

My work examines *homo musicus*, or the musical conception of the human being that informed how physicians and natural philosophers in 17th and 18th century Europe understood the functions of life. Beginning in the 17th century, natural philosophers increasingly refused any recourse to hidden causes and abstract metaphysical principles: all natural phenomena were to be explained according to simple mechanistic principles, intended to account for empirical observation. Yet the fundamental processes of life lay necessarily beyond the research of the physician's gaze, or the anatomist's scalpel, thereby creating an epistemic gap, to be filled by hypothesis and conjecture. *Homo musicus* was one such model, centered around the resonating body, composed of a network of vibrating fibres and nerves. Nervous fibres were compared to musical strings, whose proper tuning was the condition of good health; the mind became a harpsichord, whose keys corresponded to the actions of the body; the nervous system could be a bell, whose ringing figured every sensation. Unlike the well-documented contemporary metaphor of the clock, *homo musicus* offered a seamless explanation for the unity of the body, while also suggesting the cause of human sensibility - a central preoccupation of the time - by virtue of resonating fibres.