these problems is the fact that, in Ancient Greece, the arts were not seen as distinct entities from each other in the way they are, at least in the West, today. Consequently, when Plato or Aristotle write about 'music', they are in fact writing about a performance spectacle which would have encompassed poetry, drama, acting, costume and dance as well as what we think of as music today (Senyshyn, 2008, p.182). Their pronouncements on the moral utility of music make sense in the context of such a totalistic conception of art. However, making such moral judgements about music when it is viewed as a distinct art form seems much less natural. For instance, it is not unusual today to hold that there are moral problems with the lyrics of a pop song or the plot of an opera, whilst maintaining that there is nothing problematic about the music per se (Sensyshyn, 2008, p. 183).

This is less of a problem in Plato than it is in Aristotle, due to his discussion of Ancient Greek musical semiotics, and the aforementioned potential for his theories to be applied to the semiotics of other genres. The question as to whether or not we should do so, however, remains. Taken at their most literal, the aesthetics of both Plato and Aristotle could be used to justify censorship. Thinkers such as Trietler and Portnoy have discussed some deeply troubling historical precedents for suppressing certain artworks based on our moral or ideological views (Miles, 1995, p. 30, Stroux, 1993, p. 1325), and these are surely not events that many of us would wish to repeat. Furthermore, in a society where the right to freedom of expression, excluding hate speech and incitement to violence, is enshrined in law, we must ask ourselves whether we wish to rely on moral judgements in order to assess the aesthetic validity of musical works, particularly in an educational context.

Not all theorists have dismissed the idea that the pleasure that can be derived from an artwork could be a factor in that artwork's value. Perhaps one of the most well-known discussions of aesthetics lies in Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Judgement*. This *Critique* is the third of a set of critiques, the first two being the *Critique of Pure Reason* and the *Critique of Practical Reason*. Together, the *Critiques* aim to explain how the external world relates to our individual experiences of the world, with the *Critique of Judgement*

specifically forming an attempt to overcome the gulf between these two apparently distinct facets of existence (Bowie, 2003, p. 16). This final *Critique* focuses on 'beauty' as opposed to art, though he does admit the possibility of beautiful art. Unlike Aristotle and Plato, Kant (1790/1987) does not seem to predict negative effects arising from the pleasure can be derived from beauty, and thus from art, though one has to have sufficiently developed faculties of judgement in order to recognise beauty (pp. 217-219).

The Critique of Judgement mainly discusses the concepts of beauty and the sublimity, along with our ability to judge whether or not a given object or sensation is beautiful or sublime. Its discussion of what beauty and sublimity actually are and what gives them value are limited to a single section on each, entitled 'Analytic of the Beautiful' and 'Analytic of the Sublime'. In the former section, Kant (1790/1987) defines beauty as '*purposiveness… …without the presentation of a purpose*' (p. 236). By 'purposiveness' Kant appears to mean the appearance of a purpose without an actual purpose (pp. 220-221). For Kant, it seems, an object or sensation can only be truly beautiful if it exists for its own sake rather than to perform a function or meet a need. However, aside from the necessity of 'purposiveness', Kant states that there can be no objective criteria for what constitutes beauty which are universally applicable (p. 232), though he does state that beautiful objects or sensations are 'liked universally' (p. 220). He defines the sublime as '*what is large beyond comparison*' (Kant, 1790/1987 p. 248), and claims that it too is 'purposive' (p. 250). However, whereas our liking for beauty is based on liking for beautiful objects in and of themselves, our liking for sublimity is really 'a liking for the expansion of the imagination' (Kant, 1790/1987, p. 250). That is, whilst we like the sensation of contemplating the sublime, we do not necessarily like the sublime object or concept itself.

Kant's main discussion of the aesthetics of art, however, falls into a section of the *Critique* entitled 'Deduction of Pure Aesthetic Judgements'. He appears to suggest that, in order to appreciate artistic beauty, it is necessary to understand what the artwork in question is intended to represent (Kant, 1790/1987, pp. 179 - 181). Following this he argues that, of all the arts, music contributes the least to culture due to its inability to represent and communicate concepts, though we are able to comprehend music due to the

mathematical relationships of notes to each other. He also suggests that poetry is the most valuable art form due to its clarity of communication (pp. 189-195).

Kant writes at length about what constitutes an aesthetic judgement and how such judgements can be made. For Kant, an aesthetic judgement, whether that is a judgement of beauty or of sublimity, must be 'disinterested', and any pleasure derived from contemplating beauty is 'disinterested pleasure'. That is, if I have an interest in an object's existence, if the object's existence benefits me in some way, this would render me unable to accurately make an aesthetic judgement about that object (Kant, 1790/1987, p. 205, 250). Kant also implies that the ability to make aesthetic judgements is a skill which must be honed, rather than an innate ability in all, or even some, people (p. 232).

Kant's *Critique* provides a useful starting point for understanding the value of art from a formalist standpoint (Hegel, 1835/1975, p. 56), and he writes extensively on the nature of true aesthetic judgements and the conditions under which true such judgements may be made. As such, his ideas surrounding the nature of beauty, the differing values of various art forms and the conditions under which valid aesthetic judgments can be made will have far reaching implications when we come to assess the aesthetic validity of the systems by which students' compositions are assessed. However, Hegel's *Lectures on Fine Art* go further than the *Critique* in their exploration of art explicitly as opposed to beauty in a general sense.

For Hegel, philosophy is the ultimate representation of 'self-determining thought' (Bowie, 2003, pp. 140-141), and his *Lectures on Fine Art* form part of an overarching attempt to systematically answer all of the questions of modern philosophy by means of historical dialectic (Bowie, 2003, p. 140). Hegel's (1835/1975) ideas in relation to aesthetics bear many similarities to those of Kant. Principal among these similarities is the idea that art should not have a practical use or purpose (p. 38). Hegel (1835/1975) also believed that the creation of art could not be reduced to merely following rules (p. 25), and that, whilst art has the capacity to evoke emotions, it is not this capacity per se which gives art its value or its beauty (p. 46). Both agree that art representing concepts, objects or ideas

which in reality are ugly or vulgar can still be beautiful depending upon their treatment by the artist (Hegel, 1835/1975, pp. 168-171, Kant, 1790/1987, pp. 179-181).

However, while Kant (1790/1987) claims that context should not figure into aesthetic judgements at all (pp. 45-47). Hegel (1835/1975) argues that an awareness of the context in which a work of art was created is necessary in order to understand and enjoy that artwork, whilst simultaneously contending that an artwork should be judged for itself not its context (pp. 34-35). Some may argue that Hegel's is a contradictory position, or even a means by which to avoid truly taking a position on the matter. Hegel himself, however, would counter these criticism by claiming that such contradictions are merely a stage in the development of his overall argument.

AESTHETICS OF MUSIC SPECIFICALLY

Some philosophers, such as Schopenhauer, have written works on aesthetics which address music in the specific at length. Unlike Aristotle, Kant and Hegel, Schopenhauer valued music above all other art forms, as he believed that it does not refer to concepts or to appearances but expresses pure emotion (Bowie, 2003, p. 265). For Schopenhauer, music is therefore the direct image of reality, or the 'Will'. However, music is also grounded upon rational, mathematical rules which make it intelligible as well as intuitive (Bowie, 2003, p. 265). Music expresses the suffering inherent in reality whilst simultaneously providing us with an escape from that same reality (Bowie, 2003, p. 267).

Similarly to the other theories which we have discussed, Schopenhauer's aesthetics of music is predicated exclusively upon Western art music, particularly that of the Romantic era (Bowie, 2003, p. 267). This is problematic given that Schopenhauer claims that music is the most valuable art form due to its ability to express a universal truth. It is difficult to accept the idea that a musical genre which arose solely in Europe during the nineteenth century is uniquely able to express truths which are applicable across the world and throughout history. This would also be problematic were it to be applied to composition

assessment in an educational context, as it would imply that composers must write in a specific style if they wish to create valuable art, potentially disadvantaging aspiring composers based on their backgrounds and leading to a very homogenous music sector. Furthermore, it could be argued that Schopenhauer's belief that music both expresses the suffering which results from our awareness of reality and provides an escape from that same suffering is contradictory. Indeed, Schopenhauer himself admits that his claims can never be proven to be true (Bowie, 2003, p. 267).

Schopenhauer's discussions of art's relationship with suffering gains an overtly political dimension in the writings of Adorno, as do Kant's ideas surrounding the purposeless nature of beauty. Adorno suggested that music should be considered not only as it is in itself, but also as it exists in its sociocultural context (Zabel, 1989, p. 198). Like Kant and Hegel, Adorno believed that, in order to be aesthetically valuable, art must not have a function, though his justification for this is political. He contends that a Capitalist society only values productivity, and therefore art which has no function opposes such a society merely by existing (Fuchs, 2016, p. 87). He goes on to suggest that music should not express a direct political message, but rather it should express suffering through technical mastery of its formal elements (Zabel, 1989, p. 199). In doing so, For Adorno, this expression of suffering is especially apparent in early-mid twentieth century atonal music. Furthermore, he argued that popular music and jazz were merely products of bourgeois society for the false gratification of the masses, thereby stifling social progress (Zabel, 1989, p. 200).

Many have argued that Adorno's dismissal of popular and jazz styles, and elevation of atonal art music, are elitist (Hohendahl, 1991, p. 77). Furthermore, it seems reasonable to question Adorno's impartiality in making value judgements which favour atonal art music over other genres, given his background as a former student of composer Alban Berg (Zabel, 1989, p. 198). Set into a context in which they are used to assess students' compositions, Adorno's views could result in a homogenous output as all aspiring composers strive to imitate the only style which is considered to be of value. However, if we were to accept Adorno's aesthetic theories and the conclusions he reaches, then such a homogenisation of the music sector would not necessarily be a problem because,

whilst composers would all be writing in a similar style, all art in that style would be considered of higher value than art in other styles. The charges of elitism may also be challenged. as they largely were made in a highly charged emotional context when West Germany's New Left movement had failed to make its desired structural changes and thus turned on its forebears, including Adorno (Hohendahl, 1991, p. 76).

In contrast to both Schopenhauer and Adorno, music critic turned aesthetician Eduard Hanslick (1885/1891) argued that music has no unique power to stir emotions which is not present in other art forms, and that, whilst art is able to represent emotion, doing so is not its ultimate aim or the source of its beauty (p. 23). In fact, he goes so far as to claim that to be moved by music on an emotional level indicates 'pathological' listening (p. 124). Instead, Hanslick's (1885/1891) belief was that musical beauty arises from the way in which sounds which are 'intrinsically pleasing' are combined to present a cohesive musical idea (p. 66). For him, it is impossible to make an accurate aesthetic judgement about a work if its formal features are considered as separate from each other (p. 78-79). It is, however, essential to set aside any extra-musical influence or notion of programme, for even if the composer has claimed that the work is programmatic in nature, the reality is that the music cannot truly represent the programme; the programme has merely been used by the composer as a source of inspiration (p. 84). Furthermore, Hanslick (1885/1891) argues that music ceases to be purely musical when it has been created for a purpose, such as to convey a message, or to accompany an event or a work in another art form (p. 139).

Again in contrast with Adorno, Hanslick suggests that the context in which a work was written should have no bearing on any aesthetic judgements made about that work. He admits that knowledge and understanding could be gained from examining the context - historical or personal - in which a particular work was composed, but claims that such investigations were the domain of art history rather than aesthetics (Hanslick, 1885/1891, pp. 86-87). Similarly to his arguments surrounding programme music, Hanslick's (1885/1891) view is that, whilst context may serve as the impetus for the creation of a work, that same context will have no impact on the work in and of itself (pp. 84, 100-101).

Hanslick's explanation of musical beauty invites criticisms of vagueness. He makes a lot of claims regarding what is not the source of beauty in music, but his conclusion about where the beauty in music does originate seems to require further elucidation. Indeed, he himself admits that defining musical beauty is an extraordinarily difficult task (Hanslick, 1885/1891, p. 70). On the other hand, *The Beautiful in Music* is a much more in depth study of specifically musical aesthetics than any of the texts investigated above, some of which are equally vulnerable to charges of ambiguity in their conclusions.

More recently, scholarship on musical aesthetics has taken a rather different approach from that of Hanslick. A movement frequently referred to as 'The New Musicology' has seen thinkers including Subotnik, Kramer, and McClary, among others, embracing the contexts in which musical works are composed, performed, heard, and studied in their examinations of those works, as well as considering potential extra musical meanings that are ascribed to pieces of music (Miles, 1995, p. 11). McClary is perhaps the most extreme in her dedication to this position. Best known for her feminist analyses of musical works, she claims that music is given meaning by the communities creating and responding to it but, once the semiotics of a given style are known, we can 'read' meaning in music in almost the same way as we would in text. Every gesture thus becomes imbued with a specific, extra-musical meaning (Miles, 1995, pp. 24-28). The result of this is that, whether consciously or subconsciously, we judge music in relation to its meaning. For McClary, failure to do so necessarily results in a flawed understanding of a work. Miles (1995), however, suggests that McClary's arguments surrounding musical meaning border on dogma (p. 31), and fail to appreciate the value there is to be found in music's frequent lack of specificity (p. 29).

Kramer also argues that music is, by necessity, understood and judged in its social context, and that musical meaning plays a central role in this. He suggests that the idea of listening to music divorced of its extra-musical context is 'based on historically specific sets of values, not on the intrinsic nature of music' (Kramer, 2003, p. 7). Like McClary, he suggests that meaning in music is socially constructed rather than an inherent feature (Kramer, 2003, p. 12). However, he does not suggest that every feature of a work will or could have meaning ascribed to it, rather that works provide us with 'hermeneutic

windows', including text (performed or included in score as programme note), titles, musical quotations, and structural tropes, through which we ascribe meaning to them (Miles, 1995, p. 32). He also argues that musical meaning is subjective and context dependent, thereby avoiding some McClary's lack of flexibility, but adds to this that meaning is similarly subjective in language and in images, but that subjective meaning is not the same as meaninglessness (Kramer, 2003, p. 9). On the other hand, if used in as a means of assessing the aesthetic worth of students' compositions, Kramer's concept of hermeneutic windows would result in examiners having more to base their judgement on in the case of some students than others, for instance if some students utilise texts in their work while others do not. This could have an impact on marking, positively or negatively, and would therefore require much forethought before being if it were to be introduced, in order to ensure students were marked fairly.

Subotnik takes a similar, though arguably broader, approach to Kramer and McClary. She posits that there are 'two levels of structure to which meaning and value can be assigned: first, the internal or autonomous structure of the artifact *[sic.]* itself; and, second, the structure of cultural, philosophical, and ideological premises underlying or surrounding the artifact and, ultimately, the study of the artifact' (Subotnik, 1983, p. 2). She goes on to argue that the second 'structural level' will 'contribute inevitably and fundamentally to the structural definition of human utterance, even musical utterance, as well as to the understanding and judgment of utterance, even aesthetic judgment and thus cannot, finally, be ignored with any honesty' (Subotnik, 1983 p. 6). For Subotnik (1983), to attempt to judge a work based solely on its first 'structural level' is evidence of an unacknowledged ideology on the part of the individual carrying out the judgement (p. 6), and will ultimately result in a 'false' conclusion (p. 11).

Subotnik (1983) further argues that, since ideology will always play a role in our judgements, we must acknowledge this and place limits upon the extent to which we allow our ideology to impact upon our judgements, and that the basis of these limits must be our morals (p. 7). She admits, however, that the placing of such limits raises problems of its own, particularly in relation to its potential impact upon our freedom of speech, as well as the complexities of deciding upon what is 'plausibly moral' (Subotnik, 1983, p. 7).

Her conclusion is that the closest we are able to come to a solution to these problems is to allow both approaches, that which focuses on the work in itself and that which accounts for wider social and cultural contexts, to coexist despite the difficulties (Subotnik, 1983, p. 12).

All the theories examined here have their own advantages and their own flaws. In light of this, it seems reasonable to proceed by investigating how their collective strengths and weaknesses could relate to systems that are currently used to assess compositional skill in educational contexts were they to be used in such a way.

APPLYING AESTHETICS TO ASSESSMENTS OF STUDENTS' COMPOSITIONS

CONTENT OF INDIVIDUAL COURSES

There are four exam boards which offer music courses with a composition element at GCSE and A Level (the qualifications usually taken between the ages of 14 to 16 and 16 to 18 respectively) in England. These exam boards are Pearson Qualifications, which offers GCSEs and A Levels under the brand name Edexcel, OCR, AQA, and WJEC/CBAC, a Welsh organisation which offers GCSEs and A Levels in England under the brand name Eduqas (Ofqual, 2019a, tables 7 and 9). Each board sets out its own course specifications, including marking guidelines, for each of the qualifications it offers. According to their respective specifications, three out of four exam boards require students to submit two compositions at GCSE (WJEC/CBAC Ltd, 2019a, p. 10, AQA, 2019a, p. 24, Pearson Education Limited, 2019a, p. 27), while the fourth allows students to choose to submit one or two compositions or none at all (OCR, 2019a, p. 12). All four exam boards require students to submit at least one composition, and in some cases two, at A Level (WJEC/CBAC Ltd, 2019b, p. 12, AQA, 2019b, p. 26, Pearson Education Limited, 2019b, p. 33, OCR, 2019b, p. 4).

Aristotle and Adorno believed that arousing certain emotions, though not others, through the means of art is essential to the development of well rounded, just, and intelligent citizens, whether by enabling emotions to be released in a safe forum and thereby developing emotionally balanced citizens as in Aristotle (Malm, 2012, pp. 269 - 271), or for Adorno, by expressing and opposing the inevitable suffering associated with life in a

capitalist society (Fuchs, 2016, p. 87, Zabel, 1989, p. 199). Plato, on the other hand, saw risks in art's capacity for arousing emotion, and advocated for the restriction of arts education (Senyshyn, 2008, p. 179). Given that art's perceived ability to express and arouse emotion figures in at least three influential theories of aesthetics, it may be considered surprising that none of the course specifications being addressed make any mention of a piece's emotional impact when setting out the criteria by which students' compositions are to be assessed (WJEC/CBAC Ltd, 2019a, pp. 41-45, WJEC/CBAC Ltd, 2019b, pp. 44-49, AQA, 2019a, pp. 43-48, AQA, 2019b, pp. 42-49, OCR, 2019a, pp. 25-26, 32-33, OCR, 2015c, pp. 2-8, Pearson Qualifications Limited, 2019a, pp. 36-41, Pearson Qualifications Limited, 2019b, pp. 46-51). As GCSE and A Level course specifications relate directly to education, the failure of all four exam boards that offer music courses in England to consider the value of art's emotional impact as an educational tool seems something of an omission. It not only calls into question the aesthetic validity of the exam boards respective marking criteria, but also suggests, at least in so far as figures such as Aristotle and Adorno would see it, that we are at risk of failing to properly educate a generation of young people.

In addition to failing to give consideration to the emotional impact of music, none of the marking schemes being investigated here adopt a position in relation to whether meaning should be ascribed to music and, if so, how a work's ascribed meaning should impact upon the marks awarded. Nor do they give guidance on how to ascribe meaning in any given context, or suggest that examiners should bear in mind how their own social and cultural contexts and ideologies, or those of the composer, may effect their interpretation of a work. The closest that any of them come to acknowledging the idea of meaning in music is to state that, where works have been written in response to a brief, the 'appropriateness' of the response should have a bearing on the marking process (WJEC/CBAC Ltd, 2019a, pp. 41-45, WJEC/CBAC Ltd, 2019b, pp. 44-49, AQA, 2019a, pp. 43-48, AQA, 2019b, pp. 42-49, OCR, 2019a, pp. 25-26, 32-33, OCR, 2015c, pp. 2-8, Pearson Qualifications Limited, 2019a, pp. 36-41, Pearson Qualifications Limited, 2019b, pp. 46-51). For Subotnik, Kramer and McClary, it is impossible for us to divorce music from the meaning which we have ascribed to it, from our ideologies as listeners, or our knowledge of the context in which it was written and heard (Miles, 1995, p. 14, Subotnik,

1983, p. 11). Thus, exam boards' failures to address meaning in their marking schemes arguably renders the entire marking process futile.

Perhaps these exam boards have not failed to consider music's meaning, emotional impact, or the context in which it is understood, but instead have deliberately taken a more formalist approach. This would arguably be a controversial approach, as such pure formalism is often considered an outdated ideology, as evidenced by the emergence of views such as those held by Kramer, McClary, and Subotnik. However, if we are to thoroughly refute the idea that there is aesthetic validity in current GCSE and A Level composition assessments, it would seem prudent to consider the possibility that exam boards ascribe to formalist aesthetics, if only for the sake of argument.

As previously discussed, Kant, Hegel, and Hanslick all suggested that the value of art lies in its purposelessness, or at least that its value is significantly diminished when it is created for a purpose (Kant, 1790/1987, pp. 220-221, Hegel, 1835/1975, p. 38, Hanslick, 1885/1891, p. 139). Adorno held a similar view about the purposelessness of art, though for different reasons (Fuchs, 2016 p. 87). However, at GCSE, three out of four exam boards require students to write one of their compositions to a brief set by the board. These three boards also require students to write their own briefs or programme notes specifying the audience or occasion for which their second composition is intended (WJEC/CBAC, 2019a, p. 10, AQA, 2019a, p. 24-25, Pearson Education Limited, 2019a, pp. 27-31). OCR allows students to choose to write a 'free composition', a composition to a brief set by the board, both of these options or no composition at all (OCR, 2019a, p. 12). At A Level, Eduqas, AQA and OCR require students to write their first composition to a brief set by the board, and to write their own brief or programme notes specifying the audience or occasion for which their second composition is intended (WJEC/CBAC, 2019b, p. 12, AQA, 2019b, pp. 24-25, OCR, 2019b, pp. 15-16). Edexcel allows students to choose whether to write a composition to a brief set by the board or to write a 'free composition' (Pearson Education Limited 2019b, p. 33). Example briefs include 'Compose a soundtrack for a trailer for a film about the exploration of Mars' (Pearson Education Limited, 2015c, p. 5), 'Create a melodic solo and accompaniment composition, suitable for presentation at a Performing Arts Showcase evening' (OCR, 2015d, p. 2), 'Compose incidental music for a 19th century play in a local theatre' (WJEC/CBAC Ltd, 2015c, p. 6),

and 'Write an atonal piece for a chamber ensemble... ...in response to the lines below from TS Eliot's poem Burnt Norton' (AQA, 2018c, p. 7).

Assuming, for the sake of argument, that exam boards have intentionally tried to adopt a formalist approach to composition assessment, their setting and treatment of compositional briefs with an extra-musical focus, such as a film, play, or poem, becomes problematic in light of Hanslick's argument that, where music is written with a specific extra-musical programme or context in mind, that context should have no bearing on any aesthetic judgements made about the music itself (1885/1891, p. 84). When students' work is written in response to a brief, whether self-devised or externally set, all exam boards require teachers and moderators to consider how 'appropriately' students' works respond to their respective briefs (WJEC/CBAC, 2019a, p. 11, Pearson Education Limited, 2019a, pp. 37-38, OCR, 2019a, p. 33, AQA, 2019a, pp. 43-48, WJEC/CBAC Ltd, 2019a, p. 14, Pearson Education Limited, 2019b, pp. 48-49, OCR, 2019b, pp. 21-22, AQA, 2019b, pp. 42-44). Therefore, exam boards appear to be requiring that assessors work in a way which prevents them from making valid aesthetic judgements, at least in a formalist sense.

Hanslick (1885/1891) also suggests that the formal elements of music must not be considered separately from each other when making aesthetic judgements (p. 78-79). He specifically cites, melody, harmony, rhythm and instrumentation in his discussion of the formal elements of music, and argues that 'The intellectual merit lies in the union of *all* [original italicisation] these factors; hence the mutilation of one entails that of the others' (Hanslick, 1885/1891, p. 79). In relation to this argument, AQA's GCSE specification is particularly problematic. It states

> 'Each composition must demonstrate selection and use of at least four types of
> musical element as follows:
> • at least two of rhythm, metre, texture, melody, structure, form
> • at least two of harmony, tonality, timbre, dynamics, phrasing, articulation' (AQA,
2019a, p. 30).

The specification goes on to say that students must be assessed on how they have used each of their selected 'musical elements' individually, which is reflected in the marking guidelines (AQA, 2019a, pp. 43-48). This stands in direct opposition to Hanslick's arguments surrounding the making of accurate aesthetic judgements. It also appears to result in confusion amongst students and teachers, as stated in AQA's 2018 'Composing Music' examiner's report (AQA, 2018d, pp. 5-6).

Whilst AQA's GCSE specification is certainly the most explicit in demanding the separate assessment of different musical elements, there are allusions to the same in Edexcel, Eduqas and OCR specifications at both GCSE and A Level, and in AQA's A Level specification (Pearson Education Limited, 2019a, pp. 39-40, Pearson Education Limited 2019b, p. 51, WJEC/CBAC Ltd, 2019b, pp. 43-44, WJEC/CBAC Ltd, 2019a, pp. 41-43, AQA, 2019b, pp. 42-46, OCR, 2019a, pp. 26=27, 32-33, OCR, 2015c, p. 2). This suggests that all GCSE and A Level music qualifications offered in England require at least some degree of separation of a work's formal elements for the assessment of students' compositions, despite the aesthetic arguments against such separation.

THE ENGLISH EXAMINATIONS SYSTEM

All four exam boards being investigated here require students' compositions to be internally marked and externally moderated at GCSE, and externally marked at A Level (WJEC/CBAC Ltd, 2019a, p. 10, AQA, 2019a, p. 10, OCR, 2019a, p. 18, Pearson Qualifications Limited, 2019a, p. 5, WJEC/CBAC Ltd, 2019b, p. 12, AQA, 2019b, p. 10, OCR, 2019b, pp. 21-22, Pearson Education Limited, 2019b, p. 5). This system contradicts Kant's (1790/1987) requirement for judges to be disinterested (p. 205) in a number of ways. Internal marking, as is the practice at GCSE, means that a composition is likely to be marked by the composer's own teacher. Teachers may be placed under pressure to mark generously to maintain their schools', or their own, reputations, or a teacher's personal feelings about a student may impact upon how they mark that student. As only a sample of submissions from any cohort are routinely moderated, there is no guarantee that all examples of biased marking will be picked up by the exam board and rectified.

Furthermore, GCSE and A Level grade boundaries are calculated each year based on the performance of the cohort compared to their predicated performance, meaning that the number of marks required to achieve each grade vary from year to year (Ofqual, 2019c). This means that, like teachers, external assessors arguably also have an interest in how generously or harshly students' work is marked. For instance, if a teacher were employed as an external assessor by a board who's course they themselves taught, then arguably they may have an interest in marking others' students' work harshly in an attempt to influence the grade boundaries in favour of their own students. Even if we assume that all teachers, moderators and examiners are free from these pressures and biases, it may be argued that the mere fact that they are paid to mark students' works stands in conflict with Kant's principle of the disinterested observer, rendering them unable to make valid aesthetic judgments, at least from a Kantian perspective

Whilst the English examinations system would not meet with Kant's approval in relation to the making of aesthetic judgements, we should consider the possibility that exam boards have instead deliberately adopted an approach which is more in line with the views of contemporary thinkers such as Subotnik, Kramer, and McClary in relation to the position of examiners. This would require markers and moderators to be cognisant of the ways in which their own social, cultural, occupational and ideological contexts may impact upon their responses to students' submissions and, at least if we are to follow Subotnik's line of thought, to attempt to place morally determined limits on this impact. (Subotnik, 1983, p. 6, Miles, 1995, p. 24, Kramer, 2003, p. 9) However, none of the exam specifications make any reference to the context in which students' works are marked in their marking guidelines (WJEC/CBAC Ltd, 2019a, pp. 41-45, WJEC/CBAC Ltd, 2019b, pp. 44-49, AQA, 2019a, pp. 43-48, AQA, 2019b, pp. 42-49, OCR, 2019a, pp. 25-26, 32-33, OCR, 2015c, pp. 2-8, Pearson Qualifications Limited, 2019a, pp. 36-41, Pearson Qualifications Limited, 2019b, pp. 46-51).

Subotnik also argues, in addition to an awareness of how our own contexts affect our judgements, we must also be aware of 'cultural, philosophical, and ideological premises underlying or surrounding the artifact' *[sic.]* (Subotnik, 1983, p. 2). Kramer and McClary, meanwhile, suggest that our aesthetic appreciation of music is inextricably linked to our

understanding of its meaning and, in order to understand meaning in music, we must consider the social and musical context in which it was written ((Kramer, 2003, pp. 9-11, Miles, 1995, p. 14). However, there is no guidance in any of the mark schemes concerning if and how the context in which a work was written should impact upon assessment (WJEC/CBAC Ltd, 2019a, pp. 41-45, WJEC/CBAC Ltd, 2019b, pp. 44-49, AQA, 2019a, pp. 43-48, AQA, 2019b, pp. 42-49, OCR, 2019a, pp. 25-26, 32-33, OCR, 2015c, pp. 2-8, Pearson Qualifications Limited, 2019a, pp. 36-41, Pearson Qualifications Limited, 2019b, pp. 46-51). In fact, it is unclear whether external markers and moderators receive any information in this regard. This would render them unable to make a valid aesthetic judgement in the eyes of Subotnik, Kramer and McClary as well as in the eyes of Kant.

Finally, All four exam boards require students to complete their works in the year that they expect to gain their qualification, with some boards requiring pieces to be worked on under 'controlled conditions' (Pearson Qualifications Limited, 2019a, pp. 31-33, Pearson Qualifications Limited 2019b, pp. 42-44, WJEC/CBAC Ltd, 2019a, pp. 22-23, WJEC/CBAC Ltd, 2019b, p. 29, OCR, 2019a, p. 22, OCR, 2019b, p. 26, AQA, 2019a, p. 31, AQA, 2019b, p. 33). The result of these requirements is that students are effectively barred from submitting pieces they had composed separately from their GCSE or A Level studies. Therefore, students must write their pieces for the express purpose of gaining the relevant qualification. This system is problematic in light of Adorno's argument that art can be co-opted by bourgeois society to distract the population from their state of oppression, thereby becoming part of his much maligned 'culture industry' and ceasing to be aesthetically valid as art (Zabel, 1989, pp. 200-201). Given that GCSEs and A Levels exist within a capitalist society and, according to some of the most powerful sections of that society, the value of education is in preparing young people for employment and being 'the engine of our economy' (Department for Education & Gibb, 2015, para. 10), it seems reasonable to speculate that Adorno may have seen GCSEs and A Levels in arts subjects as an obvious example of the misappropriation of art for the preservation of a capitalist society.

IMPLICATIONS OF FLAWED COMPOSITION EDUCATION AND ASSESSMENT SYSTEMS

It is likely that the existence of courses and a system which are so demonstrably flawed will have wider repercussions for students, for the music sector, and for society at large. Indeed, some of these implications can be observed through official reports and

statistics. For instance, there has been a consistent drop in the numbers of students taking music at GCSE and A Level over recent years. In 2014, 42,770 people took GCSE music, but by 2018, this had fallen to 35,889 people (Ofqual, 2019a, table 7). Similarly, 7,345 people took A Level music in 2015, which dropped to 5,485 people by 2018 (Ofqual, 2019a, table 9).

It is necessary to acknowledge the role that the introduction of the English Baccalaureate in 2010 may be playing in this trend. The English Baccalaureate is a measure by which schools are ranked based on the number of their pupils who take English, Mathematics, Science, Languages, and Humanities at GCSE (Department for Education, 2019a). Not only does the English Baccalaureate measure incentivise schools to limit the number of arts subjects students can study in order to devote more time to those subjects which are included in the measure, it also stands to reason that, if young people are brought up in a system where music qualifications are considered to be of little worth, such attitudes will play into their decision making as they progress through education. The Department for Education has also produced leaflets for parents, urging them to encourage their children to take the subjects included in the English Baccalaureate (Department for Education, 'Help Your Child Make The Best GCSE Choices', n.d. b), meaning that parents are likely to be another influence on students in favour of English Baccalaureate subjects.

We could, however, speculate that one of the reasons music is not included in the English Baccalaureate, despite research suggesting its benefits to young people's social and academic development and its substantial contribution to the UK economy (Sound and Music, 2019, p. 27), may be the perceived lack of rigour in how the subject is assessed. The lack of rigour causes the government to withdraw support for the subject; the withdrawal of support in turn reduces uptake and opportunities. That said, a Department for Education report found that between 2010/11 and 2015/16, the number of students taking 'arts subjects' remained stable in schools where large numbers of students took all the subjects included in the English Baccalaureate (Department for Education, 2017c). This would suggest that there are other factors at play in the drop in students' taking GCSE, and subsequently A Level, music, and the qualifications' many aesthetic flaws could be among those factors.

Of course, there is no way of knowing for certain how much of a role flaws in the way students' compositions are assessed, or flaws in the wider system, play in the fall in students taking music qualifications in school. However, it is not unreasonable to speculate that people may be unlikely to take a subject if they have reason to believe that the associated modes of assessment may not be valid. With regard to this, it is worth noting the substantial difference between the number of students who take music GCSE and the number who take music A Level. Furthermore, not only is there a substantial drop in the 'raw number' of young people who take A Level music compared to GCSE, but also that music only accounts for 1% of A Level entries in England (Devaney and Fautley, 2015, p. 6), compared to 5% of GCSE entries (Sound and Music, 2019, p. 24). A possible explanation for this is that, if students are experiencing flawed assessments in music at GCSE, they are likely to be disinclined to take the subject at A Level.

The examiners' reports on composition from AQA and Eduqas also suggest some of the potential implications of problematic assessments. The only publicly available examiners' report which didn't cite multiple problems with students' entries, the way they had been marked, or both, was AQA's A Level examiners' report (AQA, 2018e, pp. 6-11). The common problems that are cited across the other three publicly available examiners' reports give some indication of the implications of the assessment models currently being used.

Both AQA and Eduqas' examiners' reports on composition at GCSE mention internal marking that was either too generous or too harsh (AQA, 2018d, p. 6, WJEC/CBAC Ltd, 2019e, pp. 10-11). This suggests that either the mark schemes themselves are unclear, a frustration expressed by 66.2% of respondents in Devaney and Fautley's survey (2015, p. 4), or that assessors disagree with the marking criteria set out by the exam boards. An additional explanation may be that assessors are not capable of being the Kantian 'disinterested judge' required for an accurate aesthetic judgement.

The examiners' reports also suggest that originality and different approaches are penalised as 'weird' and 'inappropriate' (AQA, 2018d, p. 3, WJEC/CBAC Ltd, 2019e, pp.

5-6). Additionally, the second most common reason cited by teachers for surprise at their students' composition grades is their perception that 'Creative music responses often scored lower than pastiche', and teachers also reported a belief that exams boards 'favoured certain genres or styles of music' (Devaney & Fautley, 2015, fig. 2). This could cause students to become reluctant to experiment and pursue original ideas in future works. Ultimately, there is a risk that current systems will result in the development of a homogenous music sector in the future. This stands in opposition to the widely held belief that aesthetically beautiful art is, by definition, individual (Hanslick, 1885/1891, p. 173, Kant, 1790/1987, p. 320-321, Hegel, 1835/1975, p. 25). Unfortunately, we may already be seeing this beginning. In their survey of barriers impacting upon composition education, Sound and Music (2019) found students' reluctance to experiment with new ideas to be a key concern amongst teachers (p. 12). Somewhat ironically, the examiners' reports themselves also make negative references to work which is 'unoriginal', 'formulaic', and 'pastiche' (AQA, 2018d, pp. 3-5, WJEC/CBAC Ltd, 2019d, pp.8-10, WJEC/CBAC, 2019e, pp. 5-8).

The same report found that at key stage four, when young people typically take their GCSEs, 67% of students have less confidence composing music than they do performing it, compared with 37% and 64% at key stages two and three respectively (Sound and Music, 2019). It is not difficult to imagine that unfair or inaccurate marking may play a role in this, either as a catalyst for the loss of confidence or by confirming it in students' minds. Anecdotally, this is something I have experienced, and have heard discussed by other composers. This could feasibly lead to students abandoning composition altogether, or deciding not to pursue further study or a career in composing, reducing the pool of talent coming into the sector. Assuming students who are unfairly marked manage to retain the confidence and desire to pursue composition further, low grades at GCSE and A Level have an impact on students' later education opportunities. For instance, a poor composition mark at A Level could lead to a student failing to achieve the grades required for a place to study music at degree level. Without this advanced training, it becomes especially difficult to forge a career in music.

WHAT COULD AN AESTHETICS INFORMED ALTERNATIVE LOOK LIKE?

The current systems that are in place for assessing students' compositions at GCSE and A Level are deeply flawed with potential far-reaching implications. This clearly needs reform. The aesthetic theories discussed earlier provide us with avenues to explore when imagining what such a reformed system could look like.

If we accept Adorno's position that art ceases to be aesthetically valid when it is co-opted by capitalist society (Zabel, 1989, pp. 200-201), then an obvious step would be to remove the requirement for students' works to be written purely for the purpose of gaining the relevant qualification. On the other hand, if the opposite position were adopted and it thus became a requirement for students to submit works they had written outside of their GCSE or A Level studies, this would likely bar young people who had no previous experience of composing from taking the subject. Given the nationwide inequality of opportunities for young people to participate in compositional activity (Sound and Music, 2019, p. 17), this would likely apply to a considerable proportion of students. Furthermore, exam boards would be inclined to suggest that allowing students to submit pre-existing works increases the risk of plagiarism (Pearson Qualifications Limited, 2019a, pp. 31-33, Pearson Qualifications Limited 2019b, pp. 42-44, WJEC/CBAC Ltd, 2019a, pp. 22-23, WJEC/CBAC Ltd, 2019b, p. 29, OCR, 2019a, p. 22, OCR, 2019b, p. 26, AQA, 2019a, p. 31, AQA, 2019b, p. 33). It would therefore seem that reforming the system in accordance with the aesthetics of Adorno may simply replace existing problems with new ones. Indeed, given Adorno's opposition to capitalism and the role that qualifications are seen to play in our economy (Department for Education & Gibb, 2015, para. 10), Adorno may well have opposed the entire notion of GCSEs and A Levels in arts subjects. In this case the entire education system would need reform before a system of composition assessments in line with the aesthetics of Adorno could be developed: a consideration which is beyond the scope of this research.

Alternatively, exam boards may wish to attempt to adopt a more formalist approach to the aesthetics of music. In this case, a necessary reform to GCSE and A Level music syllabi would be the removal of the demand for students' compositions to be written to briefs, whether the briefs are devised by the students' themselves, their teachers, or the exam boards. For a formalist, this would bring us closer towards teaching students to create aesthetically valuable music in the eyes of a formalist, rather than learning to fulfil the terms of a brief. Alternatively, briefs could be retained but the 'appropriateness' of the students' response to the brief could be removed from the marking criteria, reflecting Hanslick's (1885/1981) argument that, where an extra-musical purpose or inspiration has been the catalyst for a piece's development, this should not impact upon aesthetic judgement of the work (p. 84). This would arguably be a preferable option, as examiners report that students appear to find composition briefs helpful (AQA, 2018d, p. 3).

For a formalist, any references to the marking of individual musical elements as separate entities would also need to be removed from all course specifications, thus ensuring that all judgements would be being made in relation to whole pieces of art, rather than disparate features of a work (Hanslick, 1885/1891, pp. 78-79). Additionally, the assessors themselves would need to be truly disinterested if they are to make valid aesthetic judgements (Kant, 1790/1987, p. 205). Compositions would therefore, at the very least, need to be assessed by somebody who was not teaching the same course themselves. Ideally, assessors would also be volunteers, as then they would have no financial interest in the existence of the work that they were assessing. The disadvantage of this, however, would lie in the practicality of sourcing enough willing volunteers. One potential solution could be selection of assessors by lottery, as is the practice for jury service, though there would doubtless be practical and financial implications arising from this system, not least that of persuading the public, and possibly the government, that aesthetically accurate assessments of GCSE and A Level compositions is sufficiently important to justify the introduction of such a system. A further problem with a lottery based system for sourcing examiners is the necessity, at least according to Kant (1790/1987), for individuals to have sufficiently developed faculties of judgement in order to recognise beauty (pp. 217-219).

An alternative to the idea of marking being carried out by volunteers or individuals selected by lottery could be to accept that truly disinterested judgement is impossible, or at least very difficult, to achieve in this context. Instead, as Subotnik (1983) may suggest, teachers and examiners would need to be mindful of their own social contexts and ideologies during the marking process. Moral limits would then need to be set around how and to what extent examiners allow these factors to impact upon their decision making (p. 7). A system truly reflecting the ideas of thinkers such as Subotnik, Kramer and McClary would also require examiners to have access to information surrounding the contexts in which works had been created. They would then need to factor those contexts into their marking, again within morally determined limits. Practically, this should not pose too much of a problem, though any sensitive information would need to be anonymised and handled securely.

This would, as Subotnik (1983) herself admits, raise the question of what form such moral limits should take (p. 7). Her proposed solution to this problem is for organisations involved in the study of music to strive to foster the co-existence of a broad range of views, however challenging this may prove to be (Subotnik, 1983, p. 12). Such an approach ought to be achievable in this context. Were exam boards to draw up the limits on how social contexts and ideologies may impact upon marking on behalf of examiners, they ought to be able to ensure that such limits were developed by groups of people with wide ranging views. If such an approach proved constructive, the resulting guidelines may also satisfy teachers' reported desire for clearer assessment requirements (Devaney & Fautley, 2015, p. 4). Basing a new assessment system on the views of contemporary thinkers such as Subotnk, Kramer or McClary would also be more in line with current trends in aesthetic thinking, thereby avoiding charges of an outdated ideology that may be levelled at a system based on formalist aesthetics.

Developing an assessment system informed by the views of Kramer and McClary would also necessitate the inclusion of 'meaning' as a criterion for marking students' compositions, as both argue that our perception of musical meaning is inextricably linked to our response to a given work (Miles, 1995, p. 14, Kramer, 2003, p. 7). It is necessary to question how this could be achieved, as it would seem difficult to argue that a given

meaning either displays or lacks aesthetic validity in and of itself. Furthermore, as Trietler points out, the suppression or elevation of certain meanings above others has historically been associated with some catastrophic events (Miles, 1995, p. 30). A potential solution to this could be for students to be required to submit information about the intended meaning of their work, and for marks to be based on how 'successfully' their intention has been realised. This would also have to be considered in light of the 'moral limits' set out by the exam board, as the composer's intention forms part of the ideological considerations identified by Subotnik (1983, p. 2). Such an approach could also be applied to the idea of awarding marks based on the emotional impact of the work. If students were marked on how successfully their works evoked or elicited the emotions that they themselves had intended, this would avoid the potential problems with censorship that we encountered in our discussion of Plato and Aristotle, whilst also acknowledging the role that emotions play in aesthetic experience, as suggested by the aesthetics of figures such as Schopenhauer and Adorno as well as Plato and Aristotle.

These ideas are all hypothetical, and would likely require substantial refinement before they could be used in a real world setting. What they are intended to demonstrate, however, is that there are possibilities for improving composition assessments in education if enough thought is given to the matter, and that the study of aesthetics could provide valuable insights into how this could be achieved.

THE IMPORTANCE OF INVESTIGATING THE AESTHETIC VALIDITY OF COMPOSITION EDUCATION AND ASSESSMENT FURTHER

It is clear that there are multiple problems with the validity of GCSE and A Level composition in England, regardless of the aesthetic theory to which we ascribe. However, this research has, by necessity been limited and it is possible, maybe probable, that such problems extend further than English secondary education in the early twenty-first century. Exploring international and historic models of composition education and assessment, as well as those used in higher education, may provide some indication of how far these problems spread. Such an investigation may also highlight models which prove successful, thereby indicating ways in the English GCSE and A Level approach to composition could be improved.

The English new music sector appears to be thriving (Sound and Music, 2019, p. 4), and as a result there may be some who argue that the problems within the current approach are not a matter of concern. There are many problems with such a position. Principal

among them is the likelihood that the impact of current systems and their direct predecessors is not yet being felt by the sector. Furthermore, it may be that composition as a profession is dominated by individuals who had access to private tuition outside of their school studies, and that such tuition has made up for the problems associated with GCSEs and A Levels. This limits the pool of talent coming into the sector to only those who have been able to obtain, often expensive, private tuition, or those who could access tuition not related to GCSE and A Level study through charities, friends, family, or exceptionally dedicated school teachers. For the sake of equality and the continued health of the new music sector, it is essential that everyone has the opportunity to experience a high quality composition education.

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