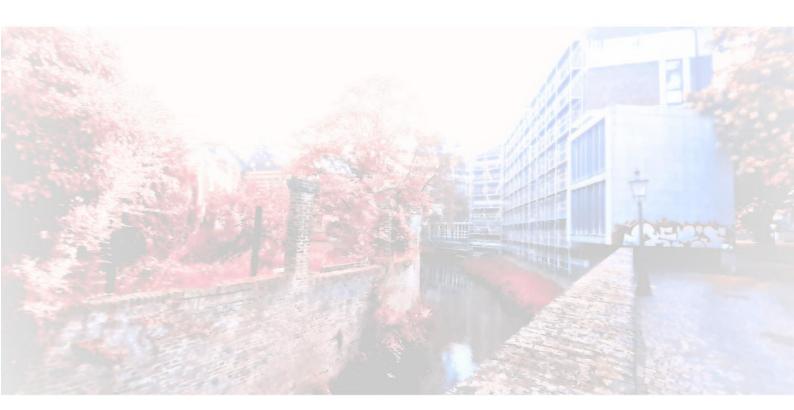# Boundaries We Hear but Cannot See

TRACING AUTONOMY IN CLASSICAL MUSIC HIGHER EDUCATION

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Acknowledgements

This thesis might have only my name under its title, but it is by no means the result of my effort and input only. In fact, without the contributions and mediation of all the people who supported me and this project, there is no way it could have taken the shape it has today. My appreciation of their support is even greater in light of the larger process of personal discovery, reflection and reformulation that this thesis is part of. Many thanks to the people at Conservatorium Maastricht for opening their doors to my research, in particular, to Mette Laugs and Twan Bartholomee for their mediation. Thanks to all the teachers, students, and alumni who accepted my invitation to a 45-minute coffee and shared their invaluable insights with me.

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1. Introduction

Classical music is in *crisis*. Or the orchestra is. Or perhaps the concert. For decades, practitioners and scholars in the field have been articulating these sorts of claims. Yet, there is no consensus about what the crisis entails or the loci of the practice in which it occurs. Concerns and critiques have been voiced by all types of actors involved in its practice: musicians, composers, educators, scholars, and administrators are increasingly aware of issues that affect classical music institutions and their constituencies, from the decline of audiences in concerts to the reproduction of class and gender inequalities. Being a classically trained musician, over the years I have become increasingly aware of many of these tensions. Having conducted viola performance studies in Colombia, Austria, and the Netherlands, I started noticing in these contexts how little engagement and impact my practising and playing, and ultimately the field around me had in relation to the broader social and political world. I began seeing the patterns of homogeneity in the demographics of audiences and figures of authority in classical music, and the silent yet strident absence of women composers in concert programmes. To further complicate things, I heard no echoes of my questions in the sites where I carried out my musical practice, as if they were yet to be asked within those walls. At the same time, I still was and continue to be deeply moved by and attached to this music and still hope for it to continue existing for future generations to experience. In the wake of this conflict, I sought to understand these tensions and this thesis is part of that process, as it aims to make some sense of the issues ascribed to classical music and the work that brings them about.

As for the voicings of a *crisis*, there is no unanimity on what the issues are, where they are situated, whom they affect or how, or their causes and broader implications. In this thesis, I argue that understanding the tensions in classical music practices typically falls into a discourse of *crisis*, that follows from a concern for the future of the practice, i.e., its financial sustainability and survival. Recently, however, a discourse of *systemic issues* has also developed that focuses on how present classical music conventions might reproduce or reinforce patterns of inequality, lack of diversity, and exclusion. Furthermore, there are differences in the types of actors that voice each of these discourses: the crisis dominates institutional and policy debates among administrators and musicians, while systemic issues are voiced and investigated mainly from academic disciplines, in the social sciences and humanities.

In this thesis, and drawing inspiration from the edited collection *Classical Music Futures: Practices of Innovation* published by the Maastricht Center for the Innovation of Classical Music (MCICM) (Smith et al., 2024), I understand the term *classical music practices* in a holistic way that

encompasses music institutions and organisations, such as symphony orchestras and conservatoires; practitioners in the sense of musicians, composers, educators, and other cultural workers; the conventions, norms and habits that regulate their work; and the canon of musical works that they engage with (Smith & Peters, 2024, p. 2).

Classical music practices as we know them today emerged in the nineteenth century and have remained virtually unchanged up to this day (Smith & Peters, 2024, p. 4). The main conventions that formed under this paradigm, which I will refer to as the *nineteenth-century paradigm* (of classical music) throughout this text, and that continue to shape today's classical music world, include the concept of the musical work; the primacy of the composer's intentions and the owed fidelity to them during performance; the standard repertoire or canon that is the norm for performance, education and history of classical music; the attentive listening and silent contemplation that is the prescribed mode for engaging as audience with this music (Spronck, 2022, pp. 43-45); the notion of absolute music; and the discourse of autonomous art (Clarke, 2012, p. 174). This paradigm is further complicated by recent scholarship that has identified, across the practices that it regulates, the systemic presence of issues of social inequality and lack of diversity and that have been articulated as affecting "classed, gendered and racialised identities" (Bull, 2019, p. xii). Crucially, an element of the nineteenth-century paradigm that plays an instrumental role in the affirmation and reproduction of these inequalities, is the claim that classical music is autonomous (Clarke, 2012, p. 172).

The question of what exactly it is supposed to be autonomous *from* has been answered in multiple, non-mutually exclusive ways: music as separate from the social, from everyday functions, from non-musical reference, and from market-related concerns. It is, in particular, the presumed separation from the social that has raised the most critical discussions in recent scholarship: if music being autonomous "denies the influence of anything so worldly as [say,] gender" (Clarke, 2012, p. 173), any enquiries as to how it "might contribute to reproducing inequalities are disallowed" (Bull, 2019, p. xiv). Autonomy, in this view, is attributed "to the musical work itself, to the institutions responsible for performing these works, and to the place of art music in society" (Smith & Peters, 2024, p. 5), and has the potential to slip into other concepts of the nineteenth-century paradigm in the sense that they overlap semantically while not being synonymous, specifically the work-concept, the idea of aesthetic as such, absolute music, and formalism. The constellation of these concepts around the idea of autonomy has been termed *strong autonomy* by music theorist David Clarke (2012, p. 174), and is the term I will use throughout this thesis to refer

to the particular view of autonomy that is associated with the nineteenth-century paradigm of classical music and the systemic issues of the practice as discussed above.

This problematisation of the autonomy of classical music might suggest at first glance that the way forward is to completely do away with it for being archaic and contributing to inequalities. Nonetheless, some scholars have warned against this total dismissal and advocate for a middle ground between "making a fetish of the autonomy idea and wanting to bury it" (Clarke, 2012, p. 182). They argue, rather, for the alternative notion of *double-edged* or *double-sided autonomy*, one that acknowledges both the internal dimension of the purely musical material and the external one that points outwards to its social context (p. 178), and which, in doing so, enables music's critical capacity (Green, 2005, p. 90).

In my experience as a classical music practitioner, the word "autonomy" is never uttered in conservatories or orchestras: not even once, that I can recall, did I hear this word in my practice, let alone reflect on what it might imply. As a hidden concept, autonomy invites the question of how it *actually* manifests itself in current musical practices: does the nineteenth-century understanding of autonomy still permeate orchestras, conservatoires, or concert halls? Has it been altogether dismissed for its problematic implications, or has it been reformulated to enable the critical capacity it has been argued to allow? To explore its manifestations, I examine how a classical music organisation and its inhabiting practitioners relate to these notions of autonomy, for which I will focus on a Higher Music Education Institution in the Netherlands as my case study. The choice of this particular kind of institution is justified by the fact that, compared to organisations like symphony orchestras, conservatories generally accommodate a more diverse range of practitioners and actors (teachers, performers, composers, students, administrators, audiences, etc.), who in turn embody and produce a wide variety of discourses, providing a fertile ground to study how autonomy shapes the field, in particular educational practices. Additionally, and in view of the potential prevalence of nineteenth-century autonomy despite the scholarly advancements mentioned above, my research also addresses the possibility of a gap between practice and scholarship in classical music.

In this light, by examining Conservatorium Maastricht (CM) through a multimodal ethnographic approach, I intend to engage with the research question of how the concept of autonomy manifests itself in and shapes classical music practices in higher music education. This investigation will allow a richer and layered view of the ways classical musicians and institutions understand their practice in relation to societal contexts by examining the very concept that defines

the articulation—or lack thereof—with the broader social world, through the concrete notions, values, and experiences of actual practitioners on the field. Against this backdrop, it also provides a clearer view of the conditions in which questions of elitism, social inequality and exclusion are addressed or sidelined, potentially signalling pathways to greater inclusivity, diversity and institutional transparency. This research also hopes to contribute to informing current processes of academisation within Higher Music Education Institutions (HMEIs), by which European countries articulate and implement the requirement that "all disciplines and study programmes must demonstrate that they are reflective or theory-based" (Gies, 2019, p. 45). It aims to provide valuable insights into CM's own process of academisation, especially for the curriculum renovation it is currently undergoing, as it highlights the effects of the boundary-drawing work of autonomy on the internal tensions between research and practice, tradition and innovation. Lastly, given my positioning as a classical musician and researcher, this thesis can also be seen as an attempt at divestment from classical music's (strong) autonomy: according to musicologist Brandon Farnsworth, investigating the ways in which this art form interacts "[in the past, present, and future] with history, politics, or current affairs" (2024, p. 56), is in itself a way of challenging the deep inequalities pervading its practice.

I will start by drawing the scholarly context and rationale for examining the concept of autonomy in classical music practices within HMEIs in Chapter 2 of this thesis, through a focus on the crisis discourses, systemic issues in classical music, and the undergoing transformation of HMEIs. Because, as argued above, autonomy is a complex and covert concept, a process of operationalisation needed to be conducted before embarking on its examination. This involved turning the broad and diverse scholarly takes on autonomy into observable variables or indicators that could be systematically analysed. In Chapter 3, I detail this operationalisation through a conceptual analysis of musical autonomy, after which, by positioning my ontological understanding of music as a verb rather than a noun, I lay out the methodological approaches to examine autonomy *as a result* of the work of making music. The findings of my multi-modal ethnography at CM are presented in Chapter 4 and reflectively discussed in Chapter 5, before concluding with Chapter 6, where I articulate an answer to my research question.

2. A Panoramic View of Classical Music Practices: Currents of Crisis, Systemic Issues and Institutional Transformation

Before actually *entering* the Conservatory to focus on the possible manifestations of autonomy, I will first outline the scholarly backdrops against which an investigation of autonomy is both relevant and pressing. Classical music is seen as being in crisis, as concerns over its future survival and sustainability permeate academic and institutional discourses. However, this focus on the future sidelines the *present* of the practice, and the extensively studied systemic issues that affect the field. Since I engage with an HMEI as my case study, an overview of the pivotal moment that conservatories are going through will provide a third backdrop to ground my examination, in combination with a focus on the academisation process European HMEIs have embarked on in past decades and the gap it uncovered between performance and scholarly cultures within these institutions.

2.1 Calling It a Crisis Does Not Make It One: Discourses of Crisis in Classical Music

To think of a field as being in a state of crisis is to think about its future. Moreover, it is also to *fear* for its future, to see interrupted in some way the thread connecting its present state and what we hope it to be in years to come. But what do we fear exactly when we tag classical music with a label of *crisis*? That it will die out and not reach future generations? Or maybe that to survive it will have to transform into something unrecognisable or unlikable? Instead of trying to establish whether there is or not a crisis, I explore in this section the discourses that sustain its claims, as well as the idea that forming expectations and images of the future is not a trivial exercise of imagination, but rather something "socially performative in that they structure decision-making and organise social actions and collaborations" (Smith & Peters, 2024, p. 12).

As for *what* is supposed to be in crisis, some scholars frame it as being the world of classical music in general (Adorno, 2002; Smith et al., 2024; Spronck, 2022), some see it on an institutional level as a crisis of the symphony orchestra (Herman, 2020, pp. 12-13), others claim it is a crisis of the classical music concert as a cultural activity (Rhomberg & Tröndle, 2020, p. 316). Wherever it is argued to be taking place, notions of the crisis have in common that they voice a concern for the *future* of classical music practices, their sustainability and, ultimately, their survival. Practitioners like classical music entrepreneur David Taylor speak of a crisis characterised by diminishing attendance, weak business models, and stagnation in innovative practices (Taylor, 2020, April 8). Others like celebrated British conductor Simon Rattle frame it mainly as a financial crisis, rooted

in longstanding political neglect, misleading political language, and the cultural ignorance of policymakers (Rattle, 2023).

The issues typically ascribed to the crisis point to two main concerns: the financial sustainability of the practice on one side, and a crisis of legitimacy/relevance on the other (Herman, 2020, pp. 11-12; Rhomberg & Tröndle, 2020, p. 316). A shared symptom of both problems is the decline in audience numbers, often along with their ageing demographics (Botstein, 2004, p. 41; Spronck, 2022, p. 22). Music historian Leon Botstein, in his text *Music of a Century: Museum Culture and the Politics of Subsidy* (2004) frames this ageing and decrease of audiences as a decline in interest in classical music, and as being part of a radical transformation of musical culture during the twentieth century, characterised by a sharp break with past traditions and a change in taste and expectations. He argues that this was caused by the waning of music education in schools that broke the cycle of recruitment of new generations of adult audiences, and particularly the consequent loss of music literacy in the general public (2004, p. 42). This, in turn, made room for the negative impact of early-twentieth-century musical modernism, as the general public, in particular the young, lacked the means to connect with new music that was more difficult to listen to, and that was now in "negative contrast to the successful synthesis in the popular world between commercial viability and political and social relevance" (2004, p. 45).

In his analysis of the crisis in the context of the symphony orchestra, musicologist Arne Herman challenges the idea that financial precariousness is a new phenomenon in these institutions. It is instead something inherent, as there has not been a moment in their history in which symphony orchestras have been able to sustain themselves through ticket sales and have thus always depended on one or other form of external funding (2020, p. 24). Herman argues that, on the contrary, there are many indications that classical music is actually "very much alive" (p. 21), examples of which are the higher-than-ever performance quality levels or the emergence of new orchestras. Botstein also challenges this perceived sense of crisis since, "[i]n absolute numbers, there are more listeners to more concert music and opera than ever before" (Botstein, 2004, p. 48). The reason that classical music nonetheless continues to be perceived as marginalised is in part, for Botstein, that during the past century, performers and organisations have embraced almost exclusively the role of "guardians of the past", becoming curators of "a museum of historical performing art", and only indirectly, if ever, participating in the creation of new music, their role reduced to "re-creation" (p. 49).

Financial precariousness, albeit a real challenge for institutions is now understood to be a mere symptom of a *structural* crisis rooted in the loss of legitimacy that derives from a weak alignment of values and norms between classical music institutions and the social entities that form their constituencies (Herman, 2020, pp. 23-26). Herman understands legitimacy in this context as the "generalised perception that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within a given social context" (p. 12), and it takes centre stage when institutions like orchestras are pressured to prove their legitimacy as a requisite to receive funding. To do so, institutions tend to rely more and more on a belief that "music has a constructive social impact on those involved" (p. 31), and present themselves as predictable and accessible through quantitative measurements of "market conformity (by headcount) and societal impact (by audience diversity)" (p. 32). In broader cultural policy research, such focus on quantitatively measurable impacts has been consistently critiqued for advancing the assumption that it is "possible to generalise about people's experiences of the arts within art forms, across art forms and across a diverse population" (Belfiore & Bennett, 2007, p. 136). Moreover, by taking for granted that the arts produce a positive impact on people's well-being, institutions are also assuming that they have no negative ones and "if they do, they are so negligible that they are not worth mentioning" (p. 137). Finally, these approaches in measurement are typically not intended to establish if there is actual impact or not, but to provide evidence that there is (p. 137), thus falling short of delivering cause-effect links between the art form itself and the benefits it claims to produce (Belfiore, 2002).

Cultural policy researchers David Stevenson, Gitte Balling and Nanna Kann-Rasmussen (2017) offer another critical perspective that challenges the assumptions of the crisis discourse by analysing the presumed problem of *non-participation* in culture across Europe, which in the context of classical music practices refers to the lack of attendance to concerts. They argue that more than a problem, it is rather a "shared problematisation" (p. 89). Despite high levels of cultural participation recorded in cross-national surveys in Europe in recent years, national cultural policies continue to claim that "there is still a 'problem' with cultural participation rates" (p. 90), justifying the need for more state funding of the affected organisations. Stevenson et al. point at some key issues in this representation of the problem: first, the non-participant is identified almost exclusively under a narrow notion of high culture that encompasses "concerts, theatre, film, museums, libraries and books", coincidentally forms of "primarily state-supported cultural organisations" (p. 96). Second, this representation of the non-participant tends to omit the structural inequalities that hinder their capacity to participate or fail to consider that non-participation might be an active conscious decision. Third, they are represented as not participating because they fail to understand the benefits of doing so and the "'value' of 'culture'" (p. 95). Lastly,

the non-participant representation often targets marginalised demographics, who then become the focus of cultural interventions to increase participation. In this light, understanding non-participation as a practice of problematisation with underlying agendas that seem to prescribe participation in high culture as well as the governmental funding that sustains it, highlights the need to reconsider how the absence, decline, and ageing of audiences are framed in classical music practices.

This overview provides valuable insights into the presumed crisis in classical music. First, financial precariousness is but a symptom of a broader structural crisis of legitimacy rooted in a misalignment between classical music institutions and contemporary societal values. This legitimacy crisis stems from a failure to adapt to twentieth-century changes in musical culture and the shift in their role to a museum function. Additionally, the pressure to prove their legitimacy in order to receive funding has resulted in ineffective methodological approaches that hindered their ability to investigate and understand their own social impact. This is further complicated by recent trends in European cultural policy that prescribe particular forms of participation in state-funded high culture as the norm and expectation. These critiques of the crisis discourse evidence the social performativity of futuring, as fears for its survival have greatly shaped decision-making in impact research and policymaking. We have glimpsed through the cracks of the crisis discourse that, at least on institutional and policy levels, forms of inequality and exclusion inhabit classical music practices. It is time to look away from the future of classical music for a moment and more closely into its past and present to enquire how inequality and exclusion are constructed and reproduced in classical music practices.

2.2 Mapping the Boundaries - Systemic Issues in Classical Music Practices

The causes of the crisis in classical music, as articulated in the previous section, are often assumed to come from *outside* its practices and institutions. However, recent critical sociocultural analyses have identified underlying systemic issues affecting classed, racialised and gendered identities that raise concerns about the current state of classical music practices and turn their focus inward to understand their workings and implications. Under these claims, classical music practices are not only shaped by economic and social inequality conditions but contribute to their reproduction and perpetuation.

Systemic issues do not only precede but underlie concerns for the future voiced as a crisis. For sociologist Christina Scharff (2015), the loss of appeal or relevance of classical music and the consequent waning of its audiences might be understood as the result of under-representation of

certain groups in the cultural workforce, thus making classical music appealing only to a specific segment of society (p. 4), i.e. the white middle classes (Bull, 2019). Moreover, Markus Rhomberg and Martin Tröndle (Rhomberg & Tröndle, 2020) argue that institutions tend to avoid discussing these systemic issues and instead choose to engage with the crisis discourse detailed above (Rhomberg & Tröndle, 2020), a move allowed by the ideology of autonomy that classical music carries, as Bull points out (2019, xiv). The fact that institutions tend to perceive their problems as originating *outside* the organisation further stagnates their ability to transform their institutional cultures and address their financial struggles *and* underlying systemic issues. In this light, the assumption concerning audience decline is that "it is not the institution that needs to change the structure of its programs, but rather the public needs to be educated to accept the existing program" (Rhomberg & Tröndle, 2020, pp. 320-321).

Christina Scharff published a research report in 2015 on equality and diversity in the classical music profession in the United Kingdom that maps issues of inequality persist, and offers recommendations on possible ways to address them (2015, p. 4). Scharff identifies these issues of in five different loci of classical music practices: "music education and training, orchestras, teaching staff at conservatoires, conducting, and composition" (p. 5). The forms of inequality are categorised under three themes: "under-representation, vertical and horizontal segregation, and the sexualisation of female musicians" (p. 5). According to Scharff, segregation is horizontal when specific groups are predominantly found in particular economic activities, "for example, women tend to be over-represented in caring professions and men in financial services" (p. 10). Vertical segregation, in turn, occurs when certain groups are disproportionally represented in roles of authority and status (p. 12).

From her findings, class- and race-based inequalities are evident from the onset of music education, as children from lower socio-economic and minority ethnic backgrounds face significant barriers to entry and progression, while middle-class backgrounds are over-represented (Scharff, 2015, pp. 5, 9). The costs of learning to play an instrument and the cultural alignment of classical music education with middle-class values create an environment in which middle-class musicians "fit more comfortably" (p. 5). Inequalities also extend to the professional realm as hiring processes prioritise individuals who have completed higher education, in conjunction with the "prevalence of unpaid internships and volunteering" (p. 6), and the trends of informal work and networking. In turn, minority ethnic musicians are significantly under-represented in orchestras, as conservatoire teachers, and as managers and directors.

Gender inequality, which Smith and Peters view as "entirely intentional and explicit" (2024, p. 7) in classical music practices, is identified in Scharff's study as professional under-representation as orchestra musicians, composers, conductors, and conservatoire teachers (2015, p. 5). Horizontal segregation sees women concentrated in certain areas of the field, such as teaching, and in specific instruments such as flute or harp, while men dominate areas like composition and conducting. Vertical segregation, on the other hand, has women under-represented in positions of authority and prestige, such as conductors, orchestra principals, and artistic directors and managers. (p. 5). Furthermore, women musicians must carefully navigate a network of obfuscated conventions in terms of appearance, femininity, and sexuality. For instance, they are expected to highlight their femininity for marketing and performance, while "doing so might jeopardize their credibility as artists" (Scharff, 2015, p. 15). Lastly, sexual harassment has been a pressing concern in orchestras and conservatoires, to the point it has been called "music education's 'dirty little secret'" (Gould, 2009, as cited in Scharff, 2015, p. 15).

Scharff identifies as key barriers for marginalised artists the Western cultural myths of talent and creativity, which, on one side, pervasively understand *the artist* as male—or *the genius,* as Smith puts it (2024, p. 29)—and on the other, normative ideas around individual success and meritocracy that view success and failure as the result purely of the individual's work, sidelining the "wider social forces that shape artists' working lives and careers" (Scharff, 2015, p. 17). Moreover, this sidelining is exacerbated by what Scharff calls the "unspeakability of inequalities" (p. 17), through which these issues are rarely openly discussed and acknowledged, thus contributing to their perpetuation. Scharff offers here two key provisions: on one side, there is an urgent need for an intersectional approach to inequalities in classical music, as the implications of the convergence of two or more forms in an individual or group are notably under-researched (Scharff, 2021, p. 20); on the other, she calls for further enquiry that examines inequalities beyond class, gender and race, including issues related to "sexual orientation, age and disability" (2015, p. 17).

Sociologist Anna Bull's book *Class, Control, and Classical Music* (2019), a socio-cultural analysis of the association between social class and classical music in the United Kingdom and its intersections in gendered and racialised identities, offers a more in-depth investigation of the systemic issues of the field as identified by Scharff. Through a detailed ethnography, Bull examines a number of English youth orchestras and choirs to understand how classical music practices (understood as encompassing institutions, practitioners and conventions, as outlined in Chapter 1) are regulated and "shaped by wider conditions of economic inequality" (p. xxvi). Of notable

relevance for this thesis is Bull's claim that the camouflaging of its practices facilitates the social reproduction and perpetuation of inequalities through the ideology of autonomy around classical music, as it sidelines issues of inequality "in favour of prioritising 'the music itself'" (p. 14). In addition, one of the book's key arguments is that to understand inequalities in the classical music field, it is necessary to examine "the practices that are used to create the aesthetic" (p. xiii), as it is through classical music's embodied practices of control and restraint, preserved and disseminated by institutions, that middle-class identities draw boundaries around them to safeguard their privilege.

Bull's study reveals that "classical music education cultivates a form of selfhood that is recognised as valuable" (2019, p. 175), a notion of value that develops from the history and institutions of classical music, as well as their cultural associations, but notably also from this selfhood's resonance with "qualities that are valued by the middle classes" (p. 175). These qualities encompass emotional depth, an individual self, self-restraint, a disposition to work with authority, gendered behavioural norms, and technical expertise. Because of its intersection with middle-class identities, classical music education might be thus seen as a "cultural technology for forming a middle-class self" (p. 175). Moreover, these forms of value around selfhood and classical music are "upheld through a quintessentially middle-class practice: closing off spaces where it is stored" (p. 175), that is, *boundary-drawing*. For Bull, rather than in physical spaces, these boundaries are contained within the aesthetic of the music itself, as can be seen in the four ways she proposes classical music is articulated with middle-class identities. First, the canon of classical music dictates the "modes of social organization that the music requires" (p. 175), which include the authority of leading roles such as conductors and teachers, the clearly defined place of musicians within this hierarchy, and the exact composition of the group. Additionally, boundary-drawing around the repertoire also establishes hierarchical distinctions between classical music and other genres, demarcated by the second articulation with the middle class, i.e., their racialised modes of embodiment. These include the prescribed way of experiencing or listening to this music through "'controlled excitement' and 'emotional depth'" (p. 176), whose emergence Bull traces back to the first half of the nineteenth century, and corresponds with the convention of attentive listening ascribed to the paradigm before. The third articulation is "the imaginative dimension of bourgeois selfhood" (p. 177) in which the social organisations of performing and listening, such as the orchestra, are imagined in idealised and utopic ways "as a bourgeois fantasy of male control" (p. 177). The fourth articulation with the middle class consists of classical music's "aesthetic of 'getting it right' and its 'affordances for precision and detail'" (p. 178) and underlies the previous three in that it establishes the rational justification for the practice's social organisation, embodiment, and

imagination. These conventions entail on one side, the particular notion of technical quality in classical music –that is, playing exactly in tune and together– which to be achieved requires attentive listening, and on the other, the prescribed fidelity to the composer's intention and the indications of the score, referred to as *Werktreue* [being faithful to the work] by Lydia Goehr (1992, p. 231). Moreover, reaching these technical demands requires the costly and long-term investment of learning proficiency in the instrument, which leaves out "anyone who is not able or willing to make" such an investment (Bull, 2019, p. 179).

In conclusion, for Bull, "music itself does the boundary-drawing work" (2019, p. 179) in the sense that the barriers to participation are created by the requirements of the canonic repertoire itself. Notably, meeting these requirements is at the same time necessary to create beauty in classical music, which suggests that in order to challenge those boundaries, fundamental changes in the aesthetic practice itself are needed (p. 179). As systemic issues are ingrained in the conventions of performance and reception of classical music, its institutions, particularly HMEIs, play a crucial role in their perpetuation as they are responsible for their preservation and inculcation. By examining HMEIs in the next section through a focus on their consolidation in the nineteenth century, their undergoing process of academisation, and the gap between performance and scholarship that it has revealed, I explore how this particular type of institution creates the conditions for the boundary-drawing work of autonomy.

2.3 High Stakes at Higher Music Education Institutions

Higher Music Education Institutions are currently in a pivotal moment, to the point where their future is often seen as *unclear* (Georgii-Hemming et al., 2020, p. 245; Petzold & Peters, 2023, p. 3), as they undergo a series of significant changes. Corporate ideas about quality assessment, institutional organisation, and management "have become the new reality of higher education" (Georgii-Hemming et al., 2020, p. 245), and are accompanied by calls to introduce research and entrepreneurial components in their curricula that challenge their notions of knowledge (p. 245). Moreover, they are viewed as struggling with catching up with and reacting to the issues, both systemic and societal, that have become pressing in many cultural practices, such as "inclusivity, diversity, and accessibility" (Petzold & Peters, 2023, p. 3), or climate change (Smith & Peters, 2024, p. 8). In this sense, and as argued in the MCICM's report *Higher Education and the Professional Field* (Petzold & Peters, 2023), written for Conservatorium Maastricht, the current main concern of HMEIs is "how to better prepare and support students for a future in this changing profession" (p. 3).

Music educator and researcher Stefan Gies, in his piece *How Music Performance Education Became Academic: On the History of Music Higher Education in Europe* (2019), outlines the history of HMEIs and sheds light on some of the processes that resulted in the current transformational moment described above. Before their emergence during the nineteenth century, the transmission of musical knowledge through the relationship between a master and an apprentice "has been described throughout all cultures and times" (Gies, 2019, p. 34). It is still the paradigm of music education in the form of one-to-one tuition, i.e., the setting in which the student receives one to two hours of individual instrument lessons from the instructor every week. This form of instruction, however, has often been critiqued for not being open to innovation in terms of teaching methods, as the masters typically teach how they were taught, and reflection on their own roles "does not belong to the core repertoire of the master's doctrine" (p. 34).

Although there are examples of nascent forms of organised musical instruction in Europe since the sixteenth century, it was not until 1794 that the "first 'new style' bourgeois conservatoire" (p. 40) was founded in Paris. Initially focused on public instrumental training, these institutions were eventually privatised and turned their effort to catering to the wealthy, leading to a decline in teaching quality. By the early 20th century in Europe, as they began to be nationalised and later ascribed to broader educational institutions with more scientific orientations, Gies argues, a long process of academisation began (2019, p. 43). At first, its main concerns were the separation of amateur from professional musical training, and the value and legal status of the degrees they awarded. From the 1960s, calls for equating HMEIs with universities increased, reaching a peak as "the Bologna Declaration was launched in 1999" (Gies, 2019, p. 44), which triggered a process by which most European countries "were implementing laws stipulating that all disciplines and study programmes must demonstrate that they are reflective or theory-based, in other words, that they are 'academic'" (Gies, 2019, p. 45).

As one of the aims of academisation, music education's "recognition as a discipline whose methods of knowledge acquisition are theory or reflection-based" (Gies, 2019, p. 45) implies for musicians that they are expected to become "more reflective thinkers […] who are able to respond meaningfully to societal issues" (Petzold & Peters, 2023, pp. 5-6). How this is supposed to be implemented in practice is far less straightforward, as tensions arise between the new skills expected from musicians and the "long-established systems and practices of higher music education" (Petzold & Peters, 2023, p. 3). One of the main sites of tension is the central role of artistic excellence in HMEIs, and the associated almost exclusive focus of exams and assessments in measuring artistic quality through criteria that have been critiqued for their misleading claims of

objectivity and universality (Farnsworth, 2024, p. 48). Skills such as communication, self-management and self-marketing, technological literacy, interdisciplinary collaboration, breadth in cultural awareness, and leadership were until recently virtually absent from HMEIs and even considered "'extraneous' to making music" (Baltakas, 2021, as cited in Petzold & Peters, 2023, p. 7). In other words, academisation prescribes a seemingly unattainable paradigm for the future musician under current conditions: they are "to become more flexible and expand their competences, as well as respond to societal issues, all while keeping a high level of artistic skill in their ability to perform music" (p. 3). A closer look at the possible interpretations of reflection and the presumed gap between research and practice in classical music sheds light on the tensions raised by this call for reflectiveness.

Researchers Eva Georgii-Hemming, Karin Johansson and Nadia Moberg (2020) have examined the concept of critical reflection within HMEIs' academisation process, noting its various interpretations in classical music practices. Drawing on Dewey's definition of reflection as "an explorative, investigative and creative process where experiences transform into knowledge" (Dewey, 1910, as cited in Georgii-Hemming et al., 2020, p. 246), they distinguish it from *critical reflection*, which considers larger "social, political, moral and ethical aspects" (p. 246). In their study, they found two main tensions in HMEIs caused by academisation's call for critical reflection: first, regarding how it should be operationalised—whether verbally and cognitively, as embodied *reflection-in-action,* or purely musically (p. 249)— and second, the justifications to do so, with three main trends focusing on producing artistic knowledge, contributing to individual professional success, or "about the role of musicianship in relation to society" (p. 253). Furthermore, "the marketisation of higher education" (p. 253) has skewed reflection towards individual success, sidelining critical issues. This debate ties into the gap between performance and scholarly cultures, with *scholarship* extending beyond traditional musicology and including "cultural and gender studies, critical historiography, performance studies, artistic research studies", etc. (VanderHart & Gower, 2022, p. 30). In their research, VanderHart and Gower (2022) confirm this gap between performance and musicology in HMEIs, attributing it to mutual disinterest and structural issues like funding dynamics. Moreover, established requirements for career advancement see non-performance-related activities as unnecessary and distracting from instrumental practice, "which was what they were there to study" (p. 49). Given the articulation of practices of marginalization *within* the aesthetic conventions of the practice, unawareness and disinterest of teachers in these issues perpetuate and reinforce their normalisation (p. 47).

In sum, the substantial transformations and challenges that HMEIs are presently undergoing due to pressures of marketisation, academisation and societal demands for inclusion and diversity share the call for practitioners to develop (critical) reflection as an essential part of their everyday work. However, institutions struggle to operationalise reflection as they tend to justify it as bringing individual success to musicians while sidelining its role in social engagement and transformation. This picture is further complicated by what has been identified as a gap between musical practice and scholarship, particularly in the way musicological insights and critical approaches fail to inform and influence the practice of performers, and that has structural causes at its core, in particular, related with economic organisation and aesthetic. This overview of HMEIs stresses the need of investigating the concept of autonomy in classical music practices as it is inextricably linked to the gap between scholarship and practice and the nineteenth-century paradigm from which the latter emerged.

2.4 Panoramic Conclusion

The scholarly landscape outlined in this chapter shows how the presumed crisis of classical music is first and foremost a crisis of legitimacy, of which the decline in audiences and the financial precariousness of its institutions are but mere symptoms. At the core of this legitimacy crisis is a misalignment between classical music institutions and contemporary societal values as, in the face of twentieth-century shifts in musical culture they opted for a curatorial role of re-creation of musical works of the past. Furthermore, the initiatives in terms of research and policy to address the crisis have leaned towards safeguarding institutional tenets while sidelining the systemic issues that have been identified to pervade classical music practices. The multiple and intersecting forms of inequality that constitute these systemic issues are the result of boundary-drawing around a distinctively middle-class selfhood. Crucially, these barriers are constructed through classical music's embodied practices of control and restraint, prescribed in the aesthetic of the canonic repertoire itself. These embodied practices are preserved and disseminated by HMEIs through tenets like the one-to-one tuition approach as the fundamental pedagogical model or the almost exclusive focus of assessments on artistic excellence. Moreover, HMEIs' processes of academisation have revealed inherent challenges to articulate and implement critical reflection and research practices, as well as a gap between performing and scholarly cultures. This landscape reveals not only the pressing relevance of investigating autonomy in classical music practices, as the boundary-drawing it entails is instrumental in the reproduction and perpetuation of forms of inequality, but also highlights the importance of taking a closer look at HMEIs as they preserve and disseminate the aesthetic conventions through which these boundaries are drawn. In the

following chapter, I take a closer look at scholarly discourses about autonomy and outline its operationalisation, which will help lay out the methodological approach of my research.

3. Tracing an Invisible Concept: Theoretical Framework and Methodological Approach

Musicians do not utter the word *autonomy*. At least I never did when I was a full-time student/performer, nor did I ever hear it from colleagues, teachers or administrators in the three HMEIs in which I followed my viola studies. As I discussed in the introduction to this thesis, autonomy, like music itself, is not a fixed, permanent object, but is rather realised through work and mediation. I therefore propose a view of autonomy as an *invisible practice*, drawing from Anna Bull's report *Power Relations and Hierarchies in Higher Music Education Institutions* (2021). She argues that power relations and hierarchies in HMEIs are produced through invisible practices, which she defines through the notion of the *hidden curriculum*: "[t]he unstated norms, values and beliefs that are transmitted to students through the underlying structure of meaning in both the formal content as well as the social relations of school and classroom life" (Giroux and Penna, 1979, as cited in Bull, 2021). In this light, the normative nineteenth-century paradigm "is so intertwined with the ways of working in symphonic music that it is incredibly hard to observe" (Spronck, 2022, p. 62). Before entering the conservatory and empirically examine autonomy as an invisible practice, the concept requires to be operationalised. As a first step, I begin this section with a conceptual analysis focused on how autonomy is discussed in classical music scholarship. Next, I operationalise the concept into potential concrete manifestations in classical music practice, drawing on the literature and my own experience as a practitioner. To conclude this chapter, I lay out the methodological approach that guided me in tracing these possible manifestations at CM.

Not only is autonomy an invisible practice in the field of classical music, but it is also one with many meanings, which is to say that discussions around it articulate diverse and sometimes not mutually exclusive understandings of it. In my exploration of literature in the next two sections, I identify two types of notions of autonomy, namely, *one-dimensional* and *composite* framings. The first kind presumes some form of separation or boundary around one aspect of musical practice.

3.1 One-Dimensional Framings of Autonomy

Autonomy as Separation from the Social

The first frame concerns the claim of music being separate from anything *social*, including the idea that musical production and reception are not influenced by societal elements (Born, 2017, p. 40; Bull, 2019, p. xiv; Clarke, 2012, p. 172) nor are they specific to any social or political context (Bull, 2019, p. 6; Gaiger, 2009, p. 52). This includes the notion that musical practices and discourses have no repercussions on social phenomena (Clarke, 2012, p. 177; Gaiger, 2009, p. 54), and of

particular relevance is the implication in this claim that classical music does not play a role in forms of social inequality and exclusion related to gender, race, class, ethnicity, etc. (Bull, 2019, pp. xiv, 9, 175, 179; Green, 2005, p. 90; Johnson-Williams, 2023, p. 53; Johnson, 2002, p. 21; Louth, 2015, p. 482). A more nuanced variation of this frame invokes hierarchization rather than separation from the social. Taking as a starting point the premise that social forms are an immanent part of performance arts (unlike other art forms), Western classical music's concert tradition relegates its social manifestations as secondary to the intrinsically musical and aesthetic (Born, 2017, pp. 39-40).

Autonomy as Separation from Everyday Functions and Extramusical Goals

This frame encompasses the claims that music has no immediate, everyday functions nor extramusical goals (Goehr, 1992, p. 147). This is not to say it is *useless*, as its main mode of reception (aesthetic contemplation), in itself a *functionless* activity, is how its value is realised (Johnson, 2002, p. 39). This understanding of the positioning of music originates in Kantian aesthetics, under which, "beauty is absolute and not instrumental", and aesthetic contemplation requires the viewer not to see any "moral, practical, or scientific end" (Goehr, 1992, p. 168) in the artistic object.

Autonomy as Self-referentiality

This third frame entails music's separation from any extramusical meaning (Gaiger, 2009, p. 53), particularly any meaning that is paraphrasable or that needs linguistic mediation to exist (Clarke, 2012, p. 174; Johnson, 2002, p. 83), as words could not possibly convey the universal character of music given their particularity and specificity (Goehr, 1992, p. 155). This separation entailed not only being free from an accompanying explicative text, as was the case with *absolute music*, but also from "its obligation to be meaningful in extra-musical, spiritual, and metaphysical ways" (p. 155). Instead, music was understood as intelligible because of "internal, structural coherence" (p. 155), rather than because it pointed towards something outside.

Autonomy as Separation from Commercial Concerns

The particular valuations of classical music as existing beyond any market orientation or commodification see music as autonomous from any commercial concerns. Drawn from Bourdieau's theory of the field of cultural production, this fourth frame relates to understandings of classical music as a form of *autonomous art* —in opposition to *heteronomous art*— in the sense of shunning commercial value, not seeking commercial reward and resisting commodification

(Bourdieu, 1983, as cited in Bull, 2019, p. 10). This *art-for-art-sake* paradigm places classical music beyond the fluctuations of cultural fashion (Johnson, 2002, p. 91).

3.2 Composite Autonomies

Some of the scholars reviewed for this thesis take a more layered approach to understanding musical autonomy, in particular David Clarke, who presents two opposing composites of autonomy to elaborate his argument for a middle ground between entirely embracing or rejecting the nineteenth-century view of autonomy. He coins the term *strong autonomy* to refer to this latter view (Clarke, 2012, p. 174) and draws from Lydia Goehr to call its postmodern alternative *double-edged autonomy* (Goehr, 1993, as cited in Clarke, 2012, p. 177). Clarke's dichotomy resonates with Jason Gaiger's analysis of autonomy in site-specific arts (2009), in which he identifies two distinct applications of autonomy in that field: *social autonomy,* on one side, points to the historical emancipation of art from "the interests of the church and the aristocracy" (p. 52) along with the emergence of an independent art market, and accordingly, art's autonomous status derives from having "its own internal history and learning processes" (p. 52); alternatively, he refers to *aesthetic autonomy* to account for the notion that the value of art is intrinsic and irreducible to "any other end or purpose" (p. 52). In this light, social autonomy mirrors music's double-edged autonomy, while aesthetic autonomy relates to Clarke's strong autonomy.

Strong Autonomy

This is the term coined by David Clarke (2012) to propose a constellation-type of understanding of autonomy in which it is so intertwined with other musical conventions or concepts that emerged jointly during the nineteenth century, that they have the potential to conflate into one another (p. 174). The first of these neighbouring conventions is the *work-concept*, an ontology of music on which I will elaborate later in this chapter, as it informs my methodological approach. In the most recognised forms of classical music at the time—sonatas, symphonies and concertos—, Clarke views the work-concept as inextricable from the idea of autonomy (p. 174). Given the centrality of the work-concept in the nineteenth-century paradigm, Clarke also understands the concept of Western classical music as inextricable from work and autonomy. The next component of this constellation is what Clarke calls "aesthetic as such" or "that strong concept of art (Art with a capital A)" (p. 174) and refers to the philosophical current of *aesthetic idealism* that also originated around the early nineteenth century. Under this framework, music does not merely imitate or represent the world but rather reflects an essence beyond materiality, an ideal (Spronck, 2022, p. 44). According to Goehr, under this new paradigm, musical

works correspond to "ideas formed in the mind of composers" (1992, p. 18) that are materialised and made accessible through scores and performances but their identification remains with the ideas rather than with their materialisation (p. 18). Lastly, the fourth component of strong autonomy is the concept of *absolute music*—music that is exclusively instrumental and does not intend to depict or represent anything outside of the music itself—and that Clarke pairs with "its associated notion for *formalism*" (2012, p. 174). Formalism in this context, emphasises music's formal aspects such as melody, harmony, rhythm, etc. which create an "internal, structural coherence" (Goehr, 1992, p. 155), and that allow for music to be intelligible, to have meaning. As I have shown in the previous chapter and given its entrenchment in the nineteenth-century paradigm of classical music, it is the notion of strong autonomy that is problematised as contributing to the reproduction and perpetuation of forms of inequality and lack of diversity in classical music practices.

Double-edged Autonomy

The term *double-edged* or *double-sided autonomy* was originally coined by Lydia Goehr when signalling the duality that nineteenth-century composers faced as they felt simultaneous allegiance to two contrasting ideals: "art for art's sake" and "art for the people" (1992, p. 211). Through the former, composers could detach themselves from the world and into the purely musical, while the latter allowed them to connect with it and seek social change through their art. This did not pose a conflict, Goehr argues, because music "has double-sided autonomy" (p. 211). David Clarke, aiming to work up this concept "to its full tension" (2012, p. 178), relates it to Lucy Green's case for retrieving musical autonomy through her dialectic of inherent and delineated meanings (Green, 2005). Music, under this theory, has inherent meanings deriving from its temporal organisation of sonic material but is at the same time inevitably delineated by a web of social meanings entrenched in its contexts of production, performance, and reception. Clarke and Green view double-edged autonomy as an alternative to the paradigm of strong autonomy in that, because of its inherent meanings, music can find new delineations among different social constituencies (Green, 2005, pp. 90-91) and therefore gain a critical capacity, otherwise eschewed if understood as only having inherent meanings or as not having them at all. Jason Gaiger (2009) and Georgina Born (2010) voice similar warnings against thwarting music's critical capacity by dismissing musical autonomy (Gaiger, p. 56) or embracing strong autonomy (Born, 2010, p. 176).

The critical capacity of music that these authors discuss traces back to Theodor Adorno's idea of music's inherent dialectic tension. Adorno argued that, during the twentieth century, music

underwent processes of *neutralisation* and *objectification*. By way of naturalisation, instead of being understood and studied as capable of "social power" (DeNora, 2003, p. 2), it became a medium merely mirroring social structures. Through objectification, music's ontology shifted from "active ingredient or animating force" (p. 3) to an object to be explained and commodified, a process he viewed as cognitive violence aligned with ruling authorities (pp. 5-6). For Adorno, this negated music's dialectic nature, where its internal logic and organisation are "structurally related to society" (pp. 13-14). He conceived music as performing two cognitive functions: music's capacity to reflect the composer's relation "to the social whole" (p. 11), and its capacity to exemplify and imagine alternative ways in which society might be organised, by reflecting them within its own material configurations (p. 12).

3.3. Autonomy and the Ontology of Music: Work as *Noun* or as *Verb*?

If we look at how music itself is nowadays understood or ontologised in theory and practice, such understandings typically align with one of two views: of music as an object, or of music as a process or assemblage. What Clarke called *strong autonomy*—that is, the nineteenth-century idea of autonomy that is inextricably interwoven with other elements of the paradigm (2012, p. 174)—not only ubiquitously subscribes to the understanding of music as object, but it was at the same time instrumental in the process of emergence of the concept of musical work (Goehr, 1992, p. 149).

In her book *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works* (1992) philosopher Lydia Goehr argued this concept of music as an object, or *work-concept*, emerged as a structuring and regulating musical activity around 1800 (p. 114). Musical works took the form of "structurally integrated wholes" (p. 2) that the composer represents symbolically in a score, that exist in the public realm beyond the death of the composer, and that are distinct from any of their performances. Crucially, Goehr identifies the work-concept's emergence as happening *together with* the development of music as "an autonomous fine art" (p. 113), through the move in musical understanding "away from 'extra-musical' towards 'musical' concerns" (p. 122). This shift entailed a double emancipation of musical art: on the one hand, from any extra-musical goals, which is to say that it was freed from the social functions typically ascribed to it and that were usually dictated by religious and political institutions; and on the other, from its service to words, that is, from the obligation of eliciting meaning in extra-musical ways through linguistic mediation (p. 155). These emancipations manifested most notably in the sharp increase in the status of instrumental music, understood as sounded without the involvement of the human voice and sung texts. Within the category of instrumental music,

the highest status was ascribed to *absolute music*, which stands in direct opposition to *programme music*. The latter, while still purely instrumental, is "guided by, or implicitly refers to, an extra-musical idea which might be political, religious, or poetic" (p. 211), and that is generally presented through text, most commonly in concert programme notes. The primacy of absolute music continues to be such, that nowadays it is what we usually associate with *works* of Western classical music: symphonies, concertos, sonatas, etc. (p. 2).

An alternative, more recent way of understanding music derives from the work of scholars like music sociologist Antoine Hennion. In texts like *Music and Mediation: Toward a New Sociology of Music* (2012) and *Objects, Belief, and the Sociologist: The Sociology of Art as a Work-to-Be-Done* (2019), Hennion challenges the traditional notion of music as a static work by presenting it instead as constituted of mediations, which he understands as "the reciprocal, local, heterogeneous relations between art and public through precise devices, places, institutions, objects, and human abilities, constructing identities, bodies, and subjectivities" (2012, p. 250). Furthermore, under this view music is elusive and without a presence of its own and all that is concrete are its mediations: "instruments, musicians, scores, stages, records" (2012, p. 252). In this line, mediations are not vehicles nor substitutes of the work, but "the art itself" (2012, p. 253). Taking a next step in this search for a new ontology of music, Hennion explores the notions of the work as *open* or *unfinished*, in which it is incomplete, riddled with visible absences that call to be turned into presence (2019, pp. 46-47), a task for the audience, who fills in the displayed voids and thus becomes indispensable in the realisation of the *work* (2019, p. 55). Although already a better option than the work as a fixed object, despite its openness and need to be finished, it is "nonetheless already a work" (p. 55), a device that contains in itself already "its possible future versions" (p. 55) and turns the audience into co-creators of that work. Here, Hennion draws on the work of philosopher Étienne Souriau, who proposes the radical idea of being, or existence, as *work-to-be-done*, in which the work does not need to be updated in its already established existence, but rather "calls for help to succeed in existing" (Hennion, 2019, p. 55). In other words, what does not exist yet needs to be brought about. As for how it comes into being, music as work-to-be-done inevitably challenges the ideas of creation and creator, in the light of which Hennion draws again from Souriau to argue instead for the notion of *instauration*. It emphasises that the creation of a work is not merely the realisation of a creator's initial vision or project, nor is it just the final outcome that exists in the future, but instead has its own existence and agency *throughout* the creation process (Maniglier, 2016, p. 482). The representations of what a creator intends to make can change significantly over time, but are all nevertheless "moments in the work-to-be-made" (p. 482) and do not define it entirely. Additionally, a work can fail to come into existence, yet its active state in the process

shows that the work-to-be-done is not just a future state pulling the creators towards it in a one-directional way (p. 482). Considering all this, music as work-to-be-done exists in a state of instauration, in that it is not just a composition in the mind of the composer, nor its performances. Instead, it acquires its existence throughout the whole process of creation, rehearsal, and performance, and it is brought about by the contributions of all the actors involved in the process. Under this view, music is mediated by a network of actors that goes beyond the performing musicians on stage, and that, drawing on Actor-Network Theory, includes on equal terms humans *and* non-humans (Spronck, 2022, p. 59), such as musical instruments, the architecture of the concert hall or the champagne glasses at the foyer during an intermission.

In this thesis, I draw on these ideas of music as work to be done rather than as an object to investigate the realisation of autonomy in practice *also as a result* of that work. Just as music itself is mediated by a network of humans and non-humans that work in a specific social and historical context, autonomy is not a stable and immutable characteristic of music, but rather something we make along in the process of bringing music into existence. Of crucial value in informing my investigation is Anna Bull's work on how the boundaries drawn by middle classes around classical music are in the aesthetic of the music itself, in the prescribed conventions necessary to perform the canon of classical music. In other words, by examining how the work of making music is carried out at the Conservatorium Maastricht, this thesis asks how this is done in a way boundaries of strong autonomy are created around it.

3.4 Invisible into Visible: Operationalisation of Autonomy and Methodological Approach

In order to systematically examine how the invisible practice of autonomy takes shape in my case study at Conservatorium Maastricht, it was essential to first analyse it as a concept and operationalise it. The analysis has been charted in the previous sections of this chapter, and it guided the operationalisation as I examined it against my own experiences as a practitioner during my studies at CM, the University of Music and Performing Arts Graz (Austria), and the Pontifical Xavierian University in Bogota (Colombia). I reflected on the possible concrete sites, activities, actors, conventions, values and beliefs in which the different framings and components of autonomy resulting from the analysis could manifest. The outcome was a series of thematic areas, in themselves not explicitly related to autonomy, but that could signal its operation by being present or absent in the data or if the data showed some form of positionality towards them. These themes encompass understandings of the ontology of music, performance quality standards, the social relevance and value of classical music, the valuation of other musical genres, modes of

reception of music, relevance of the contexts of a piece, innovation in classical music practices, and the presumed crisis they undergo.

Given the centrality of the nineteenth-century paradigm of classical music in the composite of strong autonomy, the other concepts that form its constellation and are inextricably intertwined with it (Clarke, 2012, p. 174) were identified as indicators of autonomy. From the work-concept, I drew a thematic area about the *ontology of classical music*, in which the working definition of music as noun or as verb would signal either strong or double-edged autonomy. Neighbouring the work-concept, the prescribed fidelity to the score and the composer or *Werktreue,* in combination with the focus on artistic quality at HMEIs identified by scholars (Farnsworth, 2024, p. 41; Petzold & Peters, 2023, p. 3) and that I experienced myself as the central thread of all the practising hours with my viola, suggested to me a second thematic area related to *quality standards in the practice*, in which an understanding of quality as fidelity to the work would point to strong autonomy while quality as artistic freedom beyond the score would signal double-edged autonomy. An area related to the canon of classical music was outlined from the importance of the concept of Western classical music in strong autonomy (Clarke, 2012, p. 174) and from the pervasive ignorance about the processes of formation of these canons that I experienced myself at HMEIs. In this area, unawareness of the lack of diversity of the canon, or the justification of including or excluding a composer or piece as a mere matter of quality, would point away from a double-edged autonomy. I include these three examples to illustrate the type of reflection on the concept's analysis and my personal experience that the operationalisation of autonomy entailed.

Because these themes underlie not just the individual discourses of practitioners, but also the activities carried out at CM and the internal policies that regulate them, I employed a multi-modal ethnographic approach combining semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis to identify them. This combination allowed me to account for the personal discourses of a broad range of practitioners, the diverse musical practices engendered at the conservatory, and the institutional discourses that regulate them, all to have the most comprehensive view possible to examine a fundamentally covert concept.

I conducted twelve semi-structured interviews with a wide variety of practitioners at CM: instrument and conducting students, instrument and composition alumni, a theory teacher, a history of music teacher, a main subject (instrument) teacher, a research supervisor, and an administrator. This aimed to ensure a broad view of each theme across the different kinds of expertise and experience present at CM. To select them, I drew a list of all the types of roles at

CM and their representatives using the *Meet Our Team* section of the conservatory's website, and with the help of the administration—who were the gatekeepers for my ethnography and who were very supportive of my research activities—we contacted several teachers. I conducted interviews with all those who were willing to participate. As for the students, I contacted people I knew but did not have a close relationship with, or approached them directly at the conservatory to request an interview. Based on the thematic areas derived from the operationalisation of autonomy, I produced a topic guide for the interviews with potential prompts to discuss each theme (See Appendix B). All interviews were anonymised to protect the privacy of the subjects and ensure that the focus remained on the content of their perspectives rather than their personal identities and backgrounds. By anonymising them—and explicitly informing them accordingly before each interview—I also aimed at facilitating more candid responses, especially around sensitive topics related to institutional practices and personal beliefs. Additionally, I will refer to specific interviewees when necessary, using pseudonyms based on the type of practitioner, e.g. Instrument Student 1 (IS1), Instrument Alumnus (IA), Research Supervisor (RS), Instrument Teacher (IT), etc. To complement the interviews, I conducted participant observation in four different CM activities, chosen to reflect a variety of classical music practices: an orchestra rehearsal that was part of one of the ensemble projects required for students, a student-organised and student-led orchestra concert, a BA violoncello exam, and a BA voice exam. These were selected according to what was taking place in the institution's event agenda during the period I had allotted to conduct my ethnography.

The analysis was extended to eleven documents related to the CM that ranged from institutional policies to artistic outputs (See Appendix A for the complete document list). The institutional documents include the Education and Examination Regulations (EER) for the BA and MA in classical music and the Extensive Course Descriptions (ECD) for all subjects in both programmes. These documents are publicly available on the EER website of Zuyd University of Applied Sciences (2024), the broader institutional body of which the conservatory is part, and were chosen because they lay the foundation for assessment criteria, and the official content of their educational activities. My research supervisor kindly provided me with the 2022-2023 MA Research Project Protocol, which explains in detail the aims, procedures, and assessment of the research requirement for the MA at CM. I also analysed the *Self Evaluation Report 2023* (Rutten) of the Bachelor of Music of the CM, not publicly available but kindly facilitated by the MCICM, and that was produced by the conservatory as part of the accreditation process it underwent in 2023. It contains relevant information such as the mission and vision statements of CM, as well as present and future developmental measures. Complementing this document, I also included the

publicly available *Report of the Limited Programme Assessment* of the Bachelor of Music, which compiled the assessment for the accreditation of the program, conducted by the external assessment agency for Higher Education AeQui Nederland. A second type of document included in the analysis are those directly related to artistic activities organised and conducted by CM: online descriptive texts and programme notes for major performance events at the conservatory, namely the Night of Classical Music 2024, the Capstone Festival 2024, the 22nd Music Awards Maastricht, and the Award for Innovation in Music 2024. These documents were sourced from CM's website and provide insights into how practitioners speak of the music they perform and how they present themselves as artists.

The interviews were transcribed and, together with the observation fieldnotes and the institutional documents, were coded and analysed with the help of ATLAS.ti. To ensure that the initial assumptions of the operationalisation would not constrain my examination, I employed a hybrid approach to thematic analysis. Derived by Jon Swain (2018), it integrates both deductive and inductive reasoning (p. 5). Accordingly, I began the analysis with the application of *pre-empirical* codes (Swain, 2018, p. 7) based on the operationalised thematic areas around autonomy, while simultaneously identifying and applying *post-empirical* codes (2018, p. 7) as potential new themes appeared in the data and signalled some form of articulation with the concept of autonomy that I had not expected or accounted for. To contextualise the findings, these post-empirical codes were then reviewed through the lens of literature discussed in Chapter 2 of this thesis.

Although the choice of multi-modal ethnography allowed me to investigate a diverse range of discourses at CM, given the limited scope of this thesis, the amount of data collected is indeed representative of this range of discourses but is insufficient to delve into more specific aspects of this enquiry. For instance, a larger number of interviews with main subject teachers (MST) would have allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of the gap between performance and scholarship, as MSTs play a key role in what students engage with or not beyond their instrumental practice. On the other hand, I was not able to include the assessment protocols for instrument exams in the data, which lay out the specific quality criteria practically implemented at CM. Additionally, observation of further types of activities, such as individual practice sessions, chamber music and main subject lessons would also be desirable. In conclusion, further investigation of autonomy at HMEIs would benefit from a broader pool of data in the form of more interviews, more activities to be observed and a broader scope of institutional documents.

3.5 Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter, I have outlined the theoretical framework and methodological approach guiding this investigation of the concept of autonomy within classical music practices at Conservatorium Maastricht. By examining autonomy through various one-dimensional and composite frames, I laid out the multiple ways in which it creates boundaries around the practice and defined their scope and influence. This analysis set the ground for the operationalisation of theoretical insights around autonomy into concrete thematic areas, which involved reflecting on my own experiences as a practitioner at HMEIs. I then outlined the multi-modal ethnographic approach I took for this investigation, which encompasses semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis, as well as the actors, activities and texts on which I applied it. In the following chapter, I turn towards the empirical observations of the work of autonomy at CM as I present the findings of my ethnography, grouped under the three different directions I directed my *gaze* once inside the conservatory: inwards, outwards, and towards the future.

4. Manifestations of Autonomy at Conservatorium Maastricht: Empirical Findings

In the following sections, I present and analyse the most relevant findings that resulted from my ethnography at CM, which I group into three areas. As a researcher tracing autonomy, standing inside CM, I needed to *look* in different directions to uncover its possible manifestations, and my findings emerged from looking *inwards*, *outwards*, and towards the *future*. By presenting them under these three frames, I will not separate the findings by source, i.e., interviews, observation and document analysis, but rather integrate them thematically, specifying the sources and situations from which they originate. As a next step, I will discuss and interpret these findings in Chapter 5, paving the way for articulating an answer to my research question in the concluding Chapter 6.

4.1 Looking Inwards: Traces of the Nineteenth-Century Paradigm

Although autonomy's most evident locus in classical music practices might be at the sites where they articulate or relate to the *outside* world, I postponed this looking outwards to focus first on traces of autonomy *inside* the practices themselves. More specifically, I examined how the actors and the institution understand the ontology of classical music, performance quality and its indicators, the modes of reception or experience of classical music, and the standard repertoire. These four foci correspond directly to four components of the nineteenth-century paradigm of classical music, namely the work-concept, *Werktreue*, attentive listening and the canon (Goehr, 2002, p. 307; Spronck, 2022, pp. 43-45) and therefore potentially signal manifestations of strong autonomy.

Ontology of Classical Music

This theme was difficult to discuss during interviews, as responses often focused on conventions of the *genre* that is classical music, such as its unique relationship with silence, its particular use of harmony and timbre, or the skills and etiquettes it requires. There were however a few clear indications of an understanding of music as work-to-be-done: an instrument student noted they attend concerts "not just to listen to the piece, but to listen who is playing it" (Instrument Student 1, personal communication, June 6, 2024 [translated by the author]), which emphasises performance and performer over composer and score. The research supervisor asserted that "there is no music without people. It's just not possible […], it does not exist even outside our ears, it's only frequencies" (Research Supervisor, personal communication, May 23, 2024). The Capstone Project, mentioned in the interviews with the Theory and History teachers and the course descriptions exemplifies this approach. Capstone is an initiative within the Music Theory Department in which students creatively approach and perform an existing piece of music

through "writing, re-writing, transcribing, varying, and improvising" (Zuyd University of Applied Sciences, 2023a, p. 17), a significant challenge to *Werktreue*. Concrete manifestations of the work-concept, however, emerged around notions of performance quality, as will be seen below.

Performance Quality Standards

My analysis largely confirms a strong and prevalent focus on quality at CM, aligning with the scholarly view that "classical music is based on values of artistic excellence, and that achieving a high quality of musical production is the pinnacle of achievement" (Farnsworth, 2024, p. 46). However, there is ambiguity around what exactly is meant by quality, and what specific standards it entails, with interviewees identifying two *layers*. On one hand, somewhat objective technical standards such as playing in tune, in rhythm, together as an ensemble, and with good sound quality, are prerequisites for the second layer. On the other hand, a more elusive artistic layer that elicits an aesthetic experience, where "something is conveyed through the music and reaches your heart, you get goosebumps, but you don't know how to explain it" (Conducting Student, personal communication, May 20, 2024 [translated by the author]). While technical standards where somewhat agreed upon and measurable, the standards that form the artistic layer were more difficult to articulate for the interviewees, and several of them explicitly acknowledged that quality standards are not entirely objective. The centrality of quality is expressed in a similar line in all the institutional documents; however, it is important to consider that the actual assessment protocols for instrument (main subject) exams could not be retrieved and included in the data.

Werktreue, or fidelity to the score and the composer's intentions, was frequently cited as a quality marker. While most interviewees signalled adherence to *Werktreue*, the Theory Teacher, History Teacher and Instrument Alumnus expressed critical views about it. The Theory Teacher, for instance, recognised performers' stark reverence for the composer but also praised how some are opening up to rearranging and recomposing pieces from the past (Theory Teacher, personal communication, May 24, 2024). The Conducting Student emphasised that it is important "to ensure that the barrier between the written music and the performer is non-existent" (Conducting Student, personal communication, May 20, 2024 [translated by the author]), prescribing for performers an *absolute* knowledge of the score. My observations also reflected a prevalence of *Werktreue*: during the rehearsal of Bruckner's first symphony, I noticed some string players *faking* to play the notes in especially difficult passages, pointing not only at a violation of *Werktreue* but to my attunement to perceive it as a practitioner.

Although exclusive to the institutional documents, there was a marked focus on *internationality* as a quality indicator. For instance, it is the very first characteristic of the BA programme that is mentioned in the *Self Evaluation Report 2023* (Rutten, p. 9), potentially reflecting the policy-prescribed ability of alumni "to carve out a place for themselves in the working domain" (AeQui Nederland, 2023, p. 4), but also a concern for the financial sustainability of an institution whose demographics show 85% of international students and that is under the scope of the Dutch government's measures to reduce the influx of international students on a national level (p. 19).

Notably, quality at CM is context specific. In certain situations, like the student-organised Open Stage concert or the so-called *class concerts*—where students of the same Main Subject Teacher perform on stage—standards are temporarily suspended or lowered to allow students to try out pieces in preparation for future performances. Even during instrument exams *Werktreue* is sometimes partially dissipated as pieces are played often only partly, that is, not all of its movements. While these suspensions may be justified by CM's educational function, they raise the question of whether this occurs also in non-educational contexts, like concert halls or orchestras.

Modes Of Reception/Experiencing of Music

The primary way of experiencing classical music is generally understood at CM to be attentive listening, which involves silent concentration and a somewhat analytical mindset, necessary to navigate classical music's complexity. Innovation in concert formats, where people can move or talk in the performance space, was framed by some interviewees as an obstacle to attentive listening, positioning themselves against such distractions.

A key point in the search for autonomy concerns whether prior knowledge is required to appreciate a classical music performance. While many interviewees believed that musical knowledge is not essential for a meaningful musical experience, others implied that there is something that needs to be understood in a listening experience ("You have to learn a bit about the Theory, otherwise you don't understand it" (Administrator, personal communication, May 21, 2024)). One instrument student critical of innovative concert practices that aimed to engage new audiences suggested that "we can also keep educating people" instead (Instrument Student 2, personal communication, May 23, 2024).

During my observations, I realised that while I was attentively listening, I was actually *listening to technique*, i.e., my focus was on judging technical quality. This technical assessment is often done visually, as I formed judgements based on the musician's body language alone. Some

interviewees echoed this phenomenon, like Composition Alumnus 2, who manifested hesitation to engage freely and creatively with a classical piece on stage because "if there's someone in the crowd who knows something about classical music, this person will crucify me or something" (Composition Alumnus 2, personal communication, May 29, 2024).

Canons of Performance, Education and History

The processes of canon formation are the topic most affected by the gap between performance and scholarship, as most interviewees had little to no knowledge of how canons were formed, with some admitting they had never considered it nor been taught about it. However, there is a general awareness of the lack of diversity in classical music canons, mostly concerning women composers, while only two interviewees mentioned or hinted at an underlying Eurocentrism. The AeQui report subtly recognises this, recommending more "active engagement with musical diversity in the final recitals" (20).

Interviewees typically explained the canon's formation by attributing it to the high quality of the pieces or composers, indicating that the composers or pieces had a level of quality that made them worth being included. An instrument student suggested that composers were included in the canon "just [because] they were the best" and attributed to them the quality of geniuses (Instrument Student 2, personal communication, May 23, 2024). However, this same student hinted at the role of power relations in canon formation when acknowledging that women composers were excluded because they did not enjoy the same privileges as men, sharing the anecdote that when Clara Schumann premiered her own piano concerto, a critic wrote that "she should just stick to play the music of her husband" (Instrument Student 2, personal communication, May 23, 2024).

4.2 Looking Outwards: Classical Music and the Social

As the one-dimensional autonomies discussed in Chapter 3 suggest, a primary trait of the work of autonomy is that it builds barriers between what is understood as purely musical and that which is not, or between what is supposed to be classical and what is not. By looking at what these walls could be closing off the practice from, I examined understandings of the value and social relevance of classical music, the valuations of other musical genres, and the relevance for a performer of the contexts of a piece of music. As I engaged with the data, I also began to recognize specific manifestations of the articulations of classical music and the middle classes as described by Anna Bull (2019) and that draw the boundaries around their valued selfhood (p. 175).

Additionally, understood also as a boundary separating the practice from something outside, I examined traces of the gap between performance and scholarly cultures at HMEIs.

Value and Social Relevance of Classical Music

The data revealed two main understandings of the value of classical music: as a historical artefact that cannot be produced again and therefore deserving preservation and as music that elicits meanings in listeners. Three interviewees explicitly compared classical music to museums, echoing Botstein's idea of classical music institutions as museums "of historical performing art" (2004, p. 49). On the other hand, only the Research Supervisor explained how meaning might emerge from music, while others understood music's capacity to create meaning as culture- or context-specific. To lesser extents, classical music's value was ascribed to its outstanding craftmanship and complexity, the genius of its composers, and its potential to generate social cohesion and well-being.

Relevance of the Context of a Piece

The context of a piece was generally considered important for performers and, sometimes, for the audience, with context understood as going beyond music theory. Some interviewees, like the non-performance teachers and an instrument student, indicated that the historical context of a piece helps to connect it with the present context. For example, knowing that many of Bach's instrumental pieces were originally dances might inform how they can be experienced and performed today (Instrument Student 2, personal communication, May 23, 2024). Context was also seen as potentially informing decision-making related to performance and innovation. However, only the History of Music Teacher questioned how audible context is for the audience, and who actually benefits from it (History Teacher, personal communication, June 7, 2024). The online documents showed a starkly narrower understanding of context: most programme notes, mainly written by students, are purely biographical, sometimes historical, and in rare cases, they ascribe a new context to the piece.

Value of Other Music Genres

A clear divide between performance practitioners and those engaged in other practices (composition, theory, history, and research) was identified concerning the value of other genres. The latter disagreed with the presumed superiority of classical music, as phrased by one of the composition alumni: "Classical music is one very good option in a sea of good options" (Composition Alumnus 1, personal communication, May 9, 2024). Some even argued that other

genres are superior in certain ways, as seen in the history teacher's admiration for jazz improvisation (History Teacher, personal communication, June 7, 2024). Meanwhile, performance-focused practitioners, despite claiming not to believe in classical music's superiority, often revealed the opposite in their answers. This is evidenced in statements like the administrator's statement that "pop music is only I, IV, V, and sometimes II, [and] that's it" (Administrator, personal communication, May 21, 2024), referring to how pop music tends to use more simple harmonies compared to classical music. Furthermore, the instrument teacher characterised classical music as more advanced. Popular genres, although "having this living energy from which classical musicians should learn, […] could be so much more interesting in terms of harmony, melody or content, as they are made in such a primitive way" (Instrument Teacher, personal communication, June 20, 2024 [translated by the author]).

Boundary Drawing

As discussed in Chapter 2, classical music education cultivates a valued form of selfhood that resonates with middle-class qualities, such as emotional depth or self-restraint (Bull, 2019, p. 175). This identity is upheld through boundary drawing around the places where it is stored, and rather than physical spaces, the boundaries are contained within the musical aesthetic itself. This work of boundary drawing manifests in three ways: classical music's modes of social organisation, modes of embodiment, and the aesthetic of "getting it right" (p. xxvii).

The valued selfhood of classical musicians was evidenced in the insights of one of the instrument students, who described how, not having had many friends in high school, being a classical musician allowed them to positively distinguish themselves from others (Instrument Student 2, personal communication, May 23, 2024). One composition alumnus noted that students are taught from early stages of music education that their work is especially important (Composition Alumnus 2, personal communication, May 29, 2024), while the Research Supervisor foregrounded the elitist nature of this identity (Research Supervisor, personal communication, May 23, 2024).

As for how the practice is socially organised, the strong authority of the teacher and conductor was evident both in the institutional documents and the observations. The AeQui Report (2023) highlights the one-to-one tuition model as central to the programme (p. 4), and the programme notes analysed showed that MSTs are regarded as prestigious figures *and* markers of prestige. Hierarchies in the microsocialities of the orchestra, another mode of social organisation,

were evident in the traditional hierarchical sitting arrangements of both the rehearsal and the Open Stage concerts or the strictly defined roles of conductors, section leaders and concertmasters.

Regarding modes of embodiment, emotional depth was often linked to classical music's complexity. Moreover, not only does it transmit and elicit emotions, but those emotions are of special depth. The Instrument Teacher, for instance, described classical music as more complex than pop not only technically but emotionally (Instrument Teacher, personal communication, June 20, 2024 [translated by the author]). Controlled excitement, essential both for performing and listening, was seen by some as a constraint of artistic freedom in performance (Composition Alumnus 2, personal communication, May 29, 2024), or as a necessary condition for the audience to be able to listen attentively (Theory Teacher, personal communication, May 24, 2024). The latter was echoed by my extreme concern of disturbing someone with my notetaking while observing the concert, the rehearsal or the exams. Normative femininities were evidenced in the attire of the women performing, such as the stark contrast during the voice exam between the soprano's gala dress and elaborate hairstyle and make-up, and the accompanying pianist's typically austere black attire (black shoes, trousers and shirt), without any make-up or intricate hairstyle. I understand these as *normative* femininities, albeit for two separate roles, because the opposite situation where the soprano is dressed austerely and the accompanist flamboyantly, would be simply unthinkable in traditional contexts. The bodily disposition to figures of authority was evident during the orchestra rehearsal and concert, when, for instance in the rehearsal, the conductor commented to nobody in particular that musicians should sit straight on their chairs for health and professional reasons, and immediately many people in the orchestra shuffled in their seats and consciously or not, sat indeed more straight.

Perfectionism and fear of making mistakes and being judged were identified in all the observed activities. During the orchestra rehearsal, for example, the conductor would remind the orchestra that there is a certain dynamic indication on a specific beat of a specific bar, which they seemed to have missed. The public shaming that is the object of the fear of making mistakes was evident when a few audience members during the Open Stage concert, students at CM themselves, would make facial expressions of disgust or discomfort when something was out of tune in the orchestra. Additionally, during the orchestra rehearsal, individuals or groups of instruments were singled out by the conductor and asked to play their part alone in front of everyone.

As described by Vanderhart & Gower (2022) within the context of HMEIs, the gap between performance and scholarly cultures relates to how "advances in musicological thought are being transmitted to performance students" (p. 29). My ethnography at CM identified two key characteristics of the gap: limited interest in scholarly knowledge among performance practitioners and tensions with MSTs, who deem non-performance activities as distractions from instrumental practice. Non-performance teachers and composition alumni demonstrated broader scholarly knowledge and curiosity beyond their instruments (they all started their practice with an instrument, which some still play). One alumnus, for instance, stated they "strongly subscribe to [Theodor] Adorno's philosophies" regarding mass-produced music (Composition Alumnus 1, personal communication, May 9, 2024). Reflectivity and criticality in two non-performance teachers, however, were limited to aesthetic and artistic aspects as they made no comments on political, systemic, or power-related issues. The disinterest of performers was evidenced in the surveys that CM conducts with its alumni asking them to rate the mastery and relevance of the different learning outcomes of the programme. Of the seven skills that constitute the outcomes, classical alumni placed the most value on technical skills and to a lesser extent on artistic skills, while outcomes such as contextual focus, or research and developmental skills, were the lowest-rated (Rutten, 2023, p. 41).

Tensions with MSTs were highlighted by the administrator and non-performance teachers. They described reluctance from MSTs to engage in research or interdisciplinary activities, often discouraging their students' involvement in non-instrument-related activities they deem unnecessary and distracting. The administrator shared an example where many MSTs declined to participate in innovative concerts, saying things like "it's not my task", leading them to stop asking the more traditional ones and approach the more open-minded teachers instead (Administrator, personal communication, May 21, 2024). This tension is further supported by the call in the reports "to elaborate more on practice-based research and to include it more in the main subject" (Rutten, 2023, p. 10).

4.3 Looking Ahead: Futures for Classical Music

Because of the social performativity of creating expectations and images of the future, as discussed in Chapter 2, I also turned my gaze at CM to the different areas and activities forming images of the future and focused on its relationship with innovation, their understandings of the presumed crisis, and the undergoing process of academisation.

Innovation

If the crisis presupposes a future where conditions worsen and raise concerns, innovation assumes times to come will not only be radically different, but also presumably better (Smith & Peters, 2024, p. 14). Generally understood beyond the composition of new music and as highly context-dependant, innovation in classical music has an underlying component of self-reflection and is seen as a means for practitioners to seek better futures (pp. 21-22). CM's commitment to innovation is reflected, for instance, in its partnership with the Maastricht Center for the Innovation of Classical Music, a collaboration with Maastricht University and Philzuid, the regional symphony orchestra, which has resulted in several artistic experimentation and research initiatives. Additionally, CM has been organising for the past five years the Award for Innovation in Music (AIM), directed to CM students interested in expanding the confines of traditional performance, and which nonetheless remains somewhat peripheral in the institution's culture.

Among interviewees, the administrator held the most up-to-date views on innovation, mentioning the key areas of community, audience, interdisciplinarity, and digital tools, also highlighted in the two documents related to the accreditation of the BA. However, students and alumni, particularly composers, criticised the typically top-down approach to innovation at CM, calling instead for a student-centred, bottom-up approach, which closely aligns with AeQui's report recommendations to put "the student in the lead" (2023, p. 9).

Although innovation requires practitioners to be open and flexible, and often to expand their knowledge and skills, there is a barrier in their reluctance to do so, identified by some interviewees to be embodied by the MSTs and their views on non-performance activities. For example, the Theory Teacher also expressed difficulties in finding partners among the main subject teachers to organise a project with non-conventional concert settings. In her words, they "are very much holding back and would like to not touch it" (Theory Teacher, personal communication, May 24, 2024).

The "Crisis" of Classical Music

Interviewees generally expressed resistance towards the notion of crisis. Some challenged the term itself, arguing that all culture, not just classical music, is facing difficulties, or that framing it as a crisis is unhelpful (Administrator, personal communication, May 21, 2024). Others are sceptic of the audience decline as their personal experience contradicts this claim (Research Supervisor, personal communication, May 23, 2024). Teachers and administrators acknowledged

the financial struggles tied to the crisis discourse, mentioning the budget cuts in music education in the Netherlands in the early 2010s. Significantly, some teachers and the administration place the responsibility of solving the crisis in the individual practitioner rather than in institutions. The history teacher, for instance, states that as students position themselves in the professional field, they should remain realistic and manage their expectations rather than complaining that they don't have "the salary of someone who did different studies" (History Teacher, personal communication, June 7, 2024).

The Process of Academisation

The future of classical music practices at CM is also shaped by cultural policy, particularly the academisation process triggered by the Bologna Declaration in 1999. In the internal institutional documents, *reflection, critical reflection*, and *critical thinking* are often used interchangeably as mere buzzwords without clear definitions or distinctions. A call to overcome this lack of clarity in the definition and aims of practice-based research is articulated in the AeQui report (2023, p. 9). Despite current efforts, the AeQui panel recommends further development of practice-based research beyond a *research attitude*, and to include "research and critical reflective skills such as analysing, writing and source handling" (AeQui Nederland, 2023, p. 13). CM's approach to research is primarily justified as a means to developing musical knowledge, evident in that "[t]he central question to all projects is: Why do we music the way we music?" (Zuyd University of Applied Sciences, 2023b, p. 7). In the Master Project Protocol, in turn, artistic research is "a tool that can support continuous improvement of the artistic performance" (Poismans & Bastiaens, 2022, p. 3). The other justification ascribed to research at CM is that it contributes to individual professional success, as defined in the AeQui report:

> [T]he student evaluates his/her own artistic performance by reflection on and exploring the development of his/her own identity, personal actions and work, and those of others, with the aim of continuously improving that performance (2023, p. 8)

The most prominent type of reflection at CM is embodied, which is to say "a reflection through music as sounds develop in time" (Georgii-Hemming et al., 2016, p. 249), although examples of language- and cognition-based reflection appear in the Theory curriculum and the Master Project.

As this chapter has shown, framing the findings of my ethnography at CM under three different *looks* allowed contextualising them within the institution has revealed a stark internal focus on nineteenth-century performance conventions; a tendency to eschew or undervalue articulations with external contexts, practices, and forms of knowledge; and pronounced tensions in the various forms of futuring of the practice. How autonomy manifests itself in this landscape, and the ways it shapes the practices of CM will be further discussed in the following chapter.

5. Discussion

A few key insights emerge after examining how the various operationalisations of autonomy manifest at CM. Ambiguity surrounds the understandings about and positionings towards most themes related to autonomy, with signs of both strong and double-edged composites appearing in different ways depending on the context and type of practitioner. However, a clear tendency towards strong autonomy was observed. It is unclear if this ambiguity signals a transition towards double-edged autonomy at CM, but it suggests some resonance with the pivotal moment that HMEIs are experiencing (Georgii-Hemming et al., 2020, p. 245; Petzold & Peters, 2023, p. 3). In this light, further research about how autonomy connects with this transformation is relevant.

Looking *inward* at CM reveals the fundamental role that the nineteenth-century paradigm of classical music continues to play in its practices, particularly the work-concept, *Werktreue*, attentive listening and the canonic repertoire. As discussed earlier, the view of the musical work as object or as process is crucially indicative of its underlying notion of autonomy: as an object, it is inherently intertwined from its emergence with the development of a notion of autonomous art (Goehr, 1992, p. 113), and is one of the components of the constellation of strong autonomy (Clarke, 2012, p. 174). The work-concept is starkly prevalent at CM and concentrates around performance-related areas—instrument main subjects, orchestra projects, instrument exams, etc.—as the pervasive adherence to *Werktreue* as a quality marker suggests. This particular ontology of music pre-exists any of its performances and is demarcated by normative fidelity towards score and composer. As a result, the performer's creativity is thwarted before the onset, and so are any possibilities of forming new and alternative delineations with the social world as classical music is excised from its contexts of creation, production and reception. Moreover, the roles of the actors are not only strictly demarcated, but a hierarchy is formed "between composer, performer, and audience", in that order (Small, 1996, as cited in Bull, 2019, p. 20). These manifestations of autonomy through the work-concept shape the practices of CM by normatively defining what a classical music performance is, and the musician's role in it: the re-creation of musical works of the past, or what Leon Botstein referred to as *museum function* (2004, p. 49). Autonomy in this light also underlies the resistance and reluctance of practitioners to innovate in concert formats and settings, as well as being a condition without which the canon of repertoire cannot exist (Herman, 2020, p. 74). While music as process or work-to-be-done foregrounds contextual mediations (Hennion, 2012, p. 250), and signals double-edged autonomy, such notions at CM are peripherally clustered around the Music Theory curriculum and the research supervision area.

The implications of autonomy in the form of quality and *Werktreue* for CM's practices are, first, that it forms a hierarchy of skills and knowledge within the institution that favours those immediately necessary to meet quality standards, something clearly visible in the centrality of the main subjects and their teachers across all analysed sources. Second, it does not only shape the curriculum but also draws a boundary around it, reinforcing resistance from the performance practitioners to any changes that might disturb that hierarchy. Third, it bears the potential of reducing the prescribed reception mode of attentive listening to assessing technique, further limiting performers' creative freedom on stage. Lastly, it creates a system of meritocracy that excludes from the equation of success any external and systemic factors for as long as the result has high quality, rendering power structures and social inequalities even harder to observe.

Concerning the largely uncontested adherence to canonic repertoire among performance practitioners at CM, autonomy allows justifying the canon as the natural and almost inevitable concentration of musical quality, while negating the influence of social, political or economic factors in its emergence. Although there is some awareness at CM of the its lack of diversity, the canon is the area that best exemplifies the *invisibility* of the work of autonomy through the widespread unawareness of its underlying forms of exclusion or its socially and politically mediated processes of emergence (Clarke, 2012, pp. 172-173). Furthermore, unawareness of these processes is particularly revelatory of strong autonomy, because the boundary is so effective that the question is sometimes not even posed (Bull, 2019, p. xiv). The canon, in turn, defines the modes of social organisation of orchestras, chamber music ensembles and main subject lessons at CM: the authority of MSTs and conductors, the clearly defined internal hierarchies of all these microsocialities, and the exact composition of the group (Bull, 2019, p. 175).

Because HMEIs are situated in concrete social and political contexts, looking *outwards* from the CM was essential to examine the boundaries that separate (or not) their practices from broader social realities. Images of the perceived value of classical music and other genres were particularly indicative of strong autonomy. On one hand, the generalized view of the relevance of classical music as historical is directly related to the museum function referred to above, which only further supports the centrality of the work-concept. This valuation through autonomy divests classical music from other forms of value beyond historical, while alternatives like eliciting an emotional response, facilitating well-being or social cohesion cannot be argued to derive specifically from classical music (Belfiore, 2002, p. 137). Furthermore, limiting classical music's relevance to its museum function undervalues contemporary composition and its capacity to create current delineations with the broader social world, widening the misalignment between classical music

institutions and contemporary societal values that underlies classical music's legitimacy crisis (Botstein, 2004, p. 41; Herman, 2020, pp. 23-26). Nonetheless, classical music's value in its capacity to create meaning was often understood as being culture- or context-specific, which signals double-edged autonomy. On the other hand, the valuations of classical music as superior to other genres based on being serious or more complex are boundaries of autonomy in themselves and account for the very limited engagement of CM's practices with other musics. What is more, the idea of a linear progressional development of musical art in which classical music stands on the *more evolved* side and pop music on the *primitive* one, can be understood as a boundary around the middle-class selfhood of classical music with an additional racial connotation (Bull, 2019, p. 176).

The gap between performance and scholarly cultures at CM is in itself a manifestation of autonomy as it draws an epistemic boundary around classical music practices. This shapes the practice as it justifies and perpetuates the lack of interest of practitioners in the work of other disciplines, as well as MSTs' reluctance to participate and encourage their students to engage with innovation or research. This lack of interest is not only a barrier to innovation at CM, as was explicitly voiced by the administration, but crucially, it perpetuates and reinforces the normalisation of systemic issues of inequality embodied within the aesthetic conventions of the practice. What is more, this epistemic boundary also regulates the curriculum at CM, as it hierarchises skills and knowledge when not just filtering out those that are typically seen as "extraneous" (Baltakas, 2021, as cited in Petzold & Peters, 2023, p. 7).

Boundary-drawing at CM occurs not only around the music itself and its performance conventions, but crucially, also around the valued selfhood of the classical musician. These boundaries are formed through the above-mentioned modes of social organisation that the canon demands, as well as through the modes of embodiment of practitioners, in particular, those directly involved in performance: the controlled excitement required for all the forms of performance observed; the bodily disposition to authority figures during rehearsals and performances; the ability to visually assess musical technique that I discovered in myself; the fear of making mistakes and its consequence of public shaming; and the normative femininities that distinguish the role of soloists from that of accompanists. This successful boundary-drawing around the classical musician's valued identity, according to Bull (2019), is allowed because the exclusion from participation that it requires is camouflaged by the discourse of autonomy (p. 6).

From the views of the *future*, those related to innovation signal perhaps most clearly some distancing from strong autonomy, particularly the non-traditional approach to performance in the

Music Theory projects and the Award for Innovation in Music (AIM). Albeit intersected with the financial concerns of the crisis discourse, the administration's comprehensive understanding and commitment to innovation also suggests a possible dispersion of strong autonomy as the new emphasis on interdisciplinarity and community are a clear turn outwards from the institution. Furthermore, the fact that the administration is aware of the tension between MSTs and innovation and research practices, without siding with the former, suggests that the institution is not uniformly aligned in its positionality towards tradition. It remains unclear though, given the limited data collected, to what degree the administrative stance on innovation is motivated by institutional self-preservation, similar to the focus on internationality as a quality indicator, in which case it would rather point towards strong autonomy. This dimmer manifestation of autonomy through innovation would be further supported by the typically top-down approaches to innovation at CM and the fact that the majority of activities in this area are clustered peripherally away from MSs.

Under the frame of the presumed crisis of classical music, strong autonomy manifests through the disproportionate focus on individual agency and responsibility as potential solutions rather than institutional or systemic change. This is problematic in light of the issue of audience decline because it reproduces the framing of non-participants as inadequate or unable to grasp the art form's value and sidelines structural barriers to participation (Stevenson et al., 2017, p. 95). Moreover, in the face of systemic issues, this focus does itself the boundary-drawing work of autonomy that might disallow questions on the reproduction and perpetuation of inequalities. In CM's path towards academisation, the work of autonomy is arguably one of the main obstacles to successfully integrating critical reflection and research into the curriculum: research is *also* a space closed off by boundaries. This is most evident in that research practices at CM are only internally relevant, limited to professional achievement and musical knowledge, thus hindering the organisation's capacity to respond to the social, economic, and political developments that HMEIs are being called to catch up with.

In light of these manifestations of autonomy at CM, the most concerning aspect of its work remains its capacity to camouflage, reproduce and perpetuate systemic issues of inequality and exclusion (Bull, 2019, p. 6). In search of some inspiration on how to move forward, I want to take a moment, however unorthodox, to leave the conservatory for a moment and step into the museum for the briefest of visits. The discourses of crisis and systemic issues that I have discussed here are not exclusive to classical music, nor unparalleled in fields like museology (Smith & Peters, 2024, p. 2). Just like classical music organisations, museums struggle with the history of their institution and its practices (Modest, 2022, p. 5), in particular, the history that runs intertwined

with colonialism. Recently, in the wake of major global developments like the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath or the rise of anti-racism movements, many museums face major challenges as they are expected to respond to these shifts (p. 7). Furthermore, although museums' exploration of these issues and work on their solutions started long before these questions were posed towards classical music practices, the steps museums have taken towards fundamental change in their practices and the discussions and struggles around them are of the most up-to-date relevance for classical music. As Wayne Modest puts it in the foreword of *The Critical Visitor: Changing Heritage Practices* (Steinbock & Dibbits, 2022a), practitioners and scholars who are aware of these struggles in museums share a sense of *exhaustion*, as in "the act of using something up, or the state of being used up" (Modest, 2022, p. 5). Modest ponders in his reflection if this exhaustion might be related or ascribed to the institution itself, not just to its unwillingness to change but maybe to a potential systemic inability to do so. Maybe, Modest further advances, what is exhausted are actually the *concepts* upon which the institution is constructed, its intellectual basis (p. 6). In the museum these include the "categories of ethnography or art", the difference between preservation and care, or even the very definition of museum (p. 6). In classical music practices it is about the categories of musical work and canonic repertoire, the tensions between the role of *re*-creation, creativity and innovation, or the understanding and function of quality. In light of my research at CM and the findings I have presented and discussed above, I bring Modest's questions to this context and advance the proposition that there is exhaustion in classical music practices and their institutions, and that maybe what is exhausted, more than its inhabiting practitioners, the art form they practice, or even the institution itself, are the concepts at their basis, their intellectual foundation, and in particular, the idea of autonomy.

In this line, I want to take a closer look at the concept of *critical visitor* that museum scholars like Modest have identified as a new kind of museum constituency (2022, p. 7). Not only is she a visitor who expects and demands for culture to be presented in inclusive ways and for diverse abilities and backgrounds, but also articulates calls for "fundamental and radical change" as a way to claim agency over her cultural heritage (Steinbock & Dibbits, 2022b, p. 18), and, crucially, plays an essential role in "identifying exclusionary barriers and routes to equity" (p. 20). Now, what would a critical visitor look like in musical practices? I would argue that classical music needs not only critical listeners or critical audiences, but in light of this potential institutional exhaustion, also critical practitioners, educators and students.

Returning at last to the conservatory, it is crucial to reflect on the work needed to bring about critical practitioners at CM and overcome the exhaustion of its foundational concept of

autonomy to better align with contemporary societal values. Despite the ongoing implementation of academisation at CM, in itself a call for critical reflection, integrating reflection and research into their practices remains a challenge. There has been valuable progress in this sense, with some emerging critical practitioners slowly moving the practice away from strong autonomy. Yet, autonomy remains a central obstacle not only because it has drawn boundaries around the value of classical music and the musician's identity, but most crucially because it does all its work *covertly*. In this sense, this creates a paradox in that the turn towards critical practice needed to dissipate strong autonomy—and achieve academisation—is thwarted by the invisibility of the work of autonomy. In other words, the paradox is that the very thing that needs to be critiqued (the work of autonomy) is so invisible and ingrained that it prevents that critique from actually being voiced.

A logical step forward is to make the work of autonomy visible at CM so that the boundaries can be actively addressed, for which one approach could be to integrate interdisciplinary scholarly knowledge into the curriculum. However, I want to argue that this might prove ineffective if confronted for a moment with the backdrop of the musician's valued identity. My interviews have suggested that notions, values and beliefs held about classical music are closely linked to forms of valued identity or selfhood in musicians. This is reflected in Anna Bull's own realisation of having such a powerful identity as she navigated the world of classical music as a performer (2019, p. xi). Moreover, I am no stranger to this identity, as I embodied it myself for many years: knowledge and skills in classical music give you a sense of importance, of doing something more relevant than other people's everyday concerns, it gives you "a sense of being somehow apart from the rest of the world" (p. xi). In this light, bridging the gap between performance and scholarly cultures through direct academic critique can make critical challenges to current conventions of the practice feel like personal attacks for classical musicians. This, in turn, would constitute a top-down strategy and I anticipate they would feel their agency thwarted. Alternatively, I propose that CM could adopt a constructivist approach that takes into account this valued identity while promoting engagement with other forms of knowledge. This would involve prompting students to learn inductively about the structural aspects of classical music practices and the cultural field in which they are embedded, including for example their historically, politically and socially situated emergence, the scientific basis of musical experiences, and the mechanisms of cultural policy that directly shape and regulate the economic and social conditions of the practice. Fostering an environment of enquiry and reflection that actively interacts with diverse and broad scholarly perspectives would allow the student to *situate* herself and her practice within the broader social and political world, granting her greater agency as there would be room to identify her own interests, values, and courses of action. Additionally, engagement with

interdisciplinary knowledge would contribute to increase the visibility of the work of autonomy, especially the systemic issues it allows the aesthetic conventions of classical music to reproduce.

6. Conclusion

In this thesis, I set out to investigate the manifestations of the concept of autonomy in classical music practices and the ways in which it shapes them, focusing on a Dutch Higher Music Education Institution as my case study. Being an invisible concept, in the sense that it is never spoken of directly in these practices, autonomy needed to be operationalised in order to be examined empirically. To do this, I conducted a conceptual analysis of autonomy and identified potential sites and instances at Conservatorium Maastricht where it could manifest itself. My empirical approach to CM entailed a multi-modal ethnography through semi-structured interviews, participant observation and document analysis, which allowed me to collect insights from a wide range of practitioners, institutional and policy perspectives, and artistic and educational activities.

My conceptual analysis identified two main notions of autonomy underlying current classical music scholarly discourses. On the one hand, a *strong autonomy* that understands classical music as separate and independent from the broader social world, entrenched with the constellation of conventions and concepts of the nineteenth-century paradigm of classical music that continues to regulate practices nowadays and that has been argued to contribute to the reproduction and perpetuation of issues of inequality, lack of diversity and exclusion. On the other, a *double-edged autonomy* that acknowledges how music is socially mediated while having an inherent, purely musical dimension, and that has a critical capacity in that new delineations with the social can be formed in new contexts. My analysis shows some ambiguity in the ways these forms of autonomy manifest at CM, as the presence of both notions could be identified, albeit not equally distributed across the institution. The predominant form at CM is strong autonomy, as the pervasive adherence to conventions of the nineteenth-century paradigm of classical music show, particularly the work-concept, *Werktreue*, the prescribed mode of attentive listening, and the canonic repertoire. Strong autonomy, through the collective work of these elements, limits the definition and relevance of classical music performance at CM to a role of re-creation of musical works of the past, or museum function, widening its misalignment with contemporary societal values and music culture. Additionally, strong autonomy at CM limits the creative and social engagement of performers by forming and enforcing hierarchies of practitioners, skills and knowledge that ubiquitously favour the status quo of the performance areas of the institution, particularly the main subjects and their teachers. This results in the reluctance of students and teachers to engage in innovation initiatives, research and reflection practices, and the broadening of their skills and knowledge. A crucial characteristic of autonomy, evidenced also at CM, is the invisibility of its work: the separation from broader contexts is so effective, that not only is there

general disinterest but also unawareness of scholarly knowledge beyond Music Theory. This knowledge gap resulting from the invisible work of autonomy renders invisible also the structural and power dynamics at work in the institution, as well as the forms of inequality and exclusion identified and discussed in scholarly debates.

There was clear evidence, nevertheless, of several instances of double-edged autonomy or dispersal of strong autonomy. The clearest examples are the artistic and academic projects that challenge the nineteenth-century paradigm of classical music organised by the Music Theory department. Moreover, the discourse of composition students and non-performance teachers is greatly informed by recent scholarship and is already starkly critical and reflexive. Nevertheless, these signs of a shift towards double-edged autonomy are highly concentrated in areas like composition, music theory and research supervision, and away from the main subjects and the orchestra projects. In this sense, although indicative of the dispersal of strong autonomy, these developments remain peripheral to the main educational and artistic activities of CM.

This thesis offers a detailed and nuanced account of the ways classical music practitioners understand and value the separation of their practices from the wider social world, which are in turn sustained by notions and conventions originating in the nineteenth century. We have also seen how these notions and conventions are upheld and disseminated by the institution, and how many of them, in particular the concept of autonomy itself, are deeply engrained in the practice and often unspoken and invisible. Of stark relevance is the fact that the covert work of autonomy not only disallows enquiring about forms of inequality and exclusion reproduced by the practice but limits the awareness that practitioners may have of them. The rendering visible of the boundary-drawing work of strong autonomy is thus essential not only to disperse it but as a necessary condition for acknowledging and addressing issues of inequality and exclusion in classical music practices. Concretely for Conservatorium Maastricht, this thesis offers a reading of their current situation that might contribute to their academisation process in several ways: it provides a framework to identify and understand the resistance offered by certain sectors of the institution in the wake of initiatives of innovation and of integration of research and reflective components; it contextualises and supports some of the recommendations of the AeQui report in regards to the roles of research and reflection in the BA programme; it suggests that, in order to overcome this resistance it is necessary to consider and address the valued classical musician's identity that is closed-off and protected by the work of autonomy.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, this research has also limitations: although indicative of the reality of the practice, the data collected was insufficient to delve more deeply into aspects of the investigation such as the central role of MS(T)s or the concrete standards of quality from the assessment protocols. Additionally, the document analysis would have benefitted from policy documents from higher circuits of cultural and educational policy, for instance on a regional, national or European level, to better understand the positionality of CM's discourses on a broader policy context and its implications for the work of autonomy. In terms of my own positionality, although I approached my ethnographic work with as much professional detachment and bias awareness as possible, it should not be forgotten that not only I am a classical musician myself, but I conducted my MA studies *at* Conservatorium Maastricht. Additionally, although I justified in detail the choice for this case study in the introduction, and despite using the term *classical music practices* in general also when discussing CM, I am aware that representation of *the practices* through one institution does not mean that my conclusions are drawn from or for the entire field.

In this sense, future research on the work of autonomy in classical music practices needs to expand also to symphony orchestras, chamber music ensembles, concert halls and other types of organisations, as well as the contexts of different countries to draw a somewhat comprehensive landscape. Additionally, including school-level music education would enrich understandings of the formation of autonomy, as most people arrive at HMEIs with a more or less defined set of values and beliefs. Moreover, future research on autonomy would benefit from longitudinal studies to capture the potential transition over time from a strong autonomy to a double-edged autonomy paradigm. This thesis has focused on classical music practices mostly involved with the canonic repertoire, yet an examination of the construction and manifestation of autonomy in contemporary composition and new music would allow better understanding of the role of both composer and composing in its work.

The challenge for classical music institutions, in the light of the landscape that this thesis has drawn, and that is now very much populated by manifestations of the invisible work of autonomy, lies not simply in the rendering visible and breaking of the boundaries it draws, but in reimagining what they enclose and protect. Classical music, if it is to grow out of its museum function and reclaim its legitimacy, needs a balance between freedom in artistic expression and the responsibility of social engagement, and needs to intersect in countless more ways with the worlds it inhabits. This might be my own futuring of classical music beyond *crisis* and *innovation*, but I hope it is just as socially performative.

Appendix A: Primary Sources - Analysed Documents

Institutional Policy Documents

- Zuyd University of Applied Sciences. (2023). *Education and Examination Regulations Bachelor of Music 2023-2024*. https://oer.zuyd.nl/15d3942f-d413-429b-9101-5d5261674d24

- Zuyd University of Applied Sciences. (2023). *Education and Examination Regulations Master of Music 2023-2024*. https://oer.zuyd.nl/fafc75bd-f3e0-4356-ad60-d92172d857a2

- Zuyd University of Applied Sciences. (2023). *Curriculum Book Bachelor of Music Classical: Extensive Course Descriptions*. https://oer.zuyd.nl/15d3942f-d413-429b-9101-5d5261674d24

- Zuyd University of Applied Sciences. (2023). *Curriculum Book Master of Music Classical: Extensive Course Descriptions*. https://oer.zuyd.nl/fafc75bd-f3e0-4356-ad60-d92172d857a2

- Poismans, K., & Bastiaens, R. (2022). *Master Project - Why do we Music the Way we Music?: An introduction to Artistic Research 2022-2023*

- Rutten, M. (2023). *Bachelor of Music: Self Evaluation Report*. Conservatorium Maastricht - Zuyd University of Applied Sciences.

- AeQui Nederland. (2023). *Report of the limited programme assessment: 19 and 20 June 2023*. https://publicaties.nvao.net/prd/AV-2321_20240202_Rapport_U23-00264%20-%20bijlage%20-%20Zuyd%20B%20Music%20def.pdf

Online Documents

- Conservatorium Maastricht - Zuyd University of Applied Sciences. (2024). *Night of Classical Music (Timetable)*. https://www.conservatoriummaastricht.nl/night-classical-music-timetable

- Conservatorium Maastricht - Zuyd University of Applied Sciences. (2024). *Capstone Festival*. https://www.conservatoriummaastricht.nl/events/capstone-festival

- Conservatorium Maastricht - Zuyd University of Applied Sciences. (2024). *22nd Music Award Maastricht - 20 April 2024*. https://www.conservatoriummaastricht.nl/22nd-music-award-maastricht-one-night-vienna-20-april-2024

- Conservatorium Maastricht - Zuyd University of Applied Sciences. (2024). *Award for Innovation in Music (AIM).* https://www.conservatoriummaastricht.nl/events/award-innovation-music-aim

Appendix B: Interview Topic Guide

Introduction:

- Brief introduction of myself, and the general topic of my thesis. I am investigating the (perceived) crisis in classical music, the changes in the professional field, and the way the conservatory responds to both.
- State purpose of interview: to focus on their personal view and experiences about the relationship between their musical practice and broader societal contexts, i.e., the ways their practice is connected, or not, with social or other extra-musical contexts.
- Explain how the interview will be used
- Ask for agreement to record the interview

Personal Background:

- What is your musical background?
- What is your role or roles at the CM? For how long? How many students?
- Do you also compose/perform/teach?

1. **Personal Working Definition of What Music Is**

- *Scenario*: you meet someone who has never experienced music before, nor heard about it. How would you explain to this person what music is?
- What do you think makes music distinct from other forms of <u>art</u> or <u>sound</u>?
- Does your definition of music influence how you teach, study, or appreciate music?
- How has your understanding of what music evolved over time?
- Do you think music has an inherent purpose/function? If so, what is it?

2. **Performance Quality Standards**

- What gives quality to a performance of classical music? **//** What does it mean to say that a performance of classical music has 'high-quality' or lack thereof?
    - o Can you describe a memorable performance you were involved in and what made it stand out?
- What aspects of performance do you focus on the most when you or someone you know are preparing a piece?

- Are there any non-negotiable standards for the quality of a performance? Why are they non-negotiable?
- How did we arrive to these standards? Where do they come from? Who decided for them?
- Are our quality standards the same as the audience's? How do they form their standards?

3. **Personal understanings of classical music's social relevance and value**

- Why do we still study and perform classical music in the XXI century?
- How would you describe the value of classical music, especially in our times? / How do you explain the value of music to someone who is not musically inclined?
- How would you describe (classical) music's role/function in society?
- There seems to be agreement that classical music positively impacts people/society. What are your views on this? If you agree, what does that impact consist of?
- In your opinion, is there inequality, exclusion or lack of diversity in classical music practices?
    o If so, what should be done about it and who would be responsible?

4. **Aesthetic contemplation / Attentive Listening as only mode of reception**

- When you attend a performance, how would you describe the way you relate or experience the music being played?
- Are there different ways of engaging and experiencing, especially beyond 'just' listening? Is there an ideal way?
- Do you deal with these ways of experiencing in your teaching? If so, how do you approach them when you do?
- Have the modes of experiencing music changed in recent years? If so, how?

5. **Knowledge and breadth of contexts of the works they engage with**

- What is the role of the contexts in which a piece was written in performing, but also in music theory and education? // How would you describe the role that the context in which a piece was written plays in your practice?

- What kinds of context are important in musical practice?
- How do you think understanding the social, political or artistic context influences the way a piece is performed? How does it influence the audience?
- What role do the contexts play or should play for audiences? If so, how can/should it be communicated? Which kinds of context are relevant for them?

6. Canons of Performance, Education and History

- The music that is played and studied is not all the music that has ever been written. How do conservatories, orchestras, and concert halls select the works and composers that we engage with?
- Who and how selects the pieces and composers you will work with in your practice?
- What is the so-called canon of classical music'? How was this canon formed? /Why are some composers in and others out?
- Can you discuss a piece or composer you believe should be added to or removed from the existing canon?
- What is for you the role of 'the past' or 'tradition' in the future of classical music practices?

7. Perception of value of other genres/styles different from classical music

- Do you personally enjoy other styles/genres beyond classical music? Which and why?
- How do you perceive the value of musical genres outside of classical music?
- Do you incorporate other styles/genres in your practice? If not, would you feel free to do so?
- What can classical music learn from other musical traditions? // What can classical music practitioners learn from other musical communities?
- What are some challenges you or your peers face when exploring musical styles beyond classical music?

8. Relationship with innovation in classical music practices

- What is your understanding of innovation in classical music practices?

- How do you balance tradition and innovation in your approach to music? How does the CM? Can you give an example of successful or unsuccessful innovation?
- Are there any aspects, conventions or understandings in the practice that you would change or like to see changed?
- What barriers do you face or see others face when trying to innovate within classical music practices?
- What is the CM´s stance towards innovation? How does it fit with the rest of the professional field?

9. Understandings of the 'crisis' of classical music

- What are some of the biggest challenges that for you classical music faces today? **//** What challenges do you foresee for this next generation of classical music practitioners in the future?
  - o What do you do in your practice to better prepare them [be better prepared] for those challenges?
- Some people argue that classical musics is undergoing a crisis. What are your views on this?
  - o If so, how would you explain this 'crisis', what does it consist of and how did we get there?
- How is the crisis being addressed in your view? And at the CM? How do you think it should be solved?
- Have you noticed any misconceptions about classical music that you believe contribute to its perceived crisis?

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