

## ABSTRACT

Title of dissertation:       PIECES OF MUSIC: THE ONTOLOGY OF CLASSICAL,  
ROCK, AND JAZZ MUSIC

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I investigate the nature of, and relationships between, works, performances, and recordings in the Western musical traditions of classical, rock, and jazz music. I begin in chapter one by defending the study of musical ontology against a recent attack by Aaron Ridley. This leads into a discussion of the appropriate methodology for investigating the ontology of art, and the reasons for doing musical ontology, particularly in a comparative way.

In chapter two I review and reject several theories of what a classical musical work is. I defend the view that such a work is an abstract object – a type of performance – against several objections, most notably that abstract objects cannot be created, while musical works are. In chapter three I argue that classical recordings, as they are typically made, are correctly conceived of as giving access to performances of the works they purport to be of, despite the fact that they are not records of any single performance event in the studio.

Before tackling rock and jazz, in chapter four I investigate the concept of a work of art in general, arguing that there are two necessary conditions an art object must meet to be a work: (1) it must be of a kind that is a primary focus of critical attention in a given art form or tradition, and (2) it must be a persisting object. I argue further that (i) there is no need to subsume all art under the work concept, and that (ii) drawing a distinction between works and other art objects need not lead to valuing the former over the latter.

In chapter five, I argue that the work of art in rock music is a track for playback, constructed in the studio. Tracks usually manifest songs, which can be performed live. A cover version is a track (successfully) intended to manifest the same song as some other track. In chapter six, I discuss various proposals for the ontology of jazz. I argue that in jazz there are no works, only performances.

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by

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# 1

## CHAPTER FOR THE END OF TIME: IN DEFENSE OF MUSICAL ONTOLOGY

In a recent paper in the *Journal of Philosophy*, Aaron Ridley, a notable philosopher of music, attacks the study of the ontology of music (2003).<sup>1</sup> His conclusions range in strength from the claim that musical ontology is ‘absolutely worthless’ (203) to the suggestion that ‘in musical aesthetics, ontology comes last (at the end of time, perhaps)’ (215). I do not think that this dissertation is absolutely worthless; nor am I prepared to postpone my submission of it indefinitely. I must, therefore, defend the practice of musical ontology – of saying what kinds of musical things there are. The best way to be convinced of the value of musical ontology is to read some, and thus I hope that by the end of my dissertation, at the latest, the reader will find Ridley’s conclusions implausible.<sup>2</sup> But here I can at least dispatch Ridley’s negative arguments, say something about the benefits of musical ontology, and describe my methodology.

### I. *CONTRA* RIDLEY

Ridley’s strategy is as follows. He first argues that musical ontology has no consequences for musical aesthetics or practice, and that no one is in fact, or should be, puzzled by questions of musical ontology. (By ‘musical aesthetics’ he seems to mean the study of

<sup>1</sup> A slightly different version of the paper appears as the fourth chapter of Ridley 2004.

<sup>2</sup> This much does not even depend on my conclusions’ being true, or my arguments’ being particularly good. If a reader is interested enough to engage with them, then the value of the field is surely granted.



questions of musical value.) From this he concludes that no one should engage in debate over questions of musical ontology. He then argues that, contrary to musical ontologists' claims that answering questions of value requires an ontological theory, or at least ontological assumptions, in fact the reverse holds: the ontological facts about music depend on facts about its value. Thus the ontologist cannot defend herself by claiming only to be doing musical metaphysics, divorcing her inquiry from questions of value.

I will argue against each of Ridley's claims. First, I will show that Ridley's main argument about the relationship between musical ontology and value fails, since it equivocates on the notion of the 'content' of a musical work. Second, I will show that his subsidiary argument – that musical ontology is not worth doing since genuine ontological questions never arise in musical practice – does not succeed, and that Ridley fails even to keep controversial ontological assumptions out of his own article. Third, I will show how the ontology of music can have important consequences for questions of musical value, though a much more concrete case is made for this conclusion by the following chapters than by my abstract arguments here.

### *1.1 Ontology and content*

Ridley's argument against doing musical ontology independently of, or even prior to, musical value theory is the following.

[A] performance of a work cannot be 'faithful' to it unless it evinces an understanding of it. And if a performance's faithfulness is, minimally, a matter of the understanding it shows, then a performance is, in that much, to be valued in proportion to the richness, depth, insight, subtlety and so on of the understanding it evinces. But if this is right, evidently enough, much of the 'content' of a given

work is only revealed *in* the understandings that faithful performances of it evince. And that means that any attempt to specify that content – the content to which a good performance is faithful – *in advance* of evaluative judgements about particular performances of it, or independently of such judgments, must be futile and self-defeating. (Ridley 2003: 213)

(Note that by ‘faithful’, Ridley seems to mean ‘good’, or ‘valuable’, since according to ordinary usage, but *contra* Ridley’s, one can produce a performance that is faithful to a work, without its being revelatory, or even particularly interesting.)

The first thing that calls for comment in this passage is Ridley’s apparent misconception of what it is musical ontologists do. When he says that much of a given work’s content is revealed only in performances of it, this is supposed to be a rebuke to the musical ontologist. But I cannot think of a musical ontologist who would claim that his theory can tell you what the content of a particular work is. Musical ontologists theorize about the *kinds* of musical things there are – works, scores, performances, recordings – and the relations between them. Musicologists (broadly construed), on the other hand, talk about particular works, performances, scores, and so on. To give a concrete example, Stephen Davies, in an important recent book on musical ontology, essays a theory about the relation between a work and a performance of it. He argues that three necessary conditions jointly suffice for a performance’s being of a particular work: ‘(1) the performance matches the work’s content, more or less; (2) the performers intend to follow most of the instructions specifying the work, whoever wrote them; and (3) a robust causal chain runs from the performance to the work’s creation’ (S. Davies 2001:

196-7).<sup>3</sup> In a later article on profundity in instrumental music, Davies puts on his musicologist's hat to give an analysis of the first movement of Bartók's *Music for Strings, Percussion, and Celesta*. The analysis ends with the following paragraph:

Here is the miracle. The closing three measures not only draw the movement to its close, they recapitulate and thereby summarize the whole movement's structure.

The two voices move in contrary motion from A, settle simultaneously on E-flat, the tritone, and then reverse the process until they converge in unison on the final

A. (S. Davies 2002: 352-3)

You might wonder how on earth Davies derives these details about Bartók's piece from his account of the relation between work and performance, quoted above. But I suspect that you don't. Clearly, an account of the *kind* of thing a musical work is will not tell you anything about the content of a *particular* work or performance. For those details, you must examine the work in question; but then you are engaged in musicology, not musical ontology.

A comparison of music with literature helps to point up the problem with Ridley's talk of the 'content' of a musical work. In one sense of 'content' – equivalent to what usually goes by the name of 'meaning' in literary discourse – it is plausible that we couldn't hope to say what the content of a work is, in advance of 'faithful' (good) interpretations of it. (It does not follow that the work does not *have* that content in advance of those interpretations, but I ignore this issue here.) In another sense of content, though – that which we would use to check whether we had a faithful copy of the text (in the ordinary sense of 'faithful') – clearly we *could* know the content of the work in

<sup>3</sup> I discuss this proposal in chapter three.

advance of any interpretations of it. Given enough time, I could tell you whether you have a faithful copy of *Finnegans Wake*, though I have next to no understanding of that work.<sup>4</sup>

Once we have sorted out these senses of content, we can read Ridley's argument in two ways. The charitable reading is to use the deep sense of content, or meaning, in which case the conclusion is that any attempt to specify the content of a work in advance of a good interpretation of it would be futile. I say 'good interpretation' rather than 'faithful performance' because (i) as noted above, Ridley uses 'faithful' in a non-standard way, and (ii) he includes among performances those 'in one's head', which makes his denial of the possibility of achieving an understanding of a work in advance of hearing a performance of it more plausible.<sup>5</sup> On this reading, Ridley's argument seems defensible, if trivial. The drawback is that on this reading the argument fails to connect with Ridley's main concerns in the article, for 'content', in the sense being used, is not the kind of thing musical ontologists describe. In order to reach the strong conclusion about musical ontology Ridley is aiming for, we must read 'faithful performance' more literally, and give 'content' its shallower meaning of just what would determine whether or not we have a performance of the work. But on this reading, the argument is indefensible, for the reasons given above – anyone with access to a copy of the score and the ability to read it can tell you to a large extent the content a performance would need to have were it to be a performance of this work.

<sup>4</sup> Some of that time would need to be devoted to establishing an authoritative text before checking your copy against it.

<sup>5</sup> Since there is an additional chance of confusion when talking about music, let me say that I am primarily thinking about *performative* rather than critical interpretation here. But, in fact, perhaps it is more charitable still to read Ridley's argument as encompassing both senses. See Levinson 1993a on this distinction.

### 1.2 Aesthetics without ontology?

A second argument Ridley employs is that we are never genuinely confused or puzzled about the ontology of the music we listen to, so there is no point in theorizing about it. My first response to this is that it sounds extremely odd coming from a philosopher. Whoever ‘we’ is supposed to refer to here, it must exclude musical ontologists, since they will certainly claim to be puzzled, and perhaps even confused, about the ontology of the music they are listening to. Now, consider the plausible claim that ‘we’ are never genuinely confused or puzzled about whether we know anything, or whether other people have experiences like we do, or whether I’m the same person who went to sleep in my bed last night. These claims don’t carry much weight with epistemologists, philosophers of mind, or personal-identity theorists. Yet Ridley is arguing that musical ontologists should be silenced on the basis of such considerations. As I see it, no one should be *forced* to consider these questions, but neither should anyone be compelled *not* to consider them. A reasonable response to this defense might be that epistemologists *et al.* are able to show quickly that there are no obvious answers in their fields of inquiry, and thus that they are not (necessarily) wasting their time addressing the issues that interest them. Thus the musical ontologist is at least beholden to show likewise that questions of musical ontology are not easy to answer. Ridley wisely does not parlay this response, nor does he attempt to provide the easy answers to any ontological questions music raises. Rather, he claims that

I have not [committed myself to a whole set of ontological claims throughout the course of my own argument]<sup>6</sup>....All I have argued is that performances can show

<sup>6</sup> The bracketed material is a direct quotation from Ridley’s previous paragraph – the reference of the pronoun it replaces here.

us things about works; and that requires nothing more than the thought that (some) performances are interpretations *of* works – not, I surmise, a proposition likely to provoke a storm of protest, and certainly not one that presupposes (or should prompt) the slightest flicker of ontological reflection....At most, I have helped myself to some perfectly neutral, pre-theoretical thoughts. And these are of a sort that no one, whatever their ontological views, could possibly object to... (Ridley 2003: 219)

The idea is that we can do all of musical aesthetics in this ontologically neutral mode.

But, in fact, much of what Ridley says *does* imply some substantive ontological presuppositions, and certainly prompts ontological reflection in those predisposed to such reflection. Showing this will be enough to put musical ontology on a par with the other philosophical inquiries mentioned above. Even if I am wrong about these particular examples' raising ontological questions, again I hope that the rest of this dissertation will show that there are interesting and worthwhile musical ontological questions to be raised.

One example of Ridley's not-so-neutral ontological assumptions follows his discussion of Davies's proposed necessary and sufficient conditions for a performance's being of a given work, quoted above. Ridley says that

if, as I have argued, a revelatory performance is one that is faithful to a work in a way that necessarily defies specification in advance, then, first, as a performance that is faithful to the work it is, trivially, *of* it, and second, amongst its unforeseeable qualities may well be the disregard of any, or even of all, of the independently specifiable bits of 'content' that it was supposed, as a legitimate performance, to have to match. (Ridley 2003: 214)

Is any performance that reveals something about a work trivially a performance of it? Performances of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony have revealed things to me about Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique*. But I would not agree that the former were performances of the latter. Is Ridley truly making the *trivial* claim, then, that any authentic, or faithful, or true, performance of a work is a performance of that work? His second claim belies this reading. It is that such a performance need not include *any* of the instruments, pitches, tonal structure, etc., that many theorists argue are constitutive of such works. But without further explanation (which Ridley does not provide), this means that a performance apparently of the *Symphonie Fantastique* may well in fact be a performance of Beethoven's Ninth. This conclusion seems just the sort of 'wildly implausible' claim that Ridley (2003: 203) accuses Nelson Goodman of making in *Languages of Art* (1976), thereby kicking off the unhealthy obsession with ontology that philosophers of music now supposedly suffer from. I am certainly prompted to wonder on quite what grounds Ridley would claim that a certain performance is or is not of a particular work. Whatever they are, they are clearly not neutral, pre-theoretical assumptions that no ontologist could possibly object to.

### *1.3 Ontology and value*

Thus far I have shown that Ridley's two main arguments for the thesis that we should abandon musical ontology are unsound. We need not rely on value judgments about a particular performance to determine whether or not it is a performance of a particular work, nor is it the case that questions of musical ontology do not arise for a philosophically-minded person interested in music. Moreover, Ridley himself has failed to write his article using only neutral pre-theoretical assumptions about musical ontology.

Perhaps Ridley's arguments can be strengthened, but rather than attempt that here, I prefer to provide a positive argument for the relevance of ontological considerations to judgments of musical value. If musical value judgments presuppose ontological judgments, then Ridley's arguments must fail.

Ridley asks, 'How, exactly, is a convincing ontological backdrop supposed to lend perspicuity to evaluative questions? No one, so far as I am aware, has actually asked this: certainly no one has given any sort of explicit answer' (2003: 210). Most philosophers of art take Kendall Walton to have asked this, and closely related questions, in 'Categories of Art' (1970). Walton also gives an explicit answer. The simplest way of explaining his argument is through his fictional example of *guernicas*. A *guernica* is a particular kind of work of art in a particular alien tradition.

*Guernicas* are like versions of Picasso's 'Guernica' done in various bas-relief dimensions. All of them are surfaces with the colors and shapes of Picasso's 'Guernica,' but the surfaces are molded to protrude from the wall like relief maps of different kinds of terrain. Some *guernicas* have rolling surfaces, others are sharp and jagged, still others contain several relatively flat planes at various angles to each other, and so forth. (Walton 1970: 347)

It so happens that sharp, jagged *guernicas* are dynamic and vital, expressive of anger, violence, and so on, while rolling *guernicas* are smooth, soft, and gentle.<sup>7</sup> The shapes that we see in Picasso's 'Guernica' do not play any more expressive or representational role in *guernicas* than the flatness of the canvas does in (our) paintings. Clearly, if someone who knew nothing about painting, but a lot about *guernicas*, saw Picasso's 'Guernica',

<sup>7</sup> Says who? Say the people who know about *guernicas*. This raises many questions; some will be considered below.



they would (erroneously taking it to be a *guernica*) describe it as ‘cold, stark, lifeless, or serene and restful, or perhaps bland, dull, boring – but in any case *not* violent, dynamic, and vital’ (Walton 1970: 347). The people from the alien culture would misdescribe Picasso’s work, because they would take it to be of a kind of which it is not. This sort of misdescription could easily result in a misevaluation. (Perhaps flat *guernicas* were all the rage in the ’60s, but everyone is just so *over* them now.)

Walton gives a parallel argument in a musical idiom in a later essay (1988). Here, he asks us to imagine a Martian musical tradition.

Martian scores do not indicate what pitches a performer is to play, or for what durations. Instead they give detailed instructions concerning dynamics, tempos, articulations, vibrato, nuances of accent and timbre, etc. – instructions that are much more detailed than those provided by (traditional) scores in our society. The performer of a Martian work is free to decide what pitches to play and for what durations, but he is expected to play them with the dynamics, articulations, timbres, etc., indicated by the composer. Different performers playing from the same score will of course play different pitches and rhythms (and hence different harmonies and harmonic rhythms) in executing the composer’s instructions, just as on Earth different performers play the notes...specified by the composer with different dynamics, tempos, and articulations. (Walton 1988: 238)

You can see where this is going. You might end up with a performance of a Martian work that sounds to us exactly like a performance of Beethoven’s Sixth Symphony. A classical-music lover will not be in a position to judge the performance as the thing that it is (a performance of Marthoven’s Sixth).

Ridley might claim that that these fanciful examples are of little interest, since we never actually encounter such problems. We operate, he claims, with ‘an apparently rather robust sense of work identity’ (Ridley 2003: 207). He later considers purportedly difficult borderline cases and first performances of works, but argues that these never in fact present us with real ontological questions or confusion. But if our sense of work identity is so robust that it doesn’t present us with any problems, why is it that philosophers of music over the past forty years have been unable to reach a consensus as to what that sense is? Why doesn’t Ridley simply say what this sense is, if he wants to end ontological speculation? Clearly we do have *some* shared sense of work identity, otherwise we would not be able to begin to do musical ontology. But it seems equally clear that this sense is not a fully worked-out or robust one, otherwise there would be no disagreements between musical ontologists. (I will say more about this in the section on methodology, below.) Moreover, as I have argued above, the fact, if it were one, that we are not presented with actual hard cases in our everyday musical activities, would not show that musical ontology is worthless, any more than the fact that we are not regularly presented with purported time-travel machines shows that the possibility of time travel should not be pursued as a metaphysical question. But most importantly, we *are* in fact presented with hard cases and cases of confusion relatively commonly (that is, much more commonly than we are presented with purported time machines, or the transmigration of princes’ souls into cobblers’ bodies). Real examples are available.

## II. SOME BENEFITS OF DOING MUSICAL ONTOLOGY

### 2.1 *Ontological confusion about classical music*

First, an uncontroversial musicological example to show the structure of the ontological examples that follow. People familiar solely with Western musical traditions are often at a loss to judge music from other traditions. Not only do they not know what counts as a good or bad performance of, say, a piece of Balinese *gamelan* music, but they cannot tell what emotions are being expressed in such a piece. Either they are aware of their limitations, or they attribute to the music the expressive properties it would have were it a piece in a Western musical tradition. I suspect most cannot tell even whether the same piece is being performed on two separate occasions.<sup>8</sup> (Compare Walton's Beethoven/Marthoven example above.) Though I would not describe this as a case of *ontological* confusion leading to an inability to judge, it is a case of ignorance of the *kind* of thing being experienced leading to that inability, and is hence a close cousin to ontological confusion.<sup>9</sup>

Cases of ontological confusion are difficult to find in the Western classical tradition, partly because the tradition is such an old one, so that there is, as Ridley points out, a relatively widely shared sense of what a work is, and what counts as a performance of one. This makes it less likely that people will disagree about a particular case, or that practitioners will be unaware of, or flout, the conventions – some of the circumstances that result in hard cases. Similarly, because of the culturally entrenched view of classical music as superior, it is difficult to find criticisms of the entire tradition that are arguably

<sup>8</sup> This seems plausible to me on the basis of friends of mine, brought up in Western cultures, who seem serious in their claims that even most Western classical music sounds the same to them.

<sup>9</sup> Exactly where the boundary between ontological and musicological facts lies is a question I will not be addressing here.

rooted in ontological misunderstandings, as opposed to similar criticisms of ‘popular’ traditions, such as rock and jazz.

Nevertheless, real cases of ontological confusion or disagreement can be found within the classical tradition. For convenience, I will take my examples from the very paper in which Ridley argues they do not exist. A favorite example of Ridley’s is a Muzak version of ‘the *Ode to Joy* theme’ (2003: 207 *et passim*).

One would not suffer as one does in elevators and supermarkets if the doubts [about whether one is hearing a performance of the *Ode to Joy* theme] were real. One would not be reduced to misanthropic cursings, to mutterings of ‘How *could* they? How *dare* they?’ if it really did strike one as a serious possibility that the miserable denatured pap oozing from the speakers was not the Beethoven after all. It clearly *is* the Beethoven, and that is why it makes one feel so low and vicious. (2003: 207)

It is notable that Ridley identifies as his target the *Ode to Joy theme*, rather than Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony, or the fourth movement thereof, or a section of that movement. For surely there would be disagreement about a claim that the recording he hears in the supermarket is a performance of Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony. But if it is Beethoven Ridley is listening to, why the anger? Apparently because it is such a bad performance. But would such rage result from even the most appalling imaginable live performance of the symphony by a full orchestra? I suspect not. Part of the reason for this is that the *Ode to Joy* theme is quite unremarkable.<sup>10</sup> It is a commonplace in analyses of

<sup>10</sup> Roger Scruton points out that the theme is nonetheless carefully constructed. Still, I find somewhat overwrought his claim that removing the syncopation of the first beat of its thirteenth bar ‘destroys the expression entirely’ (Scruton 1997: 163-4). Perhaps it would be charitable here to take him to be referring

the Ninth Symphony that the theme that emerges low in the strings, early in the final movement, from the detritus of the preceding three movements, seems far too slight to bear the weight of this great symphony to its conclusion. One of the remarkable things about the work is that Beethoven shows these appearances to be deceiving. The greatness of the Ninth (or even its fourth movement) was surely not simply lying in wait in the *Ode to Joy* theme, to be discovered by any nineteenth-century composer with a reasonable grasp of harmony, counterpoint, and orchestration. Thus, part of what explains Ridley's despair at the Muzak *Ode* is that it untimely rips the theme from the context that makes it part of something great.<sup>11</sup> No one versed in classical music can keep Beethoven's symphony out of his mind on hearing the *Ode to Joy* theme, and the inevitable comparison between Beethoven's symphony and the piece of Muzak is bound to find the Muzak wanting. The *moral* outrage Ridley expresses ('How *could* they? How *dare* they?') is in part explained by the fact that we take *works*, not parts thereof (such as the *Ode* theme), as the primary products of artists, a point I consider in detail in a later chapter.<sup>12</sup> Perhaps there is no ontological confusion in Ridley's account of his encounter with the 'Muzaked' *Ode*. But the above analysis shows that his account certainly raises ontological questions that help to bring the issues he is concerned with into focus.

Another group of ontological issues is raised by some ground-clearing Ridley does early on in his article. He notes that he will use the term 'performance' broadly: 'By "performance" I will mean not only the playing of a musical work by an individual or

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not simply to the theme, as he appears to be from his text and notation, but rather to some fully orchestrated instances of it.

<sup>11</sup> It is surprising that Ridley ignores this issue, given his fine treatment of it in an earlier paper (1993).

<sup>12</sup> For a detailed discussion of the elements (such as themes) that make up musical works, see chapter two of S. Davies 2001.

group before an audience, but also recordings, transcriptions, arrangements, versions and, in general, renditions of every sort' (Ridley 2003: 206). This seems a reasonably homogeneous set of things to bring under one term, and whether Ridley chooses 'performance' as his term is more or less a verbal issue, provided he does not equivocate on it. But it does simply sweep many ontological questions under the mat. For instance, Ridley is careful to say that the Muzak recording he hears in the supermarket is a version of the *Ode to Joy* theme, as noted above. Why not simply say it is a performance of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony? I am not suggesting that that is the best way to characterize it, but it certainly accords with Ridley's terminology, and his choice not to use the term he has just defined in the previous paragraph reveals, I think, that there are interesting questions to be asked about when something is or is not a performance of something else.

A second issue his stipulative use of 'performance' raises is the question of whether recordings are in fact best characterized as performances of works. I argue in a later chapter that typical recordings in the Western classical tradition *are* best characterized as giving access to performances, on a par with attendance at a live performance, but there are people who disagree. Some think, for instance, that almost all sound recordings are works of art in their own right.<sup>13</sup> It is easy to see the relationship between these disputes and evaluative issues. If the high Cs you hear on a recording of *Tristan und Isolde* are not in fact sung by Kirsten Flagstad, but by Elisabeth Schwarzkopf, while Flagstad sings all of Isolde's other notes, and is alone listed as Isolde on the cover, is Flagstad (or someone else) cheating? She would be in a live performance,

<sup>13</sup> Lee Brown often seems to think this. See, for example, Brown 2000c.

but if recordings are different kinds of works, standardly employing all manner of ‘studio trickery’, perhaps she is not.<sup>14</sup>

There is another kind of case in which ontological confusion results in evaluative mistakes. There may develop two musical traditions that display many similarities, yet are ontologically quite different. The traditions may share roughly the same harmonic and melodic language, for instance, but one may be a tradition of live performances of enduring works, while another is centrally improvisatory. In such cases, it will be tempting to judge performances in the two traditions on the same grounds, since the same kinds of descriptive musicological judgments may apply to performances in both traditions. But evaluative judgments will not follow automatically from such descriptions. It is difficult to write a good fugue, which is part of the reason why good fugues, and performances of them, are valued. But it is even more difficult to *improvise* a good fugue, and thus we tend to value equally good, but improvised, performances of fugues even more highly than those of ‘pre-composed’ fugues. If someone does not recognize that a certain performance is improvised, but rather assumes that it is a performance of a composed work, she will tend to undervalue the performance. Thus, approaching an improvisatory tradition as if it were one of composed works will result in thoroughgoing misevaluation.<sup>15</sup>

It is this sort of ontological confusion that I hope to untangle in my chapters on rock and jazz. In short, I argue that unlike Western classical music, which is a tradition wherein works are for performance, rock music is centrally an artform in which

<sup>14</sup> For other discussions of this case, see Culshaw 1967: 54-5, Schwarzkopf 1982: 70 & 140, Chanan 1995: 133, Kania 1998: 39-41, and S. Davies 2001: 193, n. 28.

<sup>15</sup> I address the question of whether improvisation should be considered a kind of composition in my chapter on jazz.

recordings are the works of art, while in jazz there are no works, only performances. All I will do in this chapter is provide some concrete examples of evaluative discrepancies amongst theorists in the three traditions, and the potential ontological confusions underlying them, to repudiate Ridley-style objections that such confusion never actually occurs.

### *2.2 Ontological confusion about rock music*

Theodore Gracyk provides some examples from within rock criticism of the common confusion of song (understood as thing to be performed), live performance, and studio recording.<sup>16</sup>

[Paul] Williams embarks on a two-volume discussion of [Bob] Dylan's life as an artist, comparing alternative performances of major songs over the years....But as the first volume proceeds, it becomes clear that he is not discussing *performances* at all. As he recognizes in the second volume...he is discussing *recordings*....But he is not consistent on the matter....Wilfred Mellers waffles over the distinction in his own Dylan study....Critic Dave Marsh often refers to recordings as 'performances', seemingly endorsing the thesis that recordings transparently convey performances....Where Greil Marcus was clearly interpreting recordings, [George] Lipsitz almost always characterizes the object of his interpretation as songs...[but] the song does not have all of the properties that Lipsitz finds significant. (1996: viii-ix)

<sup>16</sup> This confusion, or at least the confusing ambiguity of terms, seems to me endemic in rock culture, as any brief exploration with a class of undergraduates will show. In fact, in my experience, people familiar with rock music, but not with classical, do not make a distinction between songs and instrumental pieces, and will thus ask of a piece of purely instrumental music 'What song is that?'



These examples are perhaps benign, since they arguably do not lead to evaluative error. But it would surely aid rock criticism if there were more explicit awareness of what exactly the objects of such criticism are.

Three passages in Roger Scruton's *Aesthetics of Music* (1997) provide good examples of the same kind of ontological error, but where it *does* result in evaluative error. In each case, Scruton criticizes his chosen example on grounds appropriate to the evaluation of classical music, but not necessarily appropriate for rock.<sup>17</sup>

A pop song in which the bass-line fails to move; in which an inner voice is mutilated; in which rhythm is generated mechanically, and with neither syncopations nor accents in the vocal line – such a song may be judged inferior on those grounds alone. If we are to sustain our interest, even in music as empty as that of U2, we may reasonably demand a greater mastery of the medium, and a greater awareness of how sound transforms itself to tone. (Scruton 1997: 382-4)

As for the list of faults in the first sentence, presumably Scruton would also take issue with them in a classical song. What he must mean is that pop songs tend to possess these faults in greater numbers or more commonly than classical works do. But the substitution of 'classical' for 'pop' in the above does serve to point up that the features Scruton picks out are only faults *ceteris paribus*. It is not difficult to find good classical pieces that possess some of these features, used to good effect. I think it probably *is*

<sup>17</sup> One objection that might be brought against Scruton is his extremely selective use of rock examples. While he generalizes about all contemporary rock or popular music, he mentions by name only two tracks, and one further group: Nirvana's 'Dive', R.E.M.'s 'Losing My Religion', and U2. Selective use of examples is more problematic in talking about contemporary music than in talking about the classical canon (though Scruton uses 252 canonical classical musical examples), since (i) there is widespread agreement about membership in the classical canon, (ii) philosophers of music tend to be very familiar with the classical canon, and (iii) it tends to be *all* the classical music we are familiar with. In contemporary popular music, unlike canonical classical music, the dross has not yet fallen by the wayside.

difficult, however, to find a rock track (particularly one generally acknowledged to be good) that possesses all of them. A bass line that fails to move is simply a ‘pedal’, a common compositional tool in classical music. A mutilated inner voice, like any inner voice, is only to be found in contrapuntal writing, which is relatively uncommon in rock. Literally mechanically-generated rhythm is surely more common in rock than in classical music, but this is in large part a historical contingency. Mechanical rhythm in a loose sense is a relatively common technique in classical composition. (Think of the opening of Brahms’s First Symphony, or parts of almost any symphony of Shostakovich.) No example of a vocal line entirely devoid of syncopation and accent comes readily to mind from the classical *or* rock canon; perhaps there are some.

But the point most pertinent to my discussion here is Scruton’s second complaint that pop artists have less awareness of their medium than classical composers – the medium of ‘tone’. Scruton uses ‘tone’ to refer to musical sound. ‘A tone is a sound which exists within a musical “field of force”’ (Scruton 1997: 17). But as he points out in the same place, what counts as music is our decision, and depends upon paradigm examples. He has weighted the discussion against rock music by considering only Western classical works as his paradigms.<sup>18</sup> This is usually only implicit, as in the above quotation, and the following characterization of Nirvana’s ‘Dive’.

[The tune consists of] fragments in a kind of B minor (though harmonized for the most part with an E major chord played anyhow), with only a ghostly resemblance to melody. No movement passes between the notes, since all movement is generated elsewhere, by the rhythm guitar. And this melodic

<sup>18</sup> In addition to his selective use of examples, which I will henceforth ignore.

deficiency goes hand in hand with a loss of harmonic texture. In the soup of amplified overtones, inner voices are drowned out: all the guitarist can do is create an illusion of harmony by playing parallel fifths. (Scruton 1997: 499)

Sometimes Scruton is more explicit about the dimensions along which musical works are to be evaluated.

A musical culture introduces its participants to three important experiences, and three forms of knowledge....Nobody who understands the experiences of melody harmony and rhythm will doubt their value. (Scruton 1997: 501-2)

In an attempt to explain the popularity and power of Nirvana in the face of its inability to meet his musical standards, Scruton turns to sociological aspects of rock culture.

[T]his music has enormous power over its typical audience, precisely because it has brushed aside the demands of *music*, and replaced them with demands of another kind. The audience does not listen *to* the music, but *through* it, to the performers....The relation between the musicians and their fans is tribal; and any criticism of the music is received by the fan as an assault upon himself and his identity....If the music sounds ugly, this is of no significance: it is not there to be listened to, but to take revenge on the world. (Scruton 1997: 500)

Note that, again, it is not obvious that Scruton would endorse a similar claim with respect to classical music. The opening chord of the last movement of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony is arguably ugly, and perhaps a case could even be made for its being there 'to take revenge on the world', but neither of these facts would imply that the music's ugliness is of no significance, or that the music is not there to be listened to. *Of course* the

chord is there to be listened to, and if its ugliness or the significance thereof is not understood, the progress of the movement will not be understood. Perhaps Scruton would argue that the thoroughgoing ugliness of Nirvana's song, or oeuvre, militates against a similar reading. But it seems much more plausible that their music is ugly throughout (if this is indeed the right way to characterize it) because they, like many late twentieth-century artists, are not generally as optimistic as Beethoven (together with many other Romantic artists) was.

Scruton is not alone in looking to aspects of rock other than musical ones to explain its value. Most of the musicology of rock is similarly focused on sociological rather than musical aspects of the rock world, even amongst those who consider rock music worth listening to. A few writers try to find in rock music musical features valued in classical musicology,<sup>19</sup> but what I see as the ideal consequence of a study of comparative musical ontology is a reconception of 'the medium', over which, for instance, Scruton wishes U2 would show a greater mastery. For if we begin to think of rock tracks as (i) the works of art in rock, and (ii) ontologically like films or classical electronic music, other features will come to the fore as relevant to criticism of the music (which is not to say that melody, harmony, or rhythm will take a back seat). One writer who has attempted a taxonomy of the dimensions along which rock tracks should be judged is Albin Zak (2001). He discusses five: '1) Musical performance, 2) timbre, 3) echo, 4) ambience (reverberation), and 5) texture' (Zak 2001: 49). One might dispute the completeness of this list, or the way Zak divides up the field, but one notable aspect is that all three of the elements Scruton lists are contained in the first of the five aspects Zak

<sup>19</sup> See, for example, the essays in Covach and Boone 1997.

lists. If Scruton is missing anywhere near 80% of the content of rock works, no wonder he finds little to appreciate in them.<sup>20</sup>

If my ontological thesis about rock is right, a critical machinery to discuss the music will have to be developed that is well beyond the scope of this dissertation. Ways will have to be found to talk about the aspects of rock tracks that are not captured in the sheet music derived from them, which by itself makes it difficult to tell the difference between early U2 and middle-period Radiohead.<sup>21</sup> The beginnings of such a machinery are to be found in the language of the artists of rock (those who work in the studio and the recording booth), in some rock journalism, and in the work of some academic pioneers such as Gracyk, Zak, and Mike Daley (1988).<sup>22</sup>

### *2.3 Ontological confusion about jazz music*

I will give just one relatively brief example of ontological confusion concerning jazz. Lee B. Brown, taking part in a symposium on Ken Burns's television documentary, *Jazz*, focuses on Wynton Marsalis's claim that jazz is 'America's classical music' (Brown 2002).<sup>23</sup> Brown shows that there is a lot packed into this short phrase, but what is relevant for our purposes is that part of what Marsalis means is that jazz (or good jazz) is (or should be) compositional, as opposed to improvisational. Brown also notes the continuity of Marsalis's urge to raise jazz to a position beyond reproach ('classical') with a tradition

<sup>20</sup> For a different, but equally critical response to Scruton's negative assessment of rock music, see Gracyk 2002.

<sup>21</sup> Tellingly, Scruton's transcriptions of rock music look more or less like sheet music, ignoring many important aspects of the works.

<sup>22</sup> Of course, some classical musicological tools will transfer quite directly to rock criticism. There are the tools of harmonic and melodic analysis, that are put to use in Covach and Boone 1997, and some pioneering work in non-traditional methods of analysis, such as 'The Color of Sound', a study of timbral analysis that makes up chapter four of Cogan and Escot 1976.

<sup>23</sup> For a short history of the claim that jazz is 'America's classical music', see Walser 1995: 170.

reaching back at least to Paul Whiteman who, with his Aeolian Hall concert of ‘symphonic jazz’ in 1924, aimed to ‘make a lady out of jazz’ (Gabbard 2002: 390).<sup>24</sup>

Remarks like these of Whiteman and Marsalis, as with those of Scruton with regard to rock, are the public tip of an iceberg of opinion that misevaluates jazz on the basis of false ontological assumptions. One of these is that enduring works of art are necessarily more valuable than fleeting events like performances. Another (which jazz theorists are often pushed to, I suspect, by the first) is that jazz is ontologically like classical music. I argue against both of these assumptions in chapters four and six.

### III. METHODOLOGY

If anything of the above has convinced you that musical ontology is worth doing, one question you might ask is how one should go about it. A natural starting point is our intuitions about (musical) artworks. By ‘our’ intuitions I mean those of people knowledgeable about the art or arts in question. This knowledge need not be in the form of ‘book-learning’, it can come from participating seriously in some aspect of artistic practice – as an artist, performer, appreciator, critic, etc. – and to some degree from simply being raised in a culture pervaded by art. There has been much discussion recently about the value of intuitions in metaphysics and other domains.<sup>25</sup> But some of these standard concerns about their value do not apply to ontology of art. This is because art is different from many other domains in that its objects are largely socially constructed (S. Davies 2003a). That is, what kinds of things artworks are is largely determined by what kinds of things we think they are. If this thesis sounds bizarre, two considerations might

<sup>24</sup> For more examples of this tradition, see the references in Rasula 1995 and Walser 1995.

<sup>25</sup> For starters, see DePaul and Ramsey 1999, Boghossian and Peacocke 2000, Gendler 2000, Gendler and Hawthorne 2002, and Sorenson 1992.

lessen that impression. The first is simply some general features of social constructions. The second is that, in one salient respect, art is unlike many other domains the ontologies of which we are interested in. I will discuss these considerations in turn.

### *3.1 Some general features of social constructions*

Social constructions require co-operation, can be quite robust, and need not lead to relativism of the sort that worries many people. For instance, the value of a New Zealand dollar coin is determined by the New Zealand mint. The mint's power to determine this value in turn depends on complex relationships between the population of New Zealand, its government, and the mint, yet for various reasons, such as the majority interest in having a workable economy, the value of the dollar coin is quite robust.<sup>26</sup> You might say that the value of the coin is *relative* to all these factors, but this is not a particularly interesting sense of relativism. I cannot decide that *for me* this piece of metal has no monetary value, and though the mint may decide to take the coin out of circulation, moving back to dollar notes, even the mint cannot legislate that the dollar coin *never had* any value. Similarly, art practices, though not explicitly institutional in the way money is, depend upon the cooperation of many people, notably in the form of shared understandings about the kinds of things that get produced, how they are to be treated, and so on.<sup>27</sup> It does not follow that a particular artwork, or the kind of thing artworks are in a particular tradition, will vary from person to person, nor that consensus can necessarily change the nature of a particular artwork. Of course, mistakes can be made.

<sup>26</sup> I talk here of the value of the dollar coin relative to New Zealand's economy, not the value of the New Zealand dollar in the world economy. The latter is just as socially constructed, but the society which constructs it is the larger one of the world.

<sup>27</sup> This claim is not intended as an endorsement of the institutional theory of art. I believe it is neutral with respect to the definition of art.

Just as someone might not recognize a dollar coin as having the value it does – perhaps they mistakenly think that all coins are worth less than a dollar – someone can wrongly judge that a particular thing is or is not an artwork.

It might be objected that if what enables us to engage in art practices is our shared understandings about it, there should be no ontology to *do*. We all understand the practice, so there should be no disagreements about ontological judgments, even if they are not often explicitly made. But there are at least two reasons why this does not follow. First, since art ontology is *socially* rather than individually constructed, it is unsurprising that no individual has all the right intuitions. Compare a particular administration's foreign policy. Some general truths about it might be known by everyone in, and many people outside of, the administration. But there will surely be some details that not everyone in the administration is aware of, and conceivably some global aspects that *no one* in the administration is aware of, but which external observers are in a better position to appreciate. Similarly, though we might all share some general art-ontological knowledge, I might know more about painting than you do, while you know more about sculpture. Furthermore, there may be global features of the practice that theorists rather than practitioners are in the best position to observe.

Second, people often speak hastily, or without much thought. People can be deceived about what their beliefs really are, and often their goal is not to communicate their beliefs. They sometimes speak after much thought, but not quite enough; they speak metaphorically, and so on. There are other ways to determine someone's beliefs than to ask them about their beliefs, however. Non-verbal actions, for instance, often belie what people say. One of the musical ontologist's goals here, as in other theoretical endeavors,



is to minimize disagreement, often by explaining it away as merely apparent. The completed musical ontology, which I take as an ideal worth pursuing, if practically impossible to achieve, is approached by a method of reflective equilibrium among our intuitions, claims, and theories.<sup>28</sup> This reflective process will include arguments from the sorts of properties we attribute to artworks, to the kinds of things they must be. This is a kind of argument David Davies calls ‘the epistemological argument’:

1. an epistemological premise. Rational reflection upon our critical and appreciative practice confirms that certain properties, actual or modal, are rightly ascribed to what are termed ‘works’ in that practice, or that our practice rightly individuates what are termed ‘works’ in a certain way.
2. a methodological premise – the pragmatic constraint. Artworks must be conceived ontologically in such a way as to accord with those features of our critical and appreciative practice upheld on rational reflection.
3. an ontological conclusion. Either (negative) artworks cannot be identified with X’s, or (positive) artworks can or should be identified with X’s. (D. Davies 2004: 23)

Davies takes this schema to be fundamental to doing art ontology. I think this kind of argument is central, but note two things about it. First, our ontology of art need not consist entirely of works. (See, in particular, chapter four below). Second, though Davies calls the first premise epistemological, it will contain ontological claims. It is epistemological in the sense that it assumes we can and do know some properties of artworks, including ontological ones. I consider some objections to this assumption

<sup>28</sup> To use John Rawls’s term (1971), recently co-opted for art-ontological use by David Davies (2004).

below. For now it is important to see just that ontology does not necessarily come *second*, or even further down, in the reflective process. It is plausible that all of our art terms are tied up with one another, and thus that we cannot settle upon a maximally coherent understanding of those terms first, and sort out our ontology last. Nor should we expect the process to be an easy task just because the objects we seek to describe are constructed by us.

On the other hand, this methodology does assume the existence of the practice whose ontology we are investigating. Thus the project is a descriptive one, in the simple sense of describing something that is already there. This is perhaps one sense in which Ridley is right that musical ontology should be sorted out ‘at the end of time’ (2003: 215). It would certainly be quixotic to attempt to describe the ontology of a musical practice that does not yet exist. Musical ontology might also be thought of as descriptive in Peter Strawson’s sense (1974: xiii-xv), but since the objects under discussion are socially constructed, it is not clear that Strawson’s distinction between descriptive and revisionary metaphysics is particularly useful here. As David Davies puts it, ‘[t]o offer an “ontology of art” not subject to the pragmatic constraint would be to change the subject, rather than answer the questions that motivate philosophical aesthetics’ (2004: 21).

### *3.2 Ontological levels*

The second consideration that makes the social constructedness of art objects more acceptable is that art is unlike many other domains the ontologies of which we are interested in, in an important respect. Take science, for example. Whether or not there are black holes might well be thought to be independent of whether or not we *think* there are.

We expect scientists to *look and see*, in some sense, whether there are any black holes.<sup>29</sup> General metaphysics provides another example. Here, too, it seems that there must be an answer to the question, for instance, of what properties are (if they are anything at all). Here it is more difficult to say just how we could be expected to ‘look and see’ what properties are. But in the case of art, it is not clear that there is an equivalent strongly objective domain that we could have recourse to, even in principle. You might at first think that art is no different from science, in this sense. On the one hand, you might assimilate science to art, pointing out that scientists must share understandings in order to do science – it too is a social activity. Nonetheless, black holes are not socially constructed, because, unlike artworks and money, they themselves do not depend upon shared understandings. The *activity* of science requires persons to engage in it, but the objects of scientific inquiry are independent of those persons’ beliefs. On the other hand, you might assimilate art to science, pointing out that though artists engage in creating things, it does not follow that their, or other art practitioners’ intuitions are good guides to what they have created. Shouldn’t we be approaching art ontology scientifically, as we do black-hole ontology? Or if not, shouldn’t we be as concerned about the status of our art-ontological intuitions as we are about our general metaphysical intuitions?

There are two general ways you might think art ontology should be done scientifically. The first is scientific in the vague but not unfamiliar sense that science has taught us that everything is physical. Thus, paintings are simply physical objects, just like apples, and though musical works raise difficult questions (if, as is the current consensus,

<sup>29</sup> Of course, some argue that scientific entities are socially constructed. But I take it that those theorists will not take issue with the thesis of the social constructedness of art objects.

they are abstract) they do so no more than numbers or laws, both of which are arguably necessary to science.<sup>30</sup>

The problem with this ontological view, sometimes called ‘aesthetic empiricism’,<sup>31</sup> is that it cannot hold up against some fairly basic applications of the epistemological argument.<sup>32</sup> There are some central kinds of property ascriptions to works of art that cannot be maintained on an empiricist ontology of art. Some of the best known illustrations of this point are doppelgänger cases, such as Walton’s *guernicas* and Martian symphonies, discussed above, Arthur Danto’s discussion of readymades, Warhol’s *Brillo Boxes*, and identical red canvases (1981), and Borges’s story about Pierre Menard’s *Don Quixote*, textually identical to Cervantes’s original (1964). Take Danto’s red canvases as a representative example. Danto describes a series of perceptually indistinguishable square red canvases. However, some of them are representational (one of Moscow’s famous plaza, one of the Red Sea shortly after the Israelites made it across), while some are not (a minimalist work, a symbolist meditation on nirvana); they differ widely in their expressive properties (compare the examples already mentioned); some are not even artworks (a canvas grounded in red lead, a prop created to illustrate Danto’s thesis). Such examples show that artworks are not simple physical things (or ‘simple’ abstracta) to be engaged with purely perceptually. In the face of widespread artistic practice, we must complicate the empiricist ontology of art. Such an ontology makes an ontological assumption (supposedly scientific) that is fair game, and must fall in the process of achieving our art-ontological reflective equilibrium.

<sup>30</sup> *Pace*, of course, Field 1980.

<sup>31</sup> See, for example, Currie 1989 and Davies 2004.

<sup>32</sup> My presentation of the following argument owes much to David Davies (2004: 40-2).

The second way in which you might think art ontology should be done scientifically takes contemporary linguistics as its model.<sup>33</sup> One might have thought that there was no better, indeed no other, place to find out about the nature of a language than from speakers of it. But though speakers' intuitions are used as data points from which to build linguistic theories, most people have no idea of the nature of their language faculty, and even have difficulty following an explanation of it.<sup>34</sup> Given that art, like language, is present in every human culture, and that there are arguably similarities between art works and forms across these cultures, it seems a hypothesis worth pursuing that art, like language, has roots in universal human psychology. Thus, to continue the analogy, although our art-ontological intuitions might be data worth recording, any theory we build out of those data is going to go well beyond the structuring of those intuitions into a coherent web.

That our capacity and desire to make art, or appreciate beauty, is an innate product of our evolutionary history, is a fascinating thesis, and I would not be surprised if it turned out to be correct. But I do not think that establishing that conclusion would render the present study obsolete, or unnecessary. Imagine someone engaged in a taxonomy of poetic forms. For some reason (imagine), no one has done this before. Our taxonomist has read a lot of poetry and followed critical debates in which there are terms for certain forms, but some of them are ambiguous, or overlap, or are used differently by different people. Our taxonomist decides that she can clear up this usage, and hence aid critical practice, by clearly defining many of these terms, along the lines of how they are

<sup>33</sup> Though there has been widespread interest in this approach to aesthetics recently, I am indebted to Georges Rey for suggesting that I consider it in this context.

<sup>34</sup> See, for one of many possible examples, Chomsky 1987.

generally used. This requires some paraphrase of certain critical judgments, and even of some apparent truisms. But she ends up with a classificatory system that allows her to describe the differences between a sonnet and a sestina. Now suppose someone tries to convince her that though her taxonomy is interesting, we will have to wait for a truly scientific theory of poetic form before we can lend her conclusions any credibility, and this scientific theory will render her armchair theorizing obsolete, anyway. She would surely be surprised by this suggestion. Could she be *wrong* about the difference between a sonnet and a sestina? It seems not. Perhaps empirical psychology can eventually tell us why we have these particular forms, and not others, or why they have the effects on us that they do. But it beggars belief that it could show us that, say, sonnets and sestinas actually share the same form, or that we had cross-classified them.

Musical ontology, at the level at which I investigate it in the following pages, is more complicated than formal poetic taxonomy. But it is almost as conventional. It would be interesting to learn to what extent our music-making springs from innate faculties, and how our musical practices are channeled by our shared psychology.<sup>35</sup> But it is highly unlikely that such factors will reach all the way up into the domain where we can ask such questions as whether jazz is a performance or recorded art. *That* we can only discover by investigating jazz practice.

#### IV. CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter I have defended the practice of musical ontology against the attacks of Aaron Ridley, indicated some positive reasons for engaging in it, and addressed some methodological concerns. My conclusions are that (i) musical ontology, far from being

<sup>35</sup> For some work suggestive of answers to these questions, see Lerdahl and Jackendoff 1983, Raffman 2003, and Tillman and Bigand 2004.

left till last, must in fact be done alongside any other musical theorizing, and that (ii) musical ontology can help settle otherwise intractable evaluative disputes, for example those between champions of different musical traditions, such as Western classical, rock, and jazz music.

## 2

### NOTHING NEW UNDER THE SUN? THE ONTOLOGY OF CLASSICAL WORKS

In the previous chapter, I defended the idea of engaging in musical ontology. In this chapter I survey and evaluate the major theories in the field over its brief history, and explain their relations to the theories defended in the rest of this dissertation, developing some of the methodological themes raised earlier.

#### I. DEFINITION, ONTOLOGY, AND DIFFERENT MUSICAL TRADITIONS

Two preliminary points of clarification are in order. First, I should note that questions of definition and questions of ontology are distinct. That is, when I offer an ontology of Western classical music, say, it is not intended as a definition of what it is for a piece of music to be a Western classical piece. On the one hand, Western classical music doubtless shares its ontology with other musical traditions, such as the vocal ensemble tradition of the New Zealand Maori, in which there are also enduring works that receive different, more or less authentic, better and worse, performances on various occasions. This neither makes Beethoven's Fifth Symphony a Maori vocal piece, nor the Wehi whanau's *Hinemoa* Western classical music. On the other hand, Western classical music is not ontologically uniform. Not only are different works for performance 'thinner' or 'thicker' than one another, depending on how many features of their wholly authentic performances are determined by the work (S. Davies 2001: 20), but there is an entire sub-



tradition, within the Western classical compositional world, of creating pieces that are not for performance at all. ‘Classical electronic music’ is the generally accepted name for the Western classical compositional practice that results in tapes (or other media) for playback rather than pieces for performance.<sup>1</sup> Of course, one could stipulate that ‘Western classical’ refers only to works for performance, and then attempt to provide some other criteria to distinguish Western classical from the Maori choral tradition and other performance traditions, but this would not show that Western classical music, as the term is usually understood, is ontologically uniform.

Two natural questions to raise about the project, given this *prima facie* independence of ontology and definition are (1) how we should evaluate proposed ontologies, and (2) what the point of proposing such ontologies is. Evaluation of ontological theories might seem difficult because, for instance, if electronic works are not counter-examples to a theory of Western classical music as a tradition of works for performance, you might wonder what *would* qualify as a counter-example. And if counter-examples are impossible, it seems that theories in this domain will be unfalsifiable. But this is too simplistic a view of the project. It is hard to imagine someone arguing that *all* Western classical music is for performance. As usual in philosophy, we must start somewhere, and ontologists of art start with the art practices they are interested in (D. Davies 2004: 16-24). There is a long-standing and central practice of *performing* works in the Western classical music tradition. The ontologist takes an awareness of this practice for granted, though she may point out various details in order to argue for specific theses. This basic agreement leaves plenty of room for

<sup>1</sup> In fact, there are non-electronic works for playback, such as Conlon Nancarrow’s works for player-piano. But the great majority of contemporary works for playback are produced electronically, hence the name.

counter-examples and disagreement. For example, in the next chapter I take issue with Stephen Davies's claim that works in the central practice of Western classical music are *for live performance*. I argue that this leads to an unfortunate and unnecessary view of the status of recordings in the classical tradition.

I addressed the question of motivations for engaging in musical ontology in the previous chapter, so here I will be brief. One reason for figuring out the kinds of things there are in a given musical tradition is simple interest in the tradition. Just as it is interesting to engage in formal analysis of a favorite piece, independently of whether you think it will increase your enjoyment in listening to it, it is interesting to 'take apart' the large-scale machinery of a cultural practice you are engaged in, to see what makes it tick. But in addition to this intrinsic interest, there is also the prospect of untangling confusions, or answering questions, that the practice seems to raise. These can be benevolent, as the issue of the status of recordings often is for classical music audiences, or more problematic, as the evaluative disputes between rock, classical, and jazz audiences sometimes are.

My secondary preliminary point is about the scope of this chapter. Because it is quasi-historical, and because until recently most philosophers of art discussed Western classical music exclusively, I have combined a review of the literature on general musical ontology with a discussion of the nature of the classical musical work. But the theories I discuss are often relevant to other musical traditions, *mutatis mutandis*. For instance, one dispute concerns how the sound structures with which works might be partially identified should be conceived – as sets or Platonic universals, say. This dispute is traditionally framed in terms of Western classical works for performance. But although I argue later

that rock music is unlike these works in being instanced in playings of recordings rather than live performances, it is still the case that such works cannot simply be identified with some concrete particular, such as my copy of the CD, for the reasons considered below. Clearly the view that classical works are sets of performances, for example, could be adapted for rock music, by claiming such works are sets of playback events.

## II. THE SIMPLE PHYSICAL OBJECT HYPOTHESIS<sup>2</sup>

One reason that much of the work in the ontology of art in the past few decades has been focused on music is that a musical work offers the clearest case of something not easily identified with a simple physical particular. For while it is at least initially plausible that a painting or sculpture, say, is simply to be identified with a particular paint-covered canvas or hunk of granite, no simple physical object can even intuitively be identified with, say, *The Rite of Spring*.<sup>3</sup>

The most obvious candidate for such identification is a score. There are three kinds of problems with identifying a work with its score. The first is that the work has many features that a score lacks, and vice versa. The work can survive the destruction of a score. A work has various sonic and musical properties, while a score has visual and typographical properties. A score is a set of instructions, like a recipe, directed at performers, but a work is not a set of instructions, and if it can be said to be directed at anyone, it is directed at an audience.<sup>4</sup> The second problem with identifying the work with

<sup>2</sup> The phrase is Wollheim's (1968), but has been used since, for example in Thomasson 2004a.

<sup>3</sup> Few of the following arguments against the simple physical object hypothesis, mentalism, and nominalism are original. Most are originally to be found in Ingarden 1986, Levinson 1980, Wollheim 1986, and Wolterstorff 1980, but have been rehearsed in various summaries, including most recently S. Davies 2003b, Thomasson 2004a, and Stecker forthcoming.

<sup>4</sup> For a defense of works for performance as sets of instructions, see Thom 1993: 48-52.

the score, from the point of view of a defender of the simple physical object hypothesis, is that scores are not simple physical objects. There are many *tokens* of the score of *The Rite of Spring*, but there is no particular physical object which is *the* score. *The* score is a *type* of representation. And if we are to open the door to types, there are more plausible types with which to identify a musical work, such as a type of sonic event. The third problem with identifying the work with a score is that works can exist in the absence of any scores. There are oral musical traditions, such as those of pre-colonial New Zealand Maori, where musical works are passed down from generation to generation, and receive various performances, just as in the Western classical tradition, but, unlike the Western tradition, without the mediation of a score. If musical works can exist in traditions *without* scores, then it is unnecessary to identify them with scores when scores *are* available. Presumably, works are the same kind of thing in each of these traditions, while there is also *another* kind of thing in literate musical traditions – the score.

A second candidate for identification with the work is a performance. Of course, being events, it might be argued that performances are not physical objects at all. But they are at least spatio-temporal particulars, making the suggestion in the spirit of the simple physical object hypothesis. This proposal is not subject to the second objection raised above against the identification of the work with the score; performances are not types.<sup>5</sup> But it is subject to variants of the other two objections. Any performance has properties that the work it is a performance of lacks. Many such properties are simple consequences of the fact that the performance is a spatio-temporal particular. For

<sup>5</sup> Of course, there are types of performances. In fact, to let the cat(egory) out of the bag, I will argue below that works are precisely performance types. But when people ordinarily refer to a ‘performance’ (unlike references to ‘the score’) they are usually referring to a particular performance.

instance, any performance will take a certain amount of time, while the work may not take any particular amount of time, rather admitting a range of times, as a result of admitting a range of tempi. (In Stephen Davies's words, 'performances are always thicker than the works they are of' (2001: 3).) Any performance happens in a particular place, while the work does not exist in any particular place. Every performance ends at some point in time, but the work (usually) survives the end of every performance. Most performances include wrong notes – notes not to be found in the work – while clearly the work cannot contain such errors.

I argued above that musical works can exist in traditions without any scores whatsoever. This argument is not easily made with respect to performances. It is difficult to understand why a tradition should be called a *musical* one if it does not include any performances (understood broadly so as to include instances of non-performance works, such as playings of classical electronic works). However, even granting the impossibility of a musical *tradition* without performances, clearly particular musical *works* can exist without receiving any performances. When a composer has sent her manuscript to the publishers, her work is finished, and *a fortiori* exists. It does not come into existence when it is first performed, nor does it fail to exist if it is never performed.

### III. NOMINALISM

Given these problems with identifying a musical work with a physical particular – a score or performance – some theorists have argued that a work should rather be identified with a set or class of such particulars. This kind of theory is usually called 'nominalist'. While it is possible to hold that works are sets of scores, or scores and performances, I will

investigate only the most plausible versions of nominalism, which take musical works to be sets of performances alone.<sup>6</sup>

A naïve nominalism holds that a work is simply the set of performances that the work receives. More or less technical objections can be raised against this proposal. One example of a technical objection, raised by Nicholas Wolterstorff (1980: 49-50), is that there can be no set at a particular time with a member that does not exist at that time. Since there are very few works whose performances all occur at the same time, the identification of works with their performance sets is implausible. The reason I call this objection ‘technical’ is that it relies on contentious general metaphysical principles, such as the principle of set membership explicitly stated, and a presentist theory of time, implied by Wolterstorff’s discussion. It is by no means obvious that an alternative conception of sets could not be defended, nor that past performances of *The Rite of Spring* do not exist. I will focus on less technical objections here for a number of reasons: First, they are less contentious, and thus stronger, than technical objections. Second, as a consequence, they can be decisive in a way technical objections never seem to be. Third, there are reasons to think that settling these questions would require defending a thoroughgoing basic metaphysical theory, and such a defense is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

One less technical objection is that if works are sets of performances, they must get bigger over time, as they receive more performances. But this is counterintuitive. If this is still a little technical, due to assumptions about the (non-)existence of future entities, then consider that even if all a work’s performances exist, some works will be

<sup>6</sup> As noted above, all I say here can be translated into talk of sets of *instances* for works whose instances are not performances, such as classical electronic works.

bigger than others in unintuitive ways. For instance, Chopin's *Minute Waltz* will be much bigger than Messiaen's *Turangalila-Symphonie*, since it will presumably receive many more performances over the course of time.

On any conception of sets, though, all works that receive no performances will have to be identified as one and the same, which is implausible – some unperformed works are justly unperformed, some tragically so. And, finally, a set has its members essentially, yet any work could have had more performances, and most could have had fewer. Thus works cannot be identified with sets of their performances.

Many of the above objections can be overcome by a more sophisticated nominalism about musical works. Following David Lewis's successful nominalist program (Lewis 1986), a work might be identified not with the set of its *actual* performances, but rather with the set of all its *possible* performances.<sup>7</sup> This modification at least makes much less plausible the objections that works change in size over time, and that the *Minute Waltz* is larger than the *Turangalila-Symphonie*. It also dispatches the objection that all unperformed works must be identified. (I will return to a variant of this objection below.) Some objections can be made to both the naïve and sophisticated nominalist view, however. On either view, a work appears to come into existence not with its composition, but rather with its first performance. This casts the work's

<sup>7</sup> The best-known musical nominalist is Nelson Goodman. While it is clear that he is a nominalist – 'the compliance-class [of a score] is a work' (1976: 173) – it is not clear whether he is a naïve or sophisticated one, since he is more concerned with the relation between a score and any given performance than with the nature of the work itself. Since a sophisticated nominalism is superior to a naïve one, it may be more charitable to read Goodman as a sophisticated nominalist. But since I argue that both kinds ultimately fail, it is perhaps of little interest to which kind he would actually subscribe.

Goodman has recently found an able defender in Stefano Predelli (1995, 1999a, 1999b, 2001). But, like Goodman, Predelli has (so far) had little to say about the nature of the musical work. Unlike Goodman, though, in addition to theorizing about the relation between score and performance, Predelli is concerned to attack realism about musical works (which I discuss below).

performers rather than its composer in the role of creator of the work. Furthermore, all of the work's subsequent (and possible) performers seem to play more important roles in the creation of the work in all its specificity than the composer. On either view, a performance's being *of* a certain work amounts to its being a (vanishingly small) *part of* the work. These are surely consequences to be avoided, if possible, by any ontology of music.

Perhaps the most serious objection to any nominalist account of musical works, though, is that many central kinds of statements about, or properties of, musical works cannot be translated into, or reduced to, statements about, or properties of, their performances – even all of their possible performances. For instance, *The Rite of Spring* was composed in 1913 by Stravinsky, is the last of his great early ballets, and begins with an ethereal bassoon solo, high in the instrument's range. None of these things are true of the set of all possible performances of *The Rite of Spring*. One can perhaps imagine a translation schema for claims of the first and second kinds into nominalist language. If no possible performance of *The Rite of Spring* takes place before 1913, for instance, perhaps that fact can be seen as a respectable nominalist alternative for the claim about the work's date of composition.<sup>8</sup> A translation of the second claim could then be constructed in a similar way. The third claim – about the bassoon solo at the beginning of the work – is less tractable, though. It is not the case that every possible performance of *The Rite of Spring* begins with an ethereal bassoon solo high in the instrument's range. Some begin

<sup>8</sup> Unfortunately for the nominalist, the apparent panacea of possibilia threatens to transform into a nightmare landscape here. For it seems *possible* that *The Rite of Spring* might have been composed in 1912. But then some possible performances *will* take place before 1913. I do not emphasize these problems here, since (a) they threaten to become technical, and (b) counterfactuals about the creation of works are problematic for every ontology of art. For a detailed discussion of modal considerations to be taken into account by a complete ontology of art, see D. Davies 2004: 103-26.



with squawky, clunky bassoon solos with notes in the high and middle ranges of the instrument and some sounds that are not notes at all. Some even begin with a disgruntled percussionist crashing his cymbals together. It may be that *most* of the possible performances begin with an ethereal bassoon solo, though it's hard to imagine how one could prove this (or, granting this, what the cut-off proportion of right notes to wrong should be), but it is *certain* that most of the possible performances include some wrong notes. Thus it is difficult to see how the nominalist's translation schema will avoid the consequence that *The Rite of Spring* contains some wrong notes – a claim arguably not simply false, but incoherent. It is *The Rite of Spring* itself that determines which are the right notes. *A fortiori*, there are no wrong notes in *The Rite of Spring*.

Of course, what one wants to say is that the correct or well-formed performances of *The Rite of Spring* begin with an ethereal bassoon solo – that a performance of that work *ought* so to begin. But it is not obvious how to cash out the notion of a correct or well-formed performance (non-circularly) without reference to something distinct from such performances. It might be argued that this role can be played by the *score*, rather than the work – for example, correct performances could be those that contain all and only the notes (etc.) specified in the score. One objection to this suggestion is that some works have no scores. Moreover, in traditions where a work is specified through an exemplar performance, rather than in a score, such a performance is still *a* (the first) performance of the work, and hence can be correct or incorrect – it can contain wrong notes.<sup>9</sup> The fact that musicians in the tradition can tell which are the incorrect notes, and

<sup>9</sup> A variant of this objection is available for literate traditions, of course, since (token) scores can contain errors.

what the (unplayed) correct notes are, shows that it is *the work* that is most plausibly seen as playing the role of arbiter of which performances are correct, and which incorrect.

I pointed out above that a sophisticated nominalist can avoid the problem with the naïve theory that all unperformed works must be identified. Because such works have different sets of *possible* performances, they can be unproblematically individuated. But a sophisticated variant of the objection is available. While most unperformed works at least *might* have been performed, perhaps there are some – more than one – that *could not*. However, given that a performance of a work need not be *correct* (for instance, it might include some wrong notes) it is hard to imagine what such a work would look like. It might be *possible* that a work that calls for an ensemble of five billion tubas be played,<sup>10</sup> and one could make a reasonable attempt to play – that is, one could give a passable performance of – a piece for solo violin that at one point specified five notes to be played at once, even though playing such a chord is impossible on the violin. If one specified a truly impossible work, however – for instance a piece for unaccompanied soprano that required fourteen-note chords, spanning four octaves, and including pizzicato effects and various organ registrations throughout – it could be argued that one had produced not a musical work, but a piece of conceptual art.<sup>11</sup> Thus a sophisticated nominalist might try to avoid the objection that all unperformable musical works must be identified as the same work by arguing that there are no such works.

But there is a danger for the sophisticated nominalist here. For consider again the piece written for an ensemble of five billion tubas. The sophisticated nominalist is saved

<sup>10</sup> Though I would be tempted to argue that such a specification (at least in this world) would not be of a musical work. See my comments about the work for solo soprano, below, and the final objection to nominalism, further below.

<sup>11</sup> Compare S. Davies 1997a, who makes a similar move with respect to Cage's *4'33"*.

from the identification of this work with every other unperformed work by the admission of possible performances into the set that constitutes the work. But by the same argument that the unperformable piece for solo soprano is no musical work, it might be argued that the specification of a piece for performance by five billion tubas results not in a musical work, but a piece of conceptual art. Its point surely derives largely from the immense distance between the actual world and the possible worlds where such performances take place. (Compare S. Davies 1997a.) I do not intend to settle this question here. I merely want to point out that it is difficult for the sophisticated nominalist even to consider the question. For a set of possible performances of the right kind (ignoring the nominalist's aforementioned difficulty in cashing out this notion) simply *is* a work, according to the nominalist. Considering the alternative I am suggesting here involves, again, reference to something distinct from the set of performances, something that looks like it must be the musical work.

#### IV. MENTALISM

Given the problems with identifying a work with any simple physical entity, or even a collection thereof, one might be tempted to explore a totally different kind of art-ontological proposal. R.G. Collingwood (1938) and Jean-Paul Sartre (1940) argue that works of art cannot be 'real' (simple physical) things, and thus must be mental entities of some kind.<sup>12</sup> Sartre argues that they are imaginary objects, Collingwood that they are total (i.e. multi-sensory) imaginative experiences. But their arguments are not those considered above against the simple physical object, and more complicated nominalist,

<sup>12</sup> Sometimes this view is called 'idealism'. I avoid that term since it is also used for other views. For instance, Ingarden (1986) uses it to refer to Platonism about musical works (a very different view, which I discuss below).

hypotheses. Rather, both Collingwood and Sartre argue that any experience of an artwork involves mental – particularly imaginative – acts. Any sensory data received from a simple physical entity, such as a painted canvas or an orchestra in action, must be synthesized and supplemented to be seen as the representation of a particular person, or a unified melody that is a version of a melody heard earlier. Thus the work of art we appreciate – including such elements as the representation of a particular person, or the development of a melody – must be a mental entity constructed by or in the mind of the artist or audience.

As Amie Thomasson points out, though, even ordinary perception requires the kind of synthesis and supplementation Sartre and Collingwood describe (Thomasson 2004a: 81). Thus, if their argument succeeds, it follows that just about nothing in our world is real; everything we see, hear, and touch is imaginary. In fact, Collingwood seems close to embracing this conclusion in places. His idea is that merely seeing a person is an aesthetic experience, and thus a work of art, just a much poorer one than the experience of seeing and painting the person, or engaging fully with the completed painting (which amounts to an imaginative reconstruction of the experience of the painter) (Collingwood 1938: 304-8). But this is surely to empty the term ‘work of art’ of any significance.<sup>13</sup>

Moreover, ignoring the arguments *for* the view of artworks as mental entities, there are problems with the thesis itself. Most obviously, as with the suggestion that a musical work is to be identified with its performance, if works of art are mental entities,

<sup>13</sup> Sartre seems to have a second, sketchier, realist view of musical works (as opposed to works in the other arts): ‘are there not some arts whose objects seem to escape unreality by their very nature?’ (1940: 278). I discuss realism about musical works below.

then they pop in and out of existence in a surprising way. We usually think of the *Mona Lisa* and Bartók's string quartets as having existed since their creation. But if these works are actually imaginative experiences of some sort, first undergone by the artist, then by various audiences, they exist intermittently. One could attempt to overcome this problem by proposing a nominalist mentalism – the theory that a work is a set of certain mental entities. But such a theory will be subject to objections similar to those raised against more standard nominalisms, above. Alternatively, one could identify the work with a *type* or *kind* of mental entity. But, as remarked with respect to the suggestion that works are types of score, there are more plausible entities, such as sound structures, with which to identify works if we are to admit abstracta into our ontology.

Another problem with a mentalist ontology of art is that my experience of the *Mona Lisa*, even if it is a total imaginative one, is surely different from yours, as both of ours are from Leonardo's. But in that case we have three works of art where we usually think there is only one. (We could pick just one of these as the true work, but such a view would have similar problems to the simple physical object hypothesis, in addition to a variant of the following objection.) This is not so much a problem of the multiplication of entities beyond necessity, as one of undermining the intersubjectivity of works of art. We think it is possible for different people to experience the same work of art. These experiences can differ, but they share a common object. While our various total imaginative experiences of the *Mona Lisa* share a common object, according to Collingwood that object – the canvas – is not the work of art.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Although this goes beyond our current concern strictly with the ontology of art, it is perhaps worth noting here that one might try to save Collingwood's general theory of art by transmuting his ontological claim into an experiential one. So, rejecting his mentalism, we might agree that the *Mona Lisa* is simply a painted canvas, or some closely related entity, and that Collingwood's talk of total imaginative experience should

A final objection to mentalism is that it makes the medium of the work irrelevant to an experience or understanding of the work. This is not an objection to Collingwood's specific, multi-sensory theory, but rather to the idea that an artwork in the painting tradition, for instance, is not a thing made of paint and canvas, but a mental entity – the same kind of thing as a work in the sculpture tradition. This is implausible since important artistic and aesthetic features of the work might depend upon its use of the medium. Roger Scruton, however, argues that music is unique among the arts in its material – sounds – being 'pure events'; we hear the sounds of music, but not as coming from any particular source (1997: 11-12). If Scruton were right, this would make music more resistant to the current objection, though that would surely not save the general thesis, and might not even be enough to defend its application to music alone. But in fact, Scruton's claim is implausible. We must hear the solo part of Brahms's *Violin Concerto* as being played *on a violin*. Many of its artistic and aesthetic properties depend on this (together with other factors, of course) (Levinson 1980). Thus, even in the case of music, the aesthetic or artistic importance of the medium militates against the view that works of art are mental entities.

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be glossed as an account of an ideal experience of the work – something like a complete understanding of it. A problem that remains for the theory, though, is that it has the consequence that every artist has a complete understanding of each of his works. For the total imaginative experience is the experience of creating the work – one of the reasons it is a multi-sensory experience. And it seems implausible that anyone – the artist included – has a complete understanding of any complex work of art. The theory could be further modified, of course, but then it would likely no longer be recognizable as *Collingwood's* theory of art.

## V. FICTIONALISM

Sometimes the theory that musical or other works of art are fictional entities is presented as a kindred alternative to nominalism and mentalism.<sup>15</sup> There are a number of ways to understand the claim that musical works are fictions, and I do not think any are substantive alternatives to the versions of mentalism and nominalism I have already considered.

One way to understand the claim that musical works are fictional entities is literally. On this reading, musical works are like Sherlock Holmes – something we seem to be able to refer to, and make truth-evaluable claims about, yet whose mode of existence is difficult to pin down. On this reading, fictionalism about musical works is either not yet a theory, or collapses into one of the other theories I discuss in this chapter. It is not yet a theory if it says nothing about what fictional entities are. It is then no more helpful than the ‘theory’ that Sherlock Holmes is a fictional entity. That is the problem to be solved, not in itself a solution.

However, as soon as one tries to explain what fictional entities are, one will provide a certain kind of theory. Some argue that fictional entities are *mental* entities. Some argue they are concrete *possibilia*, and hence provide a nominalistic theory. Yet others argue they are *abstract* objects of some sort. Thus there could be many types of fictionalism about musical works, but they will be no different from the various ontological theories I consider elsewhere in this chapter. It remains the case that all ‘fictionalist’ seems to be doing in the description of such theories (on this construal) is indicating that musical works are ontologically puzzling, like fictional entities.

<sup>15</sup> For instance, Stephen Davies presents Richard Rudner’s (1950) theory as fictionalist. See S. Davies 2001: 39-40, 2003b: 169-70.

A second way to understand the claim that musical works are fictional entities is sometimes suggested, however. On this construal, musical works are fictional in the sense that talk of works is a convenient fiction, but in fact is non-referring. Such a fictionalism might be labeled ‘eliminativism’. A prima facie problem for such a view is what discourse about musical works is convenient *for*. The most natural response is that it is a convenient way of talking about other things, such as scores and performances. Again, there are two ways to understand this view.

The first interpretation is that it is simply a nominalist theory of musical works. What we refer to with our talk of *The Rite of Spring* is just some set of its (actual or possible) performances. The second interpretation takes the claim of non-reference more seriously, maintaining that it is implausible to identify works with sets of performances, yet also that there is nothing else around to identify as the work (Rudner 1950). It is not clear to me how such a proposal would be preferable to a nominalism about musical works. Nominalism seems to preserve at least one central intuition – that there *are* musical works – at no greater cost than the fictionalism under consideration. The fictionalist might claim that to reduce all work-talk to performance-talk (or performance-set talk) is to eliminate musical works. This would require a defense of reduction as elimination – no easy task in my view<sup>16</sup> – but even if such a defense could be given, any such fictionalism would be open to the strongest objections to nominalism about musical works. Fictionalism, then, is a very weak contender for an ontology of musical works.

<sup>16</sup> There is no space to go into this issue here. Surprisingly little space has been devoted to it elsewhere, but see Silberstein 2002 for a helpful taxonomy of positions, and Thomasson 2001 for a sense of the non-triviality of the issue.



## VI. PROCESSUALISM

There is one theory of the ontology of art that, though marginal, has had two notable defenders, and is thus worth discussing, although it does not trade on any peculiarities of musical works specifically. It is the view that artworks are not the paint-covered canvases or strings of words that are the result of creative artistic activity, but rather that artworks are those creative activities themselves, those actions or events. I label these *processual* ontologies.<sup>17</sup>

The first major defense of this view was given by Gregory Currie (1989). Currie holds that an artwork is an action-type – a discovery of a certain structure via a certain ‘heuristic path’ (basically one particular way of discovering that structure). Thus all artworks are multiple, according to Currie, though at a higher level than the usual claim about musical and literary works. Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony is not just multiple in the sense that it can receive many performances, but in the sense that someone other than Beethoven might someday discover the same structure that Beethoven did, in the same way, and thus produce another instance of the work. The *Mona Lisa* is multiple in the same sense.

David Davies (2004) has expounded a slightly more intuitive processual ontology of art, at greater length than Currie. While my criticisms apply to both theories, I will take Davies’s ontology as my target, since I believe it is more intuitive than Currie’s. According to Davies, an artwork in any of the arts is ‘a performance that specifies a focus of appreciation’ (2004: 146). ‘Performance’ here is not intended to refer to a product of the performing arts, as it is commonly understood. The performance Davies refers to is

<sup>17</sup> I discuss this proposal in my 2005, from which parts of this section are drawn.

simply the action that results in what we normally take the artwork to be – the painted canvas or sculpted marble. ‘Focus of appreciation’, and its synonym ‘work-focus’, are Davies’s terms for ‘that which, as the *outcome* or *product* of a generative performance on the part of one or more individuals, is *relevant to the appreciation* of the artwork brought into existence through that performance’ (2004: 26).

Davies’s main argument for this theory is an extended ‘epistemological argument’ in his terms, of the sort outlined in the previous chapter. He argues that there may be ‘features of the generative performance that bear on the appreciation of the *work*, but whose so bearing is not captured by an account of how that performance affects the properties constitutive of the *focus* of the work’ (D. Davies 2004: 78). For instance, Davies quotes art historian Sir Kenneth Clark arguing that Turner’s use of color to depict light in his *Snow Storm* (1842) is ““a major feat of pictorial intelligence and involved Turner in a long struggle,” a struggle involving what Clark describes as years of ““experiments”” (D. Davies 2004: 82). We can see this struggle as part of *what Turner did* in producing *Snow Storm* – his *performance*, in Davies’s terms – but we cannot ascribe this achievement to, say, a particular paint-covered canvas. At best we can see it as a relational property of that entity, by way of its production being such a feat. Davies’s theory, by identifying the work with the generative performance that results in the work-focus, allows us to attribute such features directly to the work.

Davies argues further, using examples like Kendall Walton’s *guernicas*, discussed in the previous chapter, that the work-focus comprises ‘an artistic statement *x*...articulated in an artistic medium *y* realized in a vehicle *z*’ (2004: 157). Additionally, the specification of the work-focus completes the artwork in three senses: (1) it is the aim

of the creative process, (2) its completion marks one boundary of that process, and (3) it is central to our appreciation of the performance as having achieved something determinate (D. Davies 2004: 151). But notice what a strange perspective this gives the processual ontologist on our discourse about artworks. He may paraphrase many property attributions *ostensibly* to the work-focus as *actually* to the generative performance resulting in that focus, but his very terminology still acknowledges that that product is the focus of our appreciation. Moreover, that product comprises the artist's statement in the artistic and vehicular media in which she works, and its completion is the aim of the artist's creative actions. Now if your ontology says that works are a certain sort of thing, *P*, but that the focus of our appreciation, that in which the artist aims to embody her statement through manipulation of her chosen media, is a completely different sort of thing, *F*, it seems to me that somewhere something must have gone wrong.<sup>18</sup>

Amie Thomasson has two different arguments, based on recent work in the philosophy of language, for essentially the same point (2004a: 84-8). She first argues that art-kind terms like 'symphony' are unlike natural-kind terms like 'whale' in that they 'do not seem to be introduced by mere causal contact with independent denizens of reality, but rather to arise by stipulating their application to works of extant traditions meeting certain (perhaps vaguely specified) criteria' (Thomasson 2004a: 85). Thus it is not clear that a causal theory of reference will apply to art-kind terms.

If one holds a descriptive theory of reference of art-kind terms, however, then the reference of terms like 'symphony' is determined by the beliefs of speakers about

<sup>18</sup> Indeed, I argue in a later chapter that it is a necessary condition of being a work, as opposed to some other kind of art object, that an entity be the kind of thing that is a primary focus of critical attention in an art form or tradition.

the conditions relevant to something's being a symphony, and as a result radical revisions of such common-sense beliefs [such as those of the processual ontologist] cannot be correct, for any great shift from these will prevent whatever conclusions one reaches from being *about* symphonies. (Thomasson 2004a: 85)

Thomasson's second argument is independent of her first. It is that even if a causal theory of reference *does* apply to artworks, we cannot ignore the complex 'qua problems' that then arise. The basic qua problem is that in baptizing something, one is in causal contact with all sorts of things – a particular, several parts thereof, various temporal slices of all those, arguably various properties of all the above, and so on. Thus in order to successfully name something, the baptizer must have some general ontological category in mind – particular, event, or somesuch.

Similarly, would-be grounders of the reference of general terms such as 'painting,' 'musical work,' or 'novel' must associate the term with certain criteria enabling them to pick out the relevant kind of work of art rather than a kind of fabric, sound wave, paper, etc.... Since those ontological conceptions determine what (ontological) sort of entity is picked out by the term (if anything is), they are not themselves open to revision through further 'discoveries'.... Thus radical revisionary views like [the processualist's] can at best be seen as suggestions about how our practices ought to be revised (in a way that he would perhaps find more coherent and justified), not as descriptions of what sorts of things our familiar works of art 'really are'. (Thomasson 2004a: 87-8)

Though I present this argument (as Thomasson does) as an objection to processual theories like those of Currie and Davies, its target might be widened to include various of the other ontological proposals considered in this chapter.

### 6.1 *Salvaging something*

While I do not believe that a processual ontology of art can be the right theory, there is one central aspect of Davies's theory that can be salvaged. It comes from Davies's central argument against non-processual contextualist ontologies, such as Jerrold Levinson's (1980).<sup>19</sup> The ontology is contextualist because it makes constitutive of the work some aspects of the context of the work's creation. In particular, Levinson argues that a musical work is a *performed-sound structure-as-indicated-by-X-at-t*, where *X* is a person and *t* a time (1980, 1990a), but the view can easily be extended to other art kinds.<sup>20</sup>

Davies's criticism of this view is based on what he calls the 'work-relativity of modality', that is, the fact that our judgments about what counterfactual changes a work might undergo without becoming a different work vary from work to work (2004: 103-26). For example, Picasso's groundbreaking *Les Femmes d'Alger* could not have existed in a world without Cézanne's late works – an identical canvas in such a world would articulate too radically different an artistic statement – while it could quite happily exist in a world without Turner's late works (even if Picasso was actually well aware of Turner's oeuvre); precisely the reverse might hold for a canvas by a mediocre Turner-imitator. Warhol's *Brillo Boxes* are tied quite closely to a very specific art-historical context, while an amateur painter's mediocre *Prairie Landscape* from the same time and

<sup>19</sup> Other theorists Davies includes in this group are Timothy Binkley (1977), Arthur Danto (1981), and Joseph Margolis (1974) but Levinson is usually his representative target.

<sup>20</sup> I discuss the kind of theory, like Levinson's, that takes musical works to be abstract objects in the following section.

place could have been produced many decades before or after it actually was. A contextualism like Levinson's, Davies argues, does not have the flexibility required by such examples, tying, as it does, every work to either a particular context, or time and person.

Davies's alternative is to tie a work to an 'adequate characterization of [its] originating performance' (2004: 114), where this 'comprises just those actions on the part of the artist(s), and just those features of the performative context, that would be incorporated into such an adequate characterization of the motivated manipulations resulting in the artistic vehicle of the work' (2004: 154). That is, the performance that is the work is the series of intentional actions that the artist undertook in the process of producing the work-focus. This includes, in addition to more straightforward actions such as a successfully executed chisel cut, such actions as the production of drafts, experiments like those Turner engaged in on the way to *Snow Storm*, and the botching of parts of a canvas masked in a painting's final state.

Of course, Davies 'ties' the work to its generative performance by *identifying* it with that performance. But it seems to me that tying it Levinson-like would give him the best of both worlds. If a work were a thing-as-produced-through-performance-p, works would be (i) at core the kinds of things we ordinarily take them to be, (ii) contextualized, allowing the attribution of the right kinds of properties, (iii) in the flexible fashion permitted by Davies's notion of a performance. Davies is aware of this possibility, but argues that it is not a live option because there is no general way to characterize generative performances. The whole point of introducing them is to allow the high degree of individuality and particularity that we attribute to works through our appreciative

engagement with them. This makes generative performances unlike other essential relational properties, such as sunburn's essential property of having been caused by the sun (D. Davies 2004: 182-9, Davidson 1987). But I do not see the force of this argument. Artworks come about through more complex generative events than patches of sunburn, but that does not mean we cannot give a general characterization of generative artistic performances. Indeed, Davies gives just such a characterization later in his book (2004: 146-76). So, rather than converting to the performance theory, I think a contextualist could use Davies's insights about generative artistic performances to build a stronger contextualism. Of course, such a move can only be made if a theory such as Levinson's is independently defensible. I turn to such theories now.

#### VII. REALISM

A final possibility for what musical works could be – the one I favor – is that they are abstract objects of some kind.<sup>21</sup> I call this position 'realism' as opposed to nominalism, but I hope not to beg any questions by that term. Obviously, all of the positions I have considered thus far, with the exception of one unpromising variety of fictionalism, regard musical works as real things. But the view that works are abstracta perhaps respects more of our pre-theoretical intuitions about the nature of musical works, giving a non-deflationary or non-reductive account of them. The price of that intuitiveness is some troubling philosophical problems raised by the nature of abstracta. So, 'realism' can be seen as a label with both positive and negative connotations. Moreover, it is the name widely used for this general approach in the literature, where it is arguably the most popular position.

<sup>21</sup> Some kind other than sets or action-types, since I have investigated nominalism and Currie's processual ontology already.

As with the positions considered above, there is a variety of options available under the umbrella term ‘realism’. Some realists take musical works to be universals, some take them to be types, and some to be kinds. The debate within realism between these positions (and between realism and nominalism – arguably the second most popular theory) has centered around two problems. One is the problem of the creatability of musical works if they are abstracta. The other is how a performance with wrong notes can be an instance or token of the work it is of, since the *right* notes are presumably (partly) constitutive of the universal, type, or kind to be identified with the work. While I believe these are both genuine problems for the realist, I do not think either is solved by a musical ontologist’s making the right choice among universal, type, or kind for the species of abstractum to which musical works belong.<sup>22</sup>

To illustrate this point, I will briefly consider some disputes from within the realist camp. Those who argue that works are types claim the benefit that types share properties with their tokens. Just as each token of the Stars and Stripes has thirteen alternately red and white bands, the type also has thirteen such bands. This has the intuitive consequence in the musical case that Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony (a type) is loud just in case performances of it (its tokens) are loud (Wollheim 1986: 75-9, Howell 2002: 116). Two problems that arise for the view of musical works as types, though, are (1) that it is not clear how there could be incorrect performances of the work (tokens of the type that are nonetheless *not* loud where they should be) and (2) that it is not clear

<sup>22</sup> One important realist about musical and other multiple works of art whose theory I will not be discussing in detail is Roman Ingarden (1973, 1986). As I noted above, he is the source of many arguments against non-realist theories of musical works, but his positive theory is much less detailed than any of those I discuss in this section. Ingarden’s basic positive claim is that we need not locate musical works squarely either in the realm of concreta or eternal Platonic abstracta, that they are abstracta dependent on concreta in some sense. The theories I discuss in this section put meat on those bones. For a cogent exposition of Ingarden’s thought, see Thomasson 2004b. For a contemporary development of some of his ontological ideas in relation to literary works, see Thomasson 1999.



how such a type could be created by a composer (being an abstract object) (Predelli 1995, 2001).

The suggestion that works are norm-kinds has been made as a realist response to these problems (Wolterstorff 1980: 45-58, Anderson 1985, Levinson 1990a).

Paradigmatic kinds include biological species. Their advantages over types are (1) that they admit of incorrect instances (such as three-legged dogs), and that they admit of *predicate* (as opposed to property) sharing: to say that Beethoven's Fifth Symphony begins loudly is to say that every correct instance of it begins loudly, not that the abstract entity itself literally begins loudly. *Norm-kinds* are kinds that have been 'made normative' in some way by some person. So, for instance, although the kind of performance that a performance of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony is (one with all those notes in that order, etc.) pre-dated Beethoven's act of composition (since it might have been instanced before that act), by that act Beethoven made it the case that one *ought* to instance that kind in order to perform his work.<sup>23</sup> This is supposed to solve the problem of the creatability of the work.

This proposal has its own problems. The very existence of even the paradigm cases of norm-kinds – biological species – is disputed (S. Davies 2001: 42). The notion of 'making normative', and hence the nature of a 'norm-kind', has never been satisfactorily explained (Predelli 2001). But the main point I want to make here is that none of these problems, or their proposed solutions, seems to be intimately connected to either the concept of a type or that of a kind. If predicate, rather than property, sharing is the right model for works, why can we not say that types and their tokens share predicates rather

<sup>23</sup> In fact, I do not countenance all the assumptions in this sentence, as will I make clear below; I am merely reconstructing the realist dialectic here.

than properties? If the notion of a norm-kind *can* be made sense of, why not allow norm-types? As Stephen Davies puts it, these disputes ‘could be seen as reflecting disagreements about the nature of types just as easily as they can be regarded as concerning differences between types and kinds’ (2001: 42). It seems to me that we could make the same point about the view that works are universals.

Despite this effective equivalence between the claims that works are universals, types, or kinds, in what follows I usually talk of works as types, since (i) the term ‘universal’ is closely associated with a kind of abstract object that cannot be created, and I wish to discuss the question of creatability from as neutral a standpoint as possible, and (ii) the view of works as kinds is closely associated with Wolterstorff’s theory of norm-kinds. I am sympathetic with critics of the notion of ‘norm-kinds’ and ‘making normative’ as insufficiently clear, and thus wish to distance myself from such theories. On the other hand, I do not wish to subscribe to the view of property sharing that type theorists often do, since I find that equally obscure.<sup>24</sup> Wolterstorff is right to see works as sharing predicates, but not strictly properties, with their instances. But, again, I do not see why that view cannot be co-opted for types. Thus, my choice of the term ‘type’ is more pragmatic than substantive, and the reader should feel free to substitute ‘kind’ or ‘universal’ (as I sometimes do) if it makes her more comfortable.

If these views are equivalent, though, they are equally open to attack. As I said earlier, the two biggest problems a realist theory of musical works faces are the creatability of such things, and the possibility of incorrect performances of them. I deal

<sup>24</sup> For an example of such obscurity, see Robert Howell (2002) and John Bender (1991) on patterns.

with the creatability problem at length below. Let me say something first about incorrect performances.

When philosophers originally turned their attention to musical ontology in the middle of the twentieth century, though they nominally acknowledged the performance aspect of the Western musical tradition, their attention was not focused on the nature of performance. As a result, and perhaps for understandable reasons of beginning with as simple a model as possible, they tried to explain the nature of works, and the relation between a work and its performances, on the model of a simple property and its instances (Goodman 1976, Wollheim 1986, Wolterstorff 1980). This quickly led to the problem that either performances must be note-perfect in order to be of the works they purport to be of, or all works must be identical (Goodman 1976). Wolterstorff's norm-kind proposal is the best-known attempt to solve this problem, but, as noted above, it has never been made sufficiently clear.

In the meantime, however, some theorists turned to a closer examination of the nature of performance (for example, Levinson 1987, S. Davies 1987, Thom 1993, and Godlovitch 1998). One of the things that came to light about performance during these discussions was that there is an intentional relation between a performance and the composer's specification of the work the performance is of. A performance can only be of a particular work if the performers intend to follow the instructions that the composer set down as to be followed in performing that work. Spelling out exactly this necessary condition on work performance is not a simple task. Mere wishing cannot count as the right kind of intention, or else I could perform *The Well-Tempered Clavier*. Questions of intentional content also arise, since I am performing the relevant work when I think I am

playing Purcell's *Trumpet Voluntary*, but am in fact playing a piece by Jeremiah Clarke (because I mean to follow *these* instructions, which I mistakenly take to have originated in a compositional act of Purcell's).<sup>25</sup> But what is important for our purposes here is just that some such intention is necessary for a performance to be of a work, that an account of such intentions could be given, and that such an account would allow for the possibility of someone's meeting the intentional requirement, yet playing some wrong notes (Predelli 1995). For what it means to say that there is such an intentional requirement is in part to say that the type or kind of performance a work *is* is one that is intentionally related to the composer's compositional act. Such a type of performance is still tokened when the performers mean to follow all the instructions in the score yet make a few mistakes.

Thus, I think the problem of incorrect performances is relatively easily solved once we have an understanding of the relation between a performance and the work it is of.<sup>26</sup> This understanding is also helpful in considering the problem of the creatability of musical works – the problem to which I now turn.

### *7.1 The creatability of classical musical works*

In the debate over the creatability of musical works, realists fall into two broad camps. Platonists argue that musical works are 'pure' types, not essentially tethered in any way to anything spatio-temporal, such as a composer, time, or musico-historical context. The other camp, which I label 'creationism' for want of a better term, is that musical works are abstract structures that *are* in some way tethered to one or more spatio-temporal

<sup>25</sup> For a detailed discussion of these issues, see S. Davies 2001: 163-6.

<sup>26</sup> I discuss this relation further in the following chapter.

beings.<sup>27</sup> All parties agree that there is a strong intuition among the musically well-informed that a musical work is a created object, an object brought into being at some time by some action of its composer. The Platonist argues that given the abstract nature of musical works, and the incoherence of the notion of an abstract object's being brought into existence by human action, we are compelled to revise our intuition about the creatability of musical works, as we are often compelled to revise a pre-theoretical intuition in the face of other considerations. We should move to the position that musical works are *discovered*, like other abstract objects, such as mathematical theorems and laws of nature. Moreover, the Platonist attempts to show how much of the intuition can in fact be preserved by considering the nature of what composers do, which, while not strictly *creation*, is nonetheless *creative*, and no less impressive or praiseworthy for that. The creationist argues that the loss of the strict creatability of musical works is a high price we are not compelled to pay, since the notion of a created abstractum is not in fact incoherent. Thus we can retain the theoretical benefits of the view that musical works are abstract objects admitting of various concrete instances, while maintaining our pre-theoretical intuition that they are created in the usual sense by their composers. I will begin with an assessment of the Platonists' 'damage-control' – that is, how palatable they can make the claim that, despite our intuitions, musical works are not created, but are instead eternal existents. Then I will move on to an assessment of their arguments that, palatable or not, we are compelled by metaphysical considerations to acknowledge that musical works cannot be created.

<sup>27</sup> 'Aristotelianism' has been suggested as an alternative title, but this suggests too strongly that a non-Platonist is committed to a particular ancient-historical metaphysical view, which is not the case. My 'creationism' is intended as an umbrella term for a variety of metaphysical views with the (intended) consequence that musical works are creatable.

### 7.1.1 The war of intuitions: Attempting to softening the blow of Platonism

Platonists marshal a number of observations in their attempts to soften the blow to our intuition that musical works are created. The first is that discovery and creation often go hand in hand. Peter Kivy adduces a number of examples in an attempt to show that at least in practice, if not conceptually, creation and discovery are often conflated, and thus that part of our intuition about musical works' creatability can be explained as a slip from constant conjunction to necessary connection. Claiming that '[e]very invention is part discovery' (Kivy 1983a: 39), he points out that A. A. Michelson had to invent the interferometer in order to discover the speed of light, and that the Wright brothers had to discover some principles of aerodynamics in order to create their historic airplane. But these claims do not point to the moral Kivy intends us to take away from his tales. Even if we do slip too easily from one concept to the other, Kivy gives us no reason to suppose the Platonists are not the ones mistakenly slipping from the creation of musical works to the discoveries that often accompany them, rather than the creationists slipping the other way. But the fact that we can all agree that Michelson's actions comprised an invention which he then used to make a discovery, and that the Wright brothers did just the opposite, shows that we are quite capable of keeping the concepts separate when we investigate various cases (Fisher 1991). Thus this argument does not affect the creation intuition.

But perhaps this observation is most charitably seen as a prelude to the second observation: that discovery can be creative. This is used both to explain why the creation intuition is so tenacious and also to salvage the esteem in which we hold composers, which some creationists argue would diminish were we to accept that composition is a

process of discovery rather than creation. Julian Dodd gives the example that ‘Einstein’s discovery of the facts which comprise the Special Theory of Relativity required him to be hugely imaginative and inventive. Although he did not bring these facts into existence, Einstein’s discovery of them was the result of undeniably creative thinking’ (Dodd 2000: 428). There are two problems with Dodd’s observation, however. The first is that the creationist can simply agree with it. As with Kivy’s claims that discovery often goes along with creation, and *vice versa*, Dodd’s claim that discovery is often creative does nothing to diminish our intuition that musical works are created. The second problem also tells against the first observation, above. It is that although discovery *can* be creative, it is not always so. Now, not all composition is creative, either. As in all arts, most of what is produced in the musical world is merely competent, or worse. Perhaps the same can be said for discoveries, thus this observation does not by itself tell against Platonism. But the point of Dodd’s observations is to detract from our intuition that musical works are created by pointing out that if they are rather *discovered*, the fact that discovery can be creative can explain the creation intuition away. However, this strategy will only work for those works whose composition really is creative, and our intuition is one about *all* musical works, just as we have the same intuition about all paintings, and all armchairs for that matter, whether their creation is creative or not.

The third Platonist observation is that discoveries can be as important and valuable as creations, and thus that we need not think any less of the musical works we hold dear or, again, their composers, should composition turn out to be discovery rather than creation. Kivy’s and Dodd’s examples of famous discoveries are all brought to bear on this point: Pythagoras’s theorem, Michelson’s discovery of the speed of light, Andrew

Wiles's proof of Fermat's Last Theorem, and Einstein's discovery of Special Relativity. About this last example, Dodd claims that '[o]ur opinion of Einstein's genius would not be any greater if we were to regard the facts stated by his Special Theory of Relativity as created by him rather than discovered by him' (Dodd 2000: 433). Though I think the main point here is defensible, it is worth observing the oddness of Dodd's hyperbolic remark. Suppose it *were* in fact the case that Einstein did not *discover* that  $E=mc^2$ , for example, but rather that he *created* that fact, *made it the case* that the universe followed the laws of Special Relativity. I suspect that our opinion of Einstein *would* be somewhat greater in such a case. Einstein, in this imagined scenario, would be a kind of god. I point this out merely as a corrective to the counter-productive extremities to which some writers on this topic are pushed in their efforts to make their positions seem more intuitive.

There is a second, more serious consideration that arises when we consider cases like those of Wiles and Einstein, though. Kivy has claimed (see above) that '[e]very invention is part discovery' (Kivy 1983a: 39). In itself, this claim is disputable. Given the number of patents awarded every year, is it really plausible that each resulted from a new discovery? Your answer will be 'yes' if you think that what is being discovered in each case is, in part, a pre-existing abstract object. But, firstly, that is not the sort of discovery Kivy is implying, with his example of the aerodynamic principles uncovered by the Wright brothers. And secondly, that response begs the question of whether invention (creation, composition) is discovery or creation. Creationists might comment similarly on the cases of discovery Platonists marshal in order to show the high esteem in which we hold discoverers. We hold Newton in high esteem, even though it seems that many of the



‘facts’ he ‘discovered’ are actually falsehoods. We certainly value the creativity and imagination that went into Newton’s work, but it seems that we also value his theories themselves (false though they may be), and a creationist can claim that part of what we value is the theories Newton *created*, with as much intuitive force as the Platonist can claim that we value Beethoven’s discovery of his Fifth Symphony.

The fourth Platonist observation is that despite our intuition that composers are creators, we have a competing intuition that they are discoverers. Kivy gives the example that ‘[i]t seems...quite plausible to regard [the *Tristan* chord] as a discovery of Wagner’s rather than his invention’, and argues that it is an irresistibly slippery slide from this point to the conclusion that Wagner discovered *Tristan und Isolde* (Kivy 1983a: 46). Again, though, the creationist can accept much of what Kivy is claiming, while holding firm to the creation intuition. For, as we have already seen with the Wright brothers, creation can go hand in hand with discovery. One of the things Wagner must have discovered in order to compose *Tristan und Isolde* was how surprisingly many uses that particular combination of four scale degrees can be put to (Levinson 1990a: 219). But it does not follow that he discovered *Tristan und Isolde*, any more than the creationist’s contention that *Tristan und Isolde* was created by Wagner implies that the *Tristan* chord was. The opera is a work of art, the kind of thing the provenance of which is under dispute. The *Tristan* chord is not a work of art, and thus the fact that it was discovered (granting for the sake of argument that this *is* a fact) is neither here nor there.

These considerations are relevant to a charge R. A. Sharpe makes against Platonism (Sharpe 2001). Dodd summarizes Sharpe’s argument as follows (Dodd 2002: 385):

- (11) For a person A to discover an entity O, it must be possible for A to have been mistaken.
- (12) For Beethoven's composition of the Archduke Trio to have been a discovery of the work, it must have been possible for Beethoven to have been mistaken in his compositional act.
- (13) But Beethoven could not have been so mistaken.
- So (14) Beethoven's composition of the Archduke Trio was not a discovery of the work.

Sharpe gives examples like those Platonists are fond of supplying – Pisano's discovery of the Fibonacci series, and Wiles's discovery of a proof of Fermat's Last Theorem. The latter is a helpful example for Sharpe, since Wiles thought he had discovered such a proof in 1993, but then realized he was mistaken. Dodd criticizes Sharpe's argument by pointing out that there are discoveries and discoveries. When I discover an old coin in the backyard, there's no possibility that I am mistaken.<sup>28</sup> Thus Sharpe's premise (11) is false, since it is only true of a certain sort of discovery – one that is the result of *inquiry*, where 'inquiry' means a search for something answering a particular description. Musical composition, according to the Platonist, is a species of creative, not inquisitive, discovery, so it should come as no surprise that it is impossible for composers to be mistaken.

Our considerations of Kivy's preceding argument should give us some pause here. For it seems plausible, despite Dodd's claims, that composers *do* engage in inquiry, do

<sup>28</sup> Of course, this depends on how the situation is described. It's possible that I thought it was a Spanish doubloon, and was mistaken, but this is not the characterization Dodd has in mind. I can't be mistaken about the fact that I've found this very thing, extreme sceptical scenarios aside.

set out to solve particular problems. Sometimes they succeed, and sometimes they fail. To give just two examples from the musical-ontology literature: Jerrold Levinson points out that in his *Quintet* op. 16, Beethoven ‘was interested in solving problems of balance between piano and winds – a nominally incompatible array of instruments – and succeeded in his own individual way’ (Levinson 1980: 78); Stephen Davies argues at length that within Beethoven’s *Eroica* symphony ‘there is a working out of a balance between the nature of the materials and the exigencies of the form’ (Davies 2002: 354). Many composers have grappled with these same problems, and probably some of them have mistakenly thought they solved the problems in the works they composed. Thus we can disagree both with Sharpe that composition never involves discovery, and with Dodd that the discoveries it does involve are never the result of inquiries. But none of this impinges upon our intuition that musical works are created.

The upshot of this Platonist attempt to convince us we have as strong a competing intuition that composers make discoveries as our intuition that they are creators is that we can agree that we think of composers as sometimes making discoveries, but maintain that this does not imply that it is the works they compose that are their discoveries. That is, although we may have an intuition that composers are discoverers (one that I think is *not* as strong as our intuition that they are creators) this discovery intuition is not in competition with our creation intuition, since the objects of these actions are different. We may think composers make discoveries about instrumental balance, formal possibilities, harmonic options, and so on, but this is compatible with our intuition that they create their compositions.

A final observation the Platonist can make to soften the unintuitiveness of his

position is that *no one* creates *anything* in the strongest sense of the term – creation *ex nihilo* – thus it is no diminution of composers’ labors to point out that they are not creators (Kivy 1983a: 40). But this is surely an equivocation. As we observed at the beginning of this section, we have a relatively secure grasp on the distinction between discovery and creation, as those terms are ordinarily used. You can discover something that already existed – such as America – and you can create something new by bringing it into existence – such as a chair. Neither of these concepts is that of creation *ex nihilo*, but it does not follow that they are equivalent in any way. It might be that our estimation of composers would not fall were we to agree that they were discoverers rather than creators, but this *would*, as the Platonist must agree, be a change in the way we conceive of composers. We conceive of them, as we conceive of other producers of artworks, as creators – not *ex nihilo*, but creators rather than discoverers nonetheless.

The observations that Platonists offer in an attempt to soften the blow to our intuitions that would result from accepting their view of composition as discovery rather than creation are not, in sum, very satisfying. A creationist can accept a reasonable formulation of most of them without budging from the intuitive position that musical works are created. The facts that discovery and creation often go hand in hand, that discovery can be creative, that discoveries and the people who make them can be as important and valuable as creations and their creators, that we think and talk about discoveries in music as well as about creations, and that no one creates anything *ex nihilo*, in no way imply that musical works are discovered rather than created.

#### 7.1.2 The war of intuitions: Considerations in favor of creationism

There are a number of observations supplied by creationists in favor of creationism over

Platonism that are at the same general level as those given above on behalf of the Platonists. The first is simply the statement of our intuition that composers are creators of their works – that they add items to the world, like painters and builders do (though their items are of a different ontological kind). I believe this intuition is a strong one, and that it should be unaffected by the considerations given above in favor of Platonism. It remains to be seen whether the intuition can take its place in a coherent metaphysical theory of musical works. However, at the level of pre-theoretical intuitions, our creation intuition weighs heavily in the balance in favor of creationism over Platonism.

A second observation creationists make is that artists stand in a unique possession relation to their works, a relation that does not hold between a discoverer and his discovery. ‘Columbus’s America wasn’t...his in virtue of his discovering it. But Ives’s symphonic essay *The Fourth of July* is irrevocably and exclusively his, precisely in virtue of his composing it’ (Levinson 1990a: 218). Some Platonists take this charge very seriously, and attempt to show that for various reasons musical works are special kinds of discoveries that only their composers could plausibly have made (as opposed to the ‘bare metaphysical possibility’ of someone else having made them (Kivy 1983b: 69-73)). But I think the right attitude to take here is that of Julian Dodd, who argues that ‘[j]ust such an “essential intimacy” exists between, say, Pythagoras and the theorem that bears his name. The theorem is *Pythagoras’s*: he was the creative genius who first discovered it, and it will always be associated with him’ (Dodd 2000: 432). To the extent that this observation will tell against Platonism, it is just a restatement of the original intuition: we think that a unique possession relation holds between a composer and his work because we think that composers *create* their works, rather than discover them.

Peter Kivy considers a related criticism of Platonism that I am not sure any creationist actually makes. It is that it seems impossible that certain (perhaps all) works should have been composed much earlier than they actually were. But if they were just there to be discovered, it's not obvious why this should be so. As Kivy goes on to point out, though, it does not take much thought to realize that discoveries – especially the ones we value most – are in the same boat (Kivy 1983b: 70-2; see also Dodd 2002: 387-9). The facts, if they are such, that Special Relativity describes have been around at least since shortly after the Big Bang. But Einstein's discovery of them relied on his having internalized a lot of recent mathematics and physics. There was the 'bare metaphysical possibility' of someone's discovering Special Relativity a hundred years earlier than Einstein, but the contingent circumstances made it extremely unlikely. Similarly, in the realm of composition, the fact that we find it difficult to imagine how Mozart could have composed a work with the sound structure (not to beg any questions) of *Pierrot Lunaire* does not show that the work could not be an eternal existent. This point is clearly related to the fact, noted above, that composers *do* engage in inquiries. For in composing *Pierrot*, Schoenberg relied on the harmonic (and other) innovations of many composers who preceded him. So the observation that musical works seem to be tethered in some way to their musico-historical context does not tell against Platonism.

A parallel criticism of Platonism points out that one corollary of the theory is that the same work could be composed by more than one person. Because of the reasons considered above, it seems likely that such co-composition would be the result of two composers working in the same musico-historical context, but rather unlikely to occur at all. Still, it is possible. On the other hand, there are counter-arguments a creationist can

appeal to in order to show that such co-composition is in fact *impossible*.<sup>29</sup> But simply at the level of intuitions, I do not see this as adding much strength to the creationist's case. If Platonism is preferable on theoretical grounds, the (pretty bare) possibility of co-composition is a small price to pay. I am not convinced that our pre-theoretical intuitions favor the impossibility of co-composition, anyway. We seem quite content, for instance, with holding both the intuitions that inventions are creations, and that two people can independently invent the same thing. This is not to say that that is an ultimately coherent view, just that the observation that Platonism allows for co-composition adds no weight to the intuitive case against it.

The last criticism of Platonism on the basis of our intuitions about the creatability of musical works takes a step back and looks at the creation of musical works in the context of the other arts. The argument is that in other arts, such as painting and sculpture, we believe that artists create their works, and so it gives unity to our theorizing about the arts if we hold on to our intuition about musical works' creatability (Levinson 1980: 66-7, Trivedi 2002: 75-6). Dodd responds to these claims by presenting creationists with a dilemma (Dodd 2000: 433, 2002: 383-5). The first horn, which is surely the one they are most tempted to grasp, acknowledges that painters and sculptors create their works, but points out that painting and sculpture are arts whose works are concrete individuals. The creationist acknowledges that musical works are of a fundamentally different ontological kind – they are abstract objects of some sort. But this means we should not expect theoretical unity across the arts. The second horn offers the creationist the theoretical unity he desires, but at a price he can't afford. Dodd argues that we might

<sup>29</sup> For this debate, see Jerrold Levinson 1980: 78-86 and 1990a, and Stephen Davies 2001: 76-86.

achieve theoretical unity across the arts by seeing all art works as abstract objects – paintings, for instance, being types with just one instance.<sup>30</sup> But, of course, according to Dodd this means that unity is achieved in that *no* art works are created – all are discovered, for the same reasons he argues that musical works must be.

There are a couple of ways a creationist can avoid this dilemma. One is to argue that the second horn is misdescribed. If the creationist can give a coherent metaphysical picture according to which some abstract objects are created, then the claim that paintings and sculptures are abstract objects need not disturb the creationist. (A nominalist will similarly argue that the way to grasp the first horn is to show that, ultimately, musical works are concrete objects like paintings and sculptures.) I consider creationist attempts to draw such a metaphysical picture in the following section. A second response to the dilemma is to argue that although Dodd is right to claim that the ontological diversity of the different arts provides no reason to suppose musical works are created on the basis of the creatability of paintings, he is wrong to suppose that this scotches the argument for theoretical unity. What he misses in his criticism of the argument is that *if* musical works are created as are other works of art, this will provide some unity in our theorizing about the arts. This will be, *ceteris paribus*, an advantage of such a theory over others that propose that the works of some arts are creatable, while those of other arts are not. Consider a parallel example: a theory that posits two different types of fundamental particle, both of which have mass, has more unity than a theory predictively equivalent, just as elegant, etc., but that posits one type as having mass and the other as not. Other considerations must be taken into account, of course, but this consideration should not

<sup>30</sup> This, of course, is exactly what Gregory Currie argues (1989), as discussed above.



thereby be ignored.

In sum, none of these arguments, for or against Platonism or creationism, is very strong. The arguments in favor of Platonism often exhibit *ignoratio elenchi* – a creationist can accept their conclusions without budging from his position that musical works are created. The arguments in favor of creationism point out intuitions we could preserve only if Platonism were false, but those intuitions are not strong enough to merit rejection of a substantive argument that Platonism is the only defensible metaphysical view of musical works as abstract objects. I now turn to such an argument.

### 7.1.3 The metaphysical debate<sup>31</sup>

The debate between Platonists and creationists about the metaphysical status of musical works can usefully be viewed in terms of an inconsistent triad of propositions:<sup>32</sup>

- (A) Musical works are created.
- (B) Musical works are abstract objects.
- (C) Abstract objects cannot be created.

Platonists reject (A) on the basis of arguments for (C), and try to soften the blow to our creation intuitions as we have seen above. Creationists, then, must refute any arguments Platonists have for (C), and ideally provide an account of how abstract objects can be created.<sup>33</sup>

Platonism has recently found a very able defender in Julian Dodd, and it is his

<sup>31</sup> The following debate gets ‘technical’ in the way that I eschewed in earlier sections. However, here I am considering technical objections to the position I defend, rather than technical objections to the positions I reject, thus I believe I should be more circumspect about ignoring them here.

<sup>32</sup> In fact, this triad can be used to frame a debate between Platonists, creationists, and nominalists. But having considered nominalism above, I focus on the competing realist theories here.

<sup>33</sup> Nominalists, of course, deny (B) and try to explain away our apparent references to abstract works as references to concrete objects and events.

arguments for Platonism and against creationism that I will now consider. While he contributes to the debate over the damage done to our creation intuitions by Platonism, his more important contribution to the view is an extended argument in favor of the view that abstract objects cannot be created. He summarizes the argument as follows (Dodd 2002: 381-2):

- (5) The identity of any type K is determined by the condition a token meets, or would have to meet, in order to be a token of that type.
- (6) The condition a token meets, or would have to meet, in order to be a token of K is K's property-associate: *being a k*.
- So (7) The identity of K is determined by the identity of *being a k*.
- So (8) K exists if and only if *being a k* exists.
- (9) *Being a k* is an eternal existent.
- So (10) K is an eternal existent too.

A creationist can in principle attack any one of these premises in order to defuse the Platonist attack. But the weakest point of the argument is premise (9), and it is on this and the reasons Dodd gives in its support that I will focus.

The main support Dodd gives for (9) is what he calls 'an intuitive theory concerning the existence of properties. The theory in question, simply stated, is that the property *being a k* exists if and only if it is instantiated now, was instantiated in the past, or will be instantiated in the future' (Dodd 2000: 436). As for its intuitiveness, when it comes to the metaphysics of properties I doubt we have any pre-theoretical intuitions beyond the existence of concrete particulars and their having properties. But Dodd also has some arguments in favor of the view. The first is that it steers us between a Scylla

and Charybdis of alternative views. The Scylla is

the doctrine of transcendent properties: the view that the question of whether a property exists is utterly independent of the question of whether it is instantiated...Charybdis, on the other hand, is the idea that properties exist only when instantiated: a view which has properties switching in and out of existence as they come to be, and then cease to be, instantiated. (Dodd 2000: 436)

But without further argument, Dodd is open to the charge that these theories of the existence of properties are not a Scylla and Charybdis, but rather a false dichotomy. He, perhaps rightly, sees his theory of property existence as preferable to the two alternatives he considers, but he offers no argument for these three theories' being the only games in town. A creationist may, for instance, argue in favor of a view of properties that sees certain properties – for instance, those essentially involving contingent beings – as coming into being only when the contingent beings they involve come into being. This view would not entail that the existence of such a property is 'utterly independent of the question of whether it is instantiated', for it is linked to this question by way of questions about whether it could *possibly* be instantiated. Nor would it entail that 'properties exist only when instantiated'. It suggests there may be different criteria for property existence than simply whether a property is, has been, or will be instantiated.<sup>34</sup>

This brief look at the kind of theory the creationist will need to provide in order to retain works' creatability helpfully brings out two aspects of Dodd's theory of properties. One is the *principle of instantiation*. This is the principle that there are no uninstantiated properties – that is, properties that are not instantiated at any point in time. The other is

<sup>34</sup> A version of this view – that property existence is tied to the possibility of something's being the correlative way – is defended in Levinson 1978 and 1992.

the *principle of eternity*. This is the principle that what properties there are exist eternally – properties do not come into or go out of existence. Note that in order to refute Dodd’s argument, it would be enough for the creationist to refute the principle of eternity. Let us look, then, at Dodd’s arguments for this principle.

One argument that often seems implicit runs as follows:<sup>35</sup>

(15) Properties are abstract objects.

(16) Abstract objects do not exist in space or time.

(17) Causation is spatio-temporal – that is, the relata of the causal relation must exist in space and time.

So (18) No properties are caused to exist.

This argument engages with some heavyweight issues in metaphysics, particularly the nature of abstract objects and the nature of causation. In a recent paper, Ben Caplan and Carl Matheson (2004) grapple with some of these issues in relation to Dodd’s views on musical works. On the nature of abstract objects, they argue that Dodd’s claims that abstract objects are non-spatio-temporal are more or less question-begging, since a creationist will not accept such a view of abstract objects. They claim that the Platonist needs ‘another way of cashing out the distinction between abstract and concrete objects, one that is acceptable to [creationists and Platonists] alike’ (Caplan and Matheson 2004: 118). But this seems too much to ask of a philosophical opponent. On any charitable interpretation, Dodd does not simply pluck this characterization of abstract objects out of the air to suit his current purposes. It is a widely held metaphysical view that many argue

<sup>35</sup> The following formulation of the argument is mine, not Dodd’s.

is well motivated.<sup>36</sup> The burden is on the creationist to provide an alternative conception of abstract objects if that is what he requires.

On the issue of causation, Caplan and Matheson point out that one serious contender for a theory of causation posits *events* as the relata of causal relations, and holds events to be *sets* of a certain kind. But then abstract objects are the relata of the causal relation, rendering (17) false. This seems a weak argument. There are other theories of causation and events on offer, and Caplan and Matheson do not provide any arguments in favor of the views they describe. Now they seem to be in danger themselves of being accused of picking their metaphysics to suit their conclusion. As Caplan and Matheson are fond of saying, the settling of this issue requires ‘some serious metaphysical work’ (2004: 119 and *passim*). Without that, it is open to a Platonist simply to subscribe to another respectable theory of causation or events that does not result in abstract objects’ being the relata of the causal relation. On the other hand, as I noted above, Dodd’s argument for the principle of eternity is implicit, so it is not clear that the burden of proof lies at the creationist’s doorstep. I will have something to say about the status of these general metaphysical commitments in art-ontological debates near the end of this chapter.

A better criticism Caplan and Matheson offer is that Dodd is inconsistent on whether he accepts premise (16) (Caplan and Matheson 2004: 122-3). For although he insists that all properties are eternal, he grants that some abstract objects, namely, some sets, come into and go out of existence, thus existing temporally. For example:

once the Eiffel Tower was built, the singleton containing the Eiffel Tower thereby

<sup>36</sup> See, for example, Lowe 1999: 210-27, and the references given there.

came into existence, but the fact that such sets can come in and out of existence does not violate the principle of the causal inertness of abstracta: the causal process in this case involved people and bits of metal, the coming to being of the set being an ontological free lunch. (Dodd 2002: 397)

Here, Dodd seems to reject (16), that abstract objects do not exist in space or time. Sets with temporally initiated concrete objects as members come into and go out of existence, and thus exist in time. To hold on to his conclusion (18), then, he must replace the general claims in premises (15) and (16) with a more specific claim:

(19) Properties do not exist in space or time.

(17) Causation is spatio-temporal – that is, the relata of the causal relation must exist in space and time.

So (18) No properties are caused to exist.

This replaces the issue of the nature of abstract objects with the issue of the nature of properties in particular.

Dodd subscribes to David Armstrong's theory of properties (Dodd 2000: 436, n. 18). This is an immanent, or 'Aristotelian', view of universals. It combines the *principle of instantiation*, mentioned above, with *naturalism*, a view that entails that universals exist only in their instances, that is, within the spatio-temporal realm. This is opposed to a transcendent, or 'platonic' view of universals, whereby they exist outside of space and time, and not in their spatio-temporal instances (Armstrong 1989).<sup>37</sup> One consequence of such a view, which Dodd does not acknowledge, is that in the absence of further

<sup>37</sup> A neglected third option is that some universals may exist in time, but not in space (the question of their spatial location being a kind of category error). Such universals would not exist in their spatio-temporal instances. I discuss this option further, below.

argument, immanent universals would seem to exist very much in space and time. It seems quite natural, if universals exist only in their instances, to say that they begin to exist when they begin to be instantiated, and cease to exist when they cease to be instantiated. If Dodd wants to resist this conclusion (which appears to commit him to the Charybdis of intermittent properties discussed above), he must explain how universals' existence when they are not instantiated in space and time is consistent with his naturalism. He may claim that the eternal existence of properties, like the existence of sets, is an 'ontological free lunch'. But this is not a very satisfying answer, since it is usually available to one's opponents in some form in any metaphysics debate where its use is tempting (Thomasson 2001).

If properties can have temporal beginnings, as suggested above, then the creationist has made some headway. If there is a type for every property, and *vice versa*, and properties have temporal beginnings, then we are part of the way to an explanation of how types can be created. But Dodd might grant the temporal initiation of properties, and hence types, and yet resist their creatability, again on the basis of the nature of causation and abstract objects. For even if some abstract objects are brought into being by spatio-temporal events, as he admits the singleton containing the Eiffel Tower is, and as the above considerations suggest some properties are, Dodd might argue that this 'being brought into being' is not creation. That is, Dodd could retreat to the position that musical works are temporally initiated, but that it does not follow that they are caused or, *a fortiori*, created.

Caplan and Matheson offer three ways to respond to this suggestion. The first is that the suggestion is inconsistent with the principle that things that come into existence

must be caused to exist. Such a response seems to be an appeal to a version of the principle of sufficient reason. It is thus a weak response, since there are no compelling reasons either *a priori* or *a posteriori* to subscribe to this principle (Mackie 1982: 82-7). The second response is that on a counterfactual analysis of causation, the coming into being of an abstract object in the way described *just is* an instance of causation. Had people not acted in such a way as to construct the Eiffel Tower, the singleton containing it would not have come into existence. Therefore, the people who caused the Eiffel Tower to come into existence also caused the singleton containing it to come into existence. This is a weak response for the same reason that Caplan and Matheson's appeal to the event-based theory of causation is weak. It is open to Dodd simply to appeal to some other theory of causation.

But Caplan and Matheson's third response is stronger, for it allows granting the retreating Dodd his claim that temporal initiation does not imply causation. The response is that even if we grant that the people who built the Eiffel Tower did not strictly *cause* its singleton to exist, the singleton still came into existence *as a result of* their actions; even if we grant that Beethoven did not strictly *cause* his Fifth Symphony to exist, it still would not have existed had he not engaged in his compositional activity. Thus this third response is a version of the second, without the counterfactual theory of causation.

[R]ecall that the creatability requirement is supposed to be motivated by untutored intuitions. Insofar as there is a distinction to be made between *causing* something to come into existence (in the strict and philosophical sense) and *bringing* it into existence (in the loose and popular sense), people do not have intuitions about what can, or cannot, be *caused* to come into existence; rather, they have intuitions



about what can, or cannot, be *brought* into existence. (Caplan and Matheson 2004: 123)

If the argument thus far has been sound, then we have seen that properties, and hence types, are creatable in a sense that respects the creation intuition. But that is not enough to show that musical works are created by their composers during the act of composition. For a musical work, if a type, is a type of *performance*. The complex property that is the property-associate of the type is a property that performances instantiate, or possess. But if, as Dodd's principle of instantiation implies, properties come into existence when they are first instantiated, then a musical work only comes into existence when it is first performed. And this would make the first performers of a work its creators, rather than the composer. Moreover, my remarks above suggest that properties come into and go out of existence as they are instantiated. This would have the further odd consequences (i) that a musical work does not persist through time, but pops in and out of existence, according to whether and when it is being performed, and (ii) that it is brought back into existence at each performance by whoever is performing it. All of these consequences seem to violate corollaries of the creation intuition.

There is a further odd consequence of Dodd's adherence to the principle of instantiation, one which can be turned into a *reductio* of his position. By subscribing to the principle of instantiation, he denies the existence of uninstantiated properties. But if musical works are types of performance, then works that go unperformed do not have their property-associate instantiated. It follows that neither the property nor its type-associate, the work, exist. But that means that the composer of the work could not have discovered it, composition being discovery for a Platonist. Thus, on Dodd's view, any

work that has not, is not, and will not receive a performance has not in fact been composed.

#### 7.1.4 A new creationism

But I am not committed to the principle of instantiation. I will now sketch an alternative metaphysical picture to the one Dodd provides. Its first element is the neglected third option for the mode of existence of abstracta, noted above. We are not compelled to choose between abstracta that exist outside of space and time, and those that exist in their instances – firmly within space and time. Another option is that (some) abstracta exist in time, but not in space. This option is often ignored in surveys of the possible meaning of ‘abstract’ (for example, Lowe 1999: 210-16), but not always (for example, Rosen 2001). It is not obvious why temporal, but non-spatial, existence should be considered more problematic than non-spatiotemporal existence.<sup>38</sup> Investigating this option might be seen as part of a program Amie Thomasson suggests of broadening the class of entities metaphysicians take interest in:

In short, if, rather than trying to make works of art fit into the off-the-rack categories of familiar metaphysical systems, one attempts to determine the categories that would really be suitable for works of art as we know them through our ordinary beliefs and practices, the payoff may lie not just in a better ontology of art, but in a better metaphysics. (Thomasson 2004a: 90)

Subscribing to this view of the mode of existence of musical works (or other abstracta)

<sup>38</sup> Compare spatial, but non-temporal, existence, which is hard to make sense of.

I should also note here that my talk of ‘modes of existence’ is metaphorical. I take existence to be univocal. As Lowe puts it, ‘[t]o exist *in* space and time is not to have a special kind of *existence* – for the notion of existence, like that of identity, is univocal. Rather, it is just to have certain sorts of properties and relations – spatiotemporal ones’ (Lowe 1999: 212). The ‘mode of existence’ I am suggesting we consider is just something’s having temporal, but no spatial, properties.

immediately puts paid to the problems of intermittent existence. For, on this view, the work does not exist in its instances, thus there is no need for it to go out of existence when there are no instances of it around. Its existence in time, on the other hand, allows it to begin to be at a certain point – a key requirement for creatability.

The second element of the view is a *principle of possible instantiation*, intended as an alternative to Dodd's principle of instantiation. According to the new principle, a property exists at any time that it *could* be instantiated.<sup>39</sup> If, as I argued earlier, the type of performance a work is includes an intentional link to the compositional act of its composer, then such a performance becomes possible with that act of composition. So the other aforementioned problems with Dodd's account do not apply to my suggestion – works come into existence with their composition, not performance, and unperformed works are easily individuated.

I should say a little about the kind of possibility my principle invokes. There is a sense in which it is possible for there to be a performance of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony right now. Perhaps no one has in fact done the requisite organizing, rehearsing, and so on, but someone could have. In this same sense, it is *not* possible for there to be a performance of Beethoven's *Tenth* Symphony right now. No amount of organization or rehearsal will be sufficient, because there is nothing to rehearse, nothing to organize a performance of. Why? Because, of course, Beethoven did not compose a tenth symphony. The reason this sense of possibility needs to be distinguished from others is that Beethoven *might have* composed a tenth symphony, had he lived longer, or had different priorities. And since he might have composed such a work, it might have

<sup>39</sup> A more careful formulation of this claim, suggested by Jerrold Levinson, is that a property, *being  $\varphi$* , exists at time  $t \equiv$  it is possible for something to be  $\varphi$  at  $t$ .

been performed. (There are possible worlds where Beethoven composed a Tenth Symphony and then attended its première.) Thus, it is the sense of ‘possible’ in which it *is* possible to perform Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony, but is *not* possible to perform Beethoven’s Tenth, that is appealed to in my principle of possible instantiation.<sup>40</sup>

I have articulated an alternative picture to Dodd’s, but I have not argued for it. At best I have shown that it is a coherent alternative. Why, then, should anyone subscribe to my view rather than Dodd’s? Precisely because my view respects the creation intuition. Dodd might respond that an intuition only counts as a reason to subscribe to a theory *prima facie*, or *ceteris paribus*. He would claim that neither of these conditions is met by the creation intuition. Nobody aware of the debate can claim that we are still evaluating the creatability of musical works at first glance, and Dodd would say that, given his arguments, things other than the creation intuition are no longer equal. We cannot hold on to our creation intuition in the face of his arguments about the uncreatability of abstracta.

My response to this begins with recalling my earlier arguments that Dodd’s case depends on controversial general, or fundamental, metaphysical theses – on ‘technical’ points, to invoke my earlier term.<sup>41</sup> There are two ways to avoid relying in a question-begging way on such theses. One is to wait for the more fundamental metaphysical disputes to be solved. Another is to solve them yourself. Taking the former path involves giving up musical ontology for the time being (and, if the history of metaphysics is

<sup>40</sup> This sense of possibility is closely related to the sense in which Saul Kripke suggests there could be no unicorns: ‘no counterfactual situation is properly describable as one in which there would have been unicorns’ (Kripke 1980: 156). No counterfactual situation is properly describable as one in which Beethoven’s Tenth Symphony is being performed. This sense of possibility might also be seen as related to Armstrong’s ‘outer sphere’ of possibility (1997: 165-9), though that notion is much more technical, and thus less ready to hand for my purposes here. But see also David Lewis’s discussion of ‘alien possibilities’ (1986: *passim*).

<sup>41</sup> In this he is not alone, as my above comments on Caplan and Matheson’s work indicate. For another example, see Robert Howell 2002.

anything to go by, for the foreseeable future). The latter path gives you something to do while waiting for the fundamental metaphysical questions to be answered, but doesn't seem likely to bring the dispute to a close any earlier.

In light of the fact that disputes such as those between Dodd and his critics<sup>42</sup> are unlikely to be resolved anytime soon, given that their resolution depends on the resolution of more fundamental metaphysical disputes, we *are* back to the point where things other than the creation intuition are equal. Thus the intuition has force once more – not *prima facie* force, but (even better?) force after reflection.

#### VIII. CONCLUSIONS: ONTOLOGY AND ONTOLOGY

In this chapter I have engaged with earlier writers on the topic of what kind of thing a work of Western classical music is. I have argued that the most defensible, albeit defeasible, view is that such a work is an abstract object – a type or kind of performance, created by an act of composition.

In future chapters, however, as I investigate what kind of thing a classical recording, or piece of rock, or jazz music might be, I will for the most part leave this traditional metaphysical vocabulary behind. This is because the questions I will go on to consider, and their answers, lie at a higher, less fundamental metaphysical level than the question I have been considering in this chapter. For instance, the thesis that rock works are recordings for playback, rather than works for performance, is neutral with respect to more fundamental metaphysical theories about the nature of the type-token relation. If the nominalists turn out to be right, then talk of types is simply a convenient way of talking about tokens. If the realists turn out to be right, type-talk is about quite different things

<sup>42</sup> For example, Howell (2002), who defends creationism differently from Caplan and Matheson, but by similar reliance on controversial metaphysical theses, and Trivedi 2002.

from tokens. But which of them is right will not bear on the fact that rock works are a different kind of type from classical works – one for playback rather than performance.<sup>43</sup>

The independence of ontological theories at each of these different levels should come as no more of a surprise than the independence of scientific theories from fundamental ontological theories, or for that matter the independence of music analysis from musical ontology. The true fundamental ontological theory had better make room somewhere for the existence of planets, and indeed most fundamental ontological theories are neutral with respect to the existence of planets.<sup>44</sup> Theories of musical ontology had all better make room for melodies, and the most fundamental of them had better make room for works for performance.

<sup>43</sup> A corollary of this fact is that my arguments in what follows will be less technical than those considered in this chapter.

<sup>44</sup> Despite what some of their adherents say. See again Silberstein 2002 and Thomasson 2001.

### 3

#### **AUTHENTIC RECORDING PRACTICE: CLASSICAL PERFORMANCES AND RECORDINGS**

In the previous chapter, I argued that works of classical music are types of performance. A corollary of this is that instances of such works are performances, since they are the tokens of this type. Such a conclusion might give the contemporary classical audience-member pause. For the most common mode of access to classical works for most people today, regardless of their geographical location or socio-economic status, is through recordings, and recordings and performances seem, on the face of it, to be quite different kinds of things. The most obvious ontological difference is that a performance is a singular event, while a recording is a repeatable type. There are particular tokens of a recording usually referred to as ‘copies’; we might each have a copy of Mstislav Rostropovich’s recording of the Bach cello suites. Furthermore, there may be many playings of a single copy; I might listen to my copy every morning. But what I will be most interested in here, and what I will refer to as a ‘recording’ unless otherwise indicated, is the type behind each of these kinds of token – the sound-event type that is encoded on each copy and heard on each playback of a copy.

Given my thesis that instances of classical works are performances, and in light of the point just made that performances are singular events while recordings are types, classical audiences might wonder whether in listening to recordings they are truly gaining

access to instances of the works those recordings purport to be of. I argue in this chapter that classical recordings – that is, recordings of classical works as they are typically made – are correctly thought of as giving the listener access to performances, and thus instances of the works they purport to be of.<sup>1</sup>

My case consists of two parts. The first is the transparency of recordings. Kendall Walton has argued that photographs are ‘transparent’: ‘to look at a photograph is actually to see, indirectly but genuinely, whatever it is a photograph of’ (1997: 60). The main argument for this thesis is that photographs are ‘counterfactually dependent on the scenes they portray...[and that the] counterfactual dependence...is independent of the photographer’s beliefs’ (Walton 1997: 68). Walton’s original statement of this view (1984) has generated much discussion.<sup>2</sup> However, even Walton’s best critics grant some version of the transparency claim – that in some sense we see the objects captured by a photograph unmediated by intentions in an important respect (Warburton 2003). Thus, although there is doubtless more to be said on the topic, I will take for granted (i) that photographs are transparent in the way Walton argues and (ii) that there are no relevant differences between mechanical image-reproduction and mechanical sound-reproduction. That is, recordings are as transparent as photographs; just as we see things in or through photographs, we hear things on or through recordings.<sup>3</sup> The relevance of this point for my thesis in this chapter should be clear. Just as in looking at a photograph we see a single

<sup>1</sup> I first discussed these issues in my 1998: 20-77. Some of the material in section 2 is fairly close to its original form there, but the rest has been thoroughly reworked.

<sup>2</sup> For a start, see Martin 1986, Warburton 1988, Currie 1991, Carroll 1996, Friday 1996, and Walton 1986 & 1997.

<sup>3</sup> I should note that when Lee Brown (2005) argues against the transparency of recordings, it is not Walton’s sense of ‘transparent’ that he has in mind. Rather, he is arguing against the sonic indistinguishability of a playback event and the sonic event that is its source.



person, even though the photograph itself is a type with many tokens, so in listening to a recording we hear a single performance, even though we may listen to it several times.

The second part of my case is the more difficult to argue. It is my response to the obvious objection that even granting recordings' transparency, we cannot claim to hear a performance through a recording – as they are typically made, at least. For classical recordings are not sonic snapshots of single performances, but rather collages constructed out of many takes, electronically tweaked to sound unlike anything one would have heard had one been present in the recording studio. The remainder of this chapter is an extended response to this objection, arguing that despite the constructed nature of classical recordings, they are still correctly conceived of as recorded performances.

One distinction I will use in making my case is that between an 'active' and 'phenomenal' performance. These are not two different *kinds* of performance, but rather two distinct *elements* of any performance. As Jerrold Levinson notes, there is 'a well-entrenched *process/product* ambiguity in regard to the concept of a performance. On the one hand, there is the *activity* of producing sounds for an audience; on the other hand, there are the *sounds* that are produced' (1987: 378). I call the activity or process the *active performance*, and the resulting product, the sounds we hear, the *phenomenal performance*. Levinson goes on to claim that

the thing primarily judged seems to be product rather than process, achieved result rather than activity of achieving it. This is not, however, to imply that one can judge the product in this case – a performance – in *ignorance* of or in *isolation* from the process that issues in it. (1987: 387-9)

The relevance of these points for my thesis should also be clear. In what follows, I argue that the phenomenal performance we hear on a recording is connected in the right way to the active performance of the musicians in the studio, so that we are justified in claiming that we hear a performance *simpliciter* when we listen to a classical recording.

For clarification, it is helpful to contrast my view of the relationship between classical works and recordings with that of Stephen Davies, who argues that classical works are of the ontological kind *work-for-live-performance* (S. Davies 2001: 20-36). I argue instead that classical works are for performance *simpliciter*, and that there are two kinds of performance – live and recorded. This makes my view more attractive than Davies's, I believe. For if classical works are ontologically for-live-performance, then a recorded performance of a classical work cannot authentically instance it. But most classical audiences and musicians seem to think that a studio recording of a classical work does give us access to a genuine instance of the work.<sup>4</sup> Davies seems to recognize this, and hedges a little, saying that 'such talk relies on our willingness to treat the representations of performances found on recordings as acceptable substitutes for live performances' (2001: 319). Of course, our pre-reflective intuitions that classical recordings give us access to work instances may be wrong. But, other things being equal, this conformity with our intuitions is an advantage of my account.

Since it is live performances that have been discussed most extensively (indeed, almost exclusively) in the literature, I will begin with a characterization of them. Then I will move on to a comparison of recordings with live performances.

<sup>4</sup> I address the parallel problem for Davies's view of rock ontology in a later chapter. On Davies's account, live performances of rock songs cannot be authentic instances of the songs they purport to be of, because those songs are works for-studio-performance on Davies's view.

### I. PERFORMANCES OF WORKS

A live work-performance is an event. It involves a person or group of persons intentionally following some composer's work-determinative instructions in order to bring about an instance of that work for some audience (S. Davies 2001: 196-7).

Questions can be raised about each element of this analysis. The element most discussed in the literature is which of the composer's instructions are work-determinative. I will not enter into that debate here. For what it is worth, I am in broad agreement with Stephen Davies (2001) on this point. The musical conventions of the context of composition place limits on what a composer can make determinative in a work, but (a) those conventions change over time so that, for instance, composers in the Romantic era were able to determine more features of their works than were their Renaissance predecessors, and (b) the conventions allow for some flexibility – not all Romantic composers had to, nor did they, determine the same elements to the same degree as each other, or even in all their works.

Much less has been said about the other elements of a work performance. Davies argues that there are three necessary conditions that jointly suffice for a performance's being of a work: '(1) [T]he performance matches the work's content, more or less; (2) the performers intend to follow most of the instructions specifying the work, whoever wrote them; and (3) a robust causal chain runs from the performance to the work's creation' (S. Davies 2001: 196-7).

There is some vagueness in Davies's first two conditions. As I suggested in the previous chapter, following Stefano Predelli (1995), a strong reading of 'intention' can remove this vagueness. That is, a full-blooded notion of intending to follow a set of

instructions will exclude the cases everyone wants to exclude – my ‘intending’ to play an entire symphony by myself, or even the ‘Chaconne’ from Bach’s second partita for unaccompanied violin – while allowing for wrong notes in performances by people capable playing the works they perform. Of course, the appeal to such a theory of intentions is a promissory note – one I have no intention (full-blooded or otherwise) of cashing out. But there are at least theorists working on the notion of intentional action. This, it seems to me, is preferable to leaving the vagueness in our account of performance – a vagueness that I think no one knows how to cash out. Once we have imported this full-blooded conception of intention, we can discard Davies’s first condition altogether. For, now, the notion of intentionally following the work-determinative instructions guarantees the right kind and degree of matching.<sup>5</sup>

What about the vagueness in Davies’s second condition, that the performers must intend to follow only *most* of the work-determinative instructions? I would propose eliminating this also. This will have the effect that performances by people seriously intending to follow all but one of a work’s determinative instructions are not performances of that work. But this is a bullet I am prepared to bite. There are unavoidably some performances that are not instances of works, as I argue with respect to classical music below and with respect to jazz in a later chapter. Moreover, since my appeal to full-blooded intentions allows for performance errors I am at least not in the uncomfortable position some writers on this topic have been in, trying to characterize

<sup>5</sup> Might not even a full-blooded intention be foiled? What if lightning were to strike midway through a performance? In such a case, the performers could not continue to intend to perform. The relevant intention is something bound up with the agent’s action, not some sort of strong wish directed at the future.

work-performance in terms of a completely accurate work-instance, while admitting that some work-performances are not completely accurate.<sup>6</sup>

Davies's third condition can be eliminated along with the first. For merely by characterizing the instructions followed as 'specifying the work', he has already implied that there is a robust causal chain running from the performance to the work's creation. Such a causal chain is what makes the instructions work-determinative, just as the right sort of causal chain makes my tokening of 'Nostradamus' a reference to a particular individual, despite my potential ignorance of any other way of referring to him (Kripke 1980). But Davies includes the condition, as earlier passages of his book make clear, to exclude cases where the causal chain has been corrupted, and the performers are assiduously following instructions that are not actually those the composer issued in determining the work.

There are two kinds of such a case. The first is that mentioned in the previous chapter, where the performers intend, for instance, to perform Purcell's *Trumpet Voluntary*, but in fact perform Jeremiah Clarke's work, which was for a long time misattributed to Purcell. However, these cases are already covered by the second condition, since it does not talk of works' names or their composers, but simply of their determinative instructions. Thus there is no confusion of the relevant kind in the *Trumpet Voluntary* case. However, with some earlier works, the causal chain from composer to performer has not been merely diverted in this way, but more insidiously corrupted. This is the second kind of case. In scores' being copied in various ways down the years, errors can creep in, such that the score in front of a performer does not contain the

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Levinson 1987.

determinative instructions of *any* work. In such a case, a performance correctly following the instructions before one does not result in an instance of any work.<sup>7</sup> At this point, how we should amend Davies's conditions depends upon our aims. If we want, as Davies seems to want, a set of conditions necessary for a given performance's being of a given work, then we can either leave in the reference to instructions 'specifying the work' in the second condition, and eliminate the third condition as otiose. Alternatively, we could talk only of some 'set of instructions' in the second condition, and include the third condition.

## II. PERFORMANCES AND RECORDINGS

One thing an analysis such as Davies's takes for granted is an understanding of what a performance *simpliciter* is. But given my interest here in the relations between performances and recordings, I would like to examine the notion of performance. Notice, for instance, that in the case of a group of musicians' playing from a corrupted score, what results is still a *performance*, though it is not a *work* performance, since there is no work being performed. I will argue in a later chapter that in jazz, performance without a work being performed is the standard case.

The two analytic philosophers who have written most extensively on the nature of performance are Stan Godlovitch (1998) and Paul Thom (1993). While Godlovitch and Thom both focus on performances of works, one can relatively easily excise the conditions requiring the presentation of a work from their accounts to extract a general characterization of performance. Such a characterization can be illuminated by investigating the distinction between *playing* and *performing*.<sup>8</sup> It is not an easy thing to

<sup>7</sup> It might be argued that these are no longer even instructions, but I ignore that issue here.

<sup>8</sup> This way of putting the distinction idiomatically excludes singers and conductors, since while they are said to perform, they are not said to *play* anything. However, the same distinction between performing and

say what it is for someone to play a musical instrument. It would appear to be a matter of intentionally making music, and it is not an easy thing to say what music is.<sup>9</sup> I will take the notion of ‘playing’ for granted, and focus on the distinction between playing and performing. To see that these are different we need merely note that while all performing involves playing, there are instances of playing – for example, instances of practicing – that are not instances of performing.<sup>10</sup> What conditions must be met to transform an event of playing into a performance? I will argue here that they are mostly intentional conditions, though this necessitates rejecting some other proposals.

### 2.1 Performance unities

The first kind of condition that Godlovitch, Thom, and following them, Stephen Davies, have discussed is spatial and temporal unity or continuity conditions. The basic idea is that performing is not like novel-reading. You cannot just stop and start when you like. A performance must be a continuous event. Similarly, a performance must have spatial unity. We do not perform the Bartók violin duos if I play the first violin part in my bedroom just as you are playing the second violin part in your office, even if this simultaneity is not a coincidence (Thom 1993: 171-85, Godlovitch 1998: 34-9, S. Davies 2001: 184-6). But there are problems with expressing these conditions more exactly. The performance of some works requires relatively separate performing groups, such as the larger and smaller string orchestras required for Vaughan Williams’s *Fantasia on a*

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non-performance music-making can be made for those musicians, and I intend the general claims I make to cover singers and conductors as well as instrumentalists.

<sup>9</sup> For a start, see S. Davies 1997a and Levinson 1990b.

<sup>10</sup> I ignore the hardest case for these assumptions: John Cage’s *4’33”*. This work is the focus of S. Davies 1997a, who in fact argues that it is *not* a musical work. If he is right, then Cage’s piece is no counterexample to what I say here.

*Theme by Thomas Tallis*; some works contain ‘general pauses’ where no one plays for a non-metrical period of time; and time must be taken between movements of many pieces even in ideally continuous performances.

Another condition on performance is a requirement of unity in the performance group. To take Stephen Davies’s example, when one hears forty string players performing *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik*, it will usually be the case that one is hearing but one performance. However, it *could* be the case that two twenty-strong groups have double-booked the hall and, neither yielding nor agreeing to cooperate with the other, one instead hears two simultaneous, spatially contiguous performances. Davies concludes that ‘[i]t is better...to identify the performance group on a particular occasion in terms of their cooperative enterprise’ (2001: 185). To return to the spatial and temporal conditions, I would argue similarly (and here I depart from Davies) that the performers’ intentions can do much of the work that we want done by those conditions. For what unites the two string orchestras in performing Vaughan Williams’s work, yet divides the groups in Davies’s Mozart case, is their shared intentions, rather than any particular spatial relations between them. Their spatial proximity is a result of their intention to perform together.

What then of my deviant duo case, though? If we *intend* to perform the Bartók duos while spatially separated, am I not now committed, counter-intuitively, to calling our separate playings a single performance? I am not. For there is more to what one must intend than merely to play together, in order to perform. One thing that is aimed at in performance, which the spatial and temporal continuity conventions help achieve, is a phenomenal unity – a unitary sonic event that *can be heard* as such by an audience. A



group of people is not producing a single musical performance if they know that not all their contributions can be heard at once. It is this phenomenal unity which is sacrificed in my deviant duos case.

Much has been made of the fact that in the recording studio the spatial and temporal conditions on performance are much looser (or violated, depending on your point of view). (Eisenberg 1987: 101-60, Thom 1993: 57-9, Godlovitch 1998: 26-7, Edidin 1999, S. Davies 2001: 190-4.) But one must be careful here. For one thing, it is not immediately clear what ‘the performance’ refers to in the case of a recording. The musicians may play the piece they are recording – or sections of it – many times, and parts of various of those takes may end up spliced together to make up the ‘one performance’ on the recording. So the spatial and temporal conditions on the playings that go into the production of the recording are looser than those on a live performance. But we might also observe that the spatial and temporal conditions on *rehearsal* are looser than those on a live performance. The *reason* those conditions are looser in both cases is that such conditions are helpful in producing the best possible phenomenal performance at the end of the day – be it in the concert hall, or on a CD. Thus, the musicians collectively intend to produce the best phenomenal performance they are capable of, in both live and recorded environments. This is part of my case for viewing classical recordings as encoding performances – performances of a different kind than live performances, but performances nonetheless. I call them ‘recorded performances’.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> I would prefer to call them ‘studio performances’, since this term keeps more foregrounded the fact that they are not simply records of a single unified performance event. But Stephen Davies has already used this term extensively to mean something similar, yet ultimately importantly distinct (1997b, 2001, and 2003a).

## 2.2 Skill and cheating

The common objection to this argument is that the studio allows a group of musicians not only to produce the best performance they are capable of, as rehearsal does, but rather, as rehearsal does not, a *better* performance than they are capable of. That is, the recording studio allows musicians to *cheat*, precisely by loosening particularly the temporal conditions on the production of a unified phenomenal performance. Another of the pillars of our conception of performance in classical (and, I would venture, every other live) musical tradition is the valorization of playing skills – the ability to sing, conduct, or play an instrument well (Godlovitch 1998: 52-78, Levinson 1987). It is the integrity of this aspect of performance that recourse to the resources of the studio supposedly undermines.

My response to this objection is that the classical community has responded to this threat the recording studio poses by tacitly imposing conventions on itself, as communities are wont to do. There are widely understood limits on just how much freedom can be taken in the studio before the point of misrepresentation of a performer's skill is reached. I have elsewhere investigated a range of problem cases from the recording studio, both actual and hypothetical, in an attempt to show that the conventions governing classical recordings are quite robust (Kania 1998: 37-51). While classical musicians have, since the introduction of recording technology, explored the limits and potential of that technology, a quite stable practice of recording works for performance has also been established, respecting the twin goals of the best possible unified phenomenal performance and the valorization of performance skill, while taking advantage of the potential of recording technology for the perfectibility of the phenomenal performance. Essentially, one should not release a recording under one's

own performing name if one would not be capable of producing such a phenomenal performance live under ideal circumstances (S. Davies 2001: 192-4, Godlovitch 1998: 26-7).<sup>12</sup>

### 2.3 *The audience*

Any theory of performance must take account not only of the performers but also of those to whom the performance is directed. Godlovitch and Thom both argue that a performance must be *for an audience*, both in the sense that it is intentionally directed at some audience by the performers, and in the sense that it is received by some actual audience. I will argue here that the first condition is correct, and that classical recordings meet it, but that the second condition is mistaken, and thus that recordings need not meet it.

One thing I will take for granted in what follows is that the audience for a performance cannot be identified with the performer(s). In this I agree with Godlovitch (1998: 42-3) and Theodore Gracyk (1997: 149, n. 6), against Thom (1993: 42-3), that the relations which hold between performer and audience (discussed below) cannot hold reflexively. There are two good arguments for this idea. The first is that performance is a kind of communication, and thus essentially other-directed. One cannot perform for oneself for the same reasons one cannot communicate something to oneself (Godlovitch 1998: 42). The second argument is that a performer is simply not in the right kind of position to receive the performance he is giving. This is not a matter of acoustics, as Godlovitch sometimes argues (1998: 42-3), but rather a matter of attention. For example, while performing chamber music, one is ideally listening very closely to the other parts

<sup>12</sup> The invocation of ideal circumstances is often cause for objection in philosophy, but I believe it is innocuous here.

and to one's own performance, but from a very biased aural 'point of view'. A member of the audience might concentrate primarily on the first violin part, but he is in a position to concentrate similarly on the cello. The first violinist has no such freedom; she seems to be in a very different position as regards listening to the performance. This inability of performers to pay the right sort of attention to their own performance is presumably a contingent psychological matter, but it at least seems to hold robustly across the species.

Not a lot hangs on this thesis of the necessary distinction between performer and audience – none of the claims that follow depend upon it, for instance. But ignoring the performers as possible audience-members allows me to discuss the issues below more clearly. More importantly for our purposes here, even if the above arguments are not sound, it cannot be the case that recording performers are the audience of their recorded performance as they create the performance. For the phenomenal performance that ends up on the recording is not heard by anyone in the studio. It is spliced together out of various takes. Thus, while the same people who perform in the studio can *later* become audience members by listening to the completed recording (when they *are* in a position to pay the right kind of attention to the performance), they cannot be the audience for that performance *while* they are performing.

### 2.3.1 The intentional audience

Godlovitch argues that an 'intended audience' is an important part of the 'musical agency' of the performers (1997: 28-30). The basic idea is succinctly contained in the dative nature of the vocabulary of performance. One *gives* a performance *for* an audience; or performs *to* an audience. The way the performers keep the audience in mind is highlighted by ironic comments by performers after performances for hostile audiences:

‘We were playing *at* them’. Rehearsals, by way of contrast, are held with performances in mind. No one is intended to hear them, though it does not matter if they do.<sup>13</sup> Other types of playing ‘like sight-reading, noodling, recreational practice, jam sessions, and the like...are self-contained and self-indulgent’ (Godlovitch 1997: 29). In what follows, I show that all of what Godlovitch says about this aspect of performance can be either imported wholesale or unproblematically adapted for the case of recorded performance.

There is a little blurring of rehearsal and performance in the recording studio. For instance, Godlovitch points out that ‘[o]ne cannot say of a big blunder: “Oh, it only took place in a concert” with the nonchalance of “Well, it’s just a rehearsal” or the gratitude of “Thank heavens, it’s just a rehearsal”’ (1997: 28). One may rehearse for a recording session, and thank the heavens in exactly the same way that one committed an unintentional *tièrce de Picardy* at the rehearsal, rather than while recording a take. But is not one of the great advantages of the recording studio that mistakes do not matter as much? If there is a big blunder, one can just do another take. While this is theoretically the case, when one is actually engaged in making a studio recording, the distinction between rehearsals and takes is just as clear as that between rehearsals and live performances. For instance, Sir Simon Rattle describes the process he and the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra went through to record the Sibelius symphonies: ‘[W]e had three sessions. Having rehearsed frantically first, we then made a take of the entire symphony, listened to it, worked through the evening, and then came back the next morning and made another take of the whole symphony’ (Badal 1996: 75). One might think this is an exceptional method, since Rattle and the CBSO ‘decided from [the time of

<sup>13</sup> Actually, due to the economics of the contemporary classical world, some artists (or their managers) do object to attendance at rehearsals, the fear being that those present will not pay on the night.

recording the second symphony] onwards that we would do those recordings in takes of an entire symphony' (Badal 1996: 75). But people recording in smaller chunks talk in much the same way. Discussing recording Act Three of *Die Walküre* in 1957, producer John Culshaw says

We developed a routine which, with a few small modifications, has applied ever since. First, the conductor rehearses the orchestra in the section to be recorded. In the case of a sixteen or eighteen minute sequence this rehearsal – in which the singers do not take part – can require anything up to fifty minutes. The first recording is then made with the singers, though we often tell them to 'mark' (i.e. not to sing with full voice) during any particularly difficult or tiring passages. During the interval we listen to this first recording and decide what is wrong, and after the interval it is usually possible to make the entire section twice, though without any further playback. In the second half of the session it is essential for the recording producer to be able to spot any mistake or accident which might require a separate correction 'tag', which can usually be made in the last remaining minutes of the session. (Culshaw 1967: 74)

For a final, personal example, I have taken part in recordings where the tape was left running for the entire time the choir was in the studio. Even then, the difference between rehearsal and take was as clear as night and day. In short, one *may* say 'Thank heavens we're doing another take' (though with not nearly as much relief as 'Thanks heavens it's just a rehearsal') but one would never say 'Thank heavens it only took place while we were making a recording'.

On the other hand, while one may not often hear ‘Oh, it only took place in a concert’, there is widespread agreement among musicians and audiences that mistakes are much more acceptable in a live performance than on a recording. I took part in a generally well-received concert including Herbert Howells’s *Requiem* in which some performance gremlins attacked at the beginning of the final movement.<sup>14</sup> The conductor was ‘philosophical’ about the glitch, and enthusiastic about the concert as a whole. Yet when a recording of the concert had a limited CD release, she would not allow the final movement of the Howells to be pressed. This was despite the fact that the offending passage took approximately forty-five seconds on a CD of around an hour’s duration, that the CD would only be available to choir members and those who attended the concert, and that the *Requiem* makes much less sense without the last movement. Her reasoning, of course, was that while mistakes of *some* magnitude are present in any performance, those at the upper end of the spectrum are (or at least become) unbearable on a recording one may listen to repeatedly. Looked at from the perspective of recording, it does not seem so crazy to say ‘Oh, it only took place in a concert’. For related reasons, some performers are more nervous during recording sessions than during live performances.

The upshot of all this is that recorded performances look in no danger of being considered non-performances on the basis of the performers’ intended audience. The performers are very aware of their audience, and the fact that it is as demanding as a concert audience – arguably more so in certain respects.

But is this general awareness that people listen to CDs really enough to fulfill the condition that requires performers to play for an audience? Paul Thom at times seems to

<sup>14</sup> *Indubitably Dorian*, The Auckland Dorian Choir, dir. Dr Karen Grylls, Auckland Town Hall Concert Chamber, 27 March 1998.

require more of performers. Not only must they intend their performance for an audience, they must intend it for a *particular* audience, a person or group of people specifiable in some way. For instance, he says

In doing something that has the force of saying, ‘Attend to me’ [namely, performing] I am not just making a hypothetical address, as the author of a work does, to whoever happens to be the addressee; rather, I make a categorical address to the audience, whom I assume to exist. In performing I believe myself to be referring to present persons, to whom I am in effect saying, ‘You, attend to me.’  
(Thom 1993: 192)

There may be no one present in the studio to whom the performers could believe they were referring their playing in the relevant way. But on Thom’s account this would seem to preclude their creating a performance at all.

The best response to this objection is to argue that Thom’s requirement, as stated above, applies only to *live* performance. For other types, one need only remove the word ‘present’. The performers in the studio are addressing their audience just as they do when in the concert hall, it is just that their ‘studio audience’ is not present while they play. The audience for a live performance, as far as the performer is concerned, is simply *whoever turns up*. If performers’ conception of the audience is so broad in the case of live performances, it is hard to think of any reason to deny an intended audience of the same general nature to recording performers. Think of an orchestra’s performance in an empty hall, but which is broadcast live. The orchestra intends those listening at home to enjoy their performance, say, just as they would intend anyone in the hall to. This playing cannot fail as a performance simply because the audience is not present in the same



room.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, an orchestra making a recording can be playing for whoever listens to the completed recording.

Of course, it is possible that a recording be released of a person playing a work while *not* directing his playing towards an audience. Suppose a flautist were recording Stockhausen's *In Freundschaft* for unaccompanied flute. She has difficulty concentrating, so everyone decides to take a break. The flautist remains in the hall practicing. It so happens that she plays the entire piece through at one point, that the production crew have accidentally left the recording apparatus running, and that this is the best take of the whole day.<sup>16</sup> I suspect no one would have any qualms about releasing this recording as the flautist's performance. But I would argue that this recording is better described as a 'session tape' than a recorded performance. It is just like the case of a rehearsal or practice session being overheard. If a person is not directing her playing to an audience, she is not performing.

Apart from the communicative aspect of performance, the intended-audience condition also brings to light that something we value in performers is their ability to work under pressure (for example, under concert conditions). If we compare the case of

<sup>15</sup> One can test the boundaries of this condition by moving the audience 'intentionally further away'. For instance, suppose a clarinetist is shipwrecked on a desert island with just a single palm tree, his clarinet, and a fully equipped broadcasting studio. He knows there are no land masses within the range of the studio, but there is a faint possibility that a passing ship might have a radio tuned in to whatever frequency he might broadcast on, and someone might be listening to it as the transmitter comes into range. He therefore broadcasts his playing as often as he can. Can he be performing for an intended audience when he knows that most of the time no one will be there? I'm tempted to answer affirmatively, though I think it would take great willpower to keep up the requisite beliefs – for example, that someone could be listening *now*. (You might think of this as a case on the borderline between what I call 'full-blooded' intentions, above, and pseudo- or quasi-intentions.) In any case, I think there will be a fact of the matter, and that it will be either that he *is* playing for an intended audience, or that he *is not*. I do not think there is a continuum between performing and not, divided according to the probability of an actual audience (*contra* Michael Dyer, to whom I am indebted for the suggestion of this case).

<sup>16</sup> My thanks to Baruch ter Wal for suggesting this example.

the nervous recording-performer with that of someone who cannot perform in concert unless he is fooled into thinking there is no one else in the hall, we can see more easily that these are both cases of people who, however good they are at playing their instruments, have difficulty *performing*. These positive and negative aspects of the intended-audience condition – the communication and the pressure – seem to parallel the tension between the two ideals of perfect phenomenal performance and instrumental skill, discussed above. We want the best sound possible, yet we want it to be achieved in a demanding way.

### 2.3.2 The actual audience

Godlovitch claims not only that a playing event must be intended for an audience, but also that there must be at least one listener (1998: 41-3). Thom holds a very similar view, claiming that ‘the traditional structure is right in holding that where there is a performance there must be an audience’ (1993: 172). I shall argue that Godlovitch and Thom are simply wrong in insisting that an actual audience is necessary to constitute a performance, though of course there will usually be such an audience for any actual performance.

Godlovitch first of all points to the weirdness of references to performances without audiences. For instance, ‘[s]omething aberrant haunts claims like: “I’ve performed this work sixteen times, yet never before an audience”’ (Godlovitch 1998: 41). When an artist is putting together a CV, one expects her only to include her public playing occasions. Godlovitch thinks that ‘[o]rdinary intuitions may still resist’ (1998: 43), so he discusses what he takes to be the most plausible cases of performance without an audience, hoping to show that even they are untenable. Both involve Isaac, a tragically

frustrated guitarist. In the first, ‘finding the hall empty on the appointed evening [Isaac] carries on regardless’ (Godlovitch 1998: 43). In the second, he is killed, having played the banned *Finlandia* (presumably in a stirring and no doubt fiendishly difficult solo guitar transcription) ‘in defiance before an empty hall, the would-be audience having been turned away by the occupying army’ (Godlovitch 1998: 43). Godlovitch hopes to sway any initial intuitions we might have that these are performances by pointing to conflicting intuitions. In the first case, he claims ‘Isaac’s persistence surely smacks of desperation. The act seems almost pathological without any listeners present. If Isaac has given a performance, the sense cannot but be charitable, parasitic, or even degenerate’ (Godlovitch 1998: 43). In the second, Godlovitch is ‘more inclined to rue Isaac’s lack of a sharp lawyer than to suppose this a performance proper. Indeed, it is just as marginal and degenerate as the milder instance above’ (1998: 43).

I think Godlovitch confuses the issues in an important way in all these cases, one symptom of which is his description of examples which are *not* the most plausible cases of performance without an audience. The confusion is that of an *intended* audience with the *actual* audience. In all of Godlovitch’s hypothetical situations, the performer is well aware that there is no audience for which he or she is playing. Thus I would argue that no performance occurs in any of those situations, since there is no intended audience.

It might be objected that in the situations described, the musicians *did* intend their playing to be heard. Isaac was no doubt disappointed that no one turned up to his first concert. After all, he carried on *regardless*. He *intended* people to hear him; they just didn’t come. In the *Finlandia* case, it is even more obvious that there is an intended

audience – they are right there outside the hall, having been turned away by the occupying army.

But these are not the right kinds of intentions. The idea is not that performers intend someone to hear them, it is that they have an audience in mind *to whom* they are directing their playing. As we noted above, the description the performer might give of his intended audience is something like ‘whoever turns up’ or ‘those people out there’. Isaac cannot intend his performance for an audience described in these terms in the above cases, because there is no one out there, and he knows it. He knows no one can hear him playing, so he cannot perform *for* anyone. (The introduction of a microphone and tape could change all that, of course. Now Isaac could perform for ‘whoever hears the tape’. Make it a tape-recorder he knows will self-destruct once he stops playing, and, once more, he cannot perform.)

One might try another objection, claiming not that Isaac intended to perform to the people outside the hall and failed simply because they did not turn up, but that precisely *because* they were turned away by the fascist oppressors Isaac decided to play ‘for all the victims of fascism’ (or perhaps just ‘for all tonight’s victims of this particular act of fascism’). Similarly, one might dedicate a performance to a dead loved one. But this again is a different kind of intention.<sup>17</sup> One can dedicate a performance in front of an audience of hundreds to someone not present, but this will not turn one’s audience into a single person, nor even increase it by one. Dedicatory ‘to’s such as these are more expressive of motivations for performances (or in Isaac’s case, playings) than intended audiences in the relevant sense.

<sup>17</sup> One’s eschatology might affect whether one can actually hold that a dead person is one’s intended audience, as I discuss below.

What we need, then, is a case which draws apart the intended audience from the actual audience, where the first exists and the second does not. Only then will we know if our intuitions credit audience-less playing with the name 'performance'. This will be a case where the performer believes there to be an audience, for whom she plays, but there is in fact none. One such case might be if the house lights go down on an empty hall before the performer comes on stage. She assumes someone will have told her if no one has turned up, and cannot see beyond the footlights anyway, so she performs to what she takes to be an average audience. At the end the house lights come up on a silent house and all becomes clear. She has been performing for no one. Before dismissing this as a non-performance, consider how our performer might feel. I imagine she would be acutely embarrassed, and not just because no one thought her playing worth turning up to hear. Performing to an empty hall is embarrassing in the same way as discovering the person to whom you are talking has left the room. One is in some sense communicating something, and with music it is often something emotional. Compare the empty-hall case with a rehearsal. There, one may be trying to make the same sounds as in a performance, but one is not trying to communicate anything. One is unconcerned if no one hears one's rehearsal (or indeed if someone *does* hear one's rehearsal). There is a huge gulf between that unconcern and the feeling of the performer on the discovery of the empty hall. I would argue that this is the very gulf between playing and performance.

A similar case is one where the house seats are visible and empty, but not visibly empty – someone is projecting a convincing hologram of an audience upon the seats. Just as in a concert, the orchestra assembles on stage while the 'audience' claps. There is virtual applause for the leader and conductor as they enter. They complete a splendid

rendition of Mahler's Ninth and receive a standing ovation. The orchestra may consider this to be the finest performance they have ever given, and be angry when they discover that no one actually heard it.

Finally, consider the case of performances for the dead, where they are literally believed to be the audience for one's playing. Assuming that there is in fact no life after death, this is just the sort of example we need. All these cases show that one does not need an actual audience for a performance to take place. An intended audience is enough. Though all except the last are extremely implausible, they helpfully draw apart the intended and actual audience, and give some indication of the privileged position performers occupy relative to audiences in our conception of performance.

Paul Thom argues in similar ways to Godlovitch, so I will not rehearse his versions of these arguments. However, it is worth looking at one passage where Thom tries to draw a distinction between the performance and non-performance arts on the basis of the 'presence' of their audiences.

If no one is present at the performance, there is a failure of reference. By contrast, if the novel remains unpublished, or the painting unexhibited, then there is no failure of reference because the work did not refer to anyone in the first place, even though it was made for a public to behold. The audience is not a mere dispensable accessory to performance. (Thom 1993: 192)

I doubt that many writers or painters consider their audiences 'mere dispensable accessories' to their work. Of course, one can barely deny a painting its existence as such just because no one has seen it. But Godlovitch and Thom seem content to make such a move with respect to performances. They are safe, at least as long as they consider only

*live* performances, from the embarrassment of an ontological jolt when someone turns up to appreciate the performance, because it is a fleeting event, unable to be revisited after its creation. But this has nothing to do with the way in which the audience is addressed. As we saw above, the performers intend their performance for whoever turns up to hear it. Painters and novelists similarly intend their works for whoever is in a position to appreciate them. A novel is still a novel if no one has read it. A performance is still a performance if no one has heard it.

### III. CONCLUSIONS

I have argued that classical recordings, as they are typically made, are rightly thought of as giving access to performances of the works they purport to be of.<sup>18</sup> Although the phenomenal performance they give access to is usually not connected to the active performance of the musicians in the same direct way as is the case with live performance, the conventions for producing such recordings that have arisen in the classical music world – rooted in the long-standing tradition of live performance – are such that it is appropriate to think of what we hear on a recording as a performance – a different kind of performance from a live performance, but a performance nonetheless.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>18</sup> I am sometimes tempted by a stronger version of this thesis, namely that recordings are themselves performances, not merely modes of access to them. The temptation is the result of reflection on the fact that the performance the recording encodes can only be heard by playing the recording. Thus the recording is not a mere window on to something independently available, as a photograph of a painting or person is. However, I content myself with arguing for the weaker thesis here.

<sup>19</sup> One interesting topic I have not addressed here is the comparative advantages and disadvantages of gaining access to works through live or recorded performance. I address that question in my 1998: 78-100.

**THE WORK ‘WORK’ DOES:  
WORKS AND OTHER ART OBJECTS**

Art critics, theorists, and philosophers tend to talk mostly about *works* of art, as opposed to other art objects. This is often understandable. We are more interested in *La Grande Jatte* than in the sketches and studies for it. But sometimes we are just as interested in art objects that are not works. For instance, we might be just as interested in *a performance* of a string quartet as in the quartet itself. In this paper I investigate the concept of a *work* of art, arguing that there are two necessary conditions an art object must meet to be a work: (1) it must be of a kind that is a primary focus of critical attention in a given art form or tradition, and (2) it must be a persisting object. I also argue (i) that there is no need to subsume all art under the work concept, and (ii) that drawing a distinction between works and other art objects need not lead to valuing the former over the latter.

**I. ‘ART’ AND ‘ARTWORK’**

The question of what makes something a work of art is not the question of the definition of art. Though that is a fascinating and by no means satisfactorily answered question, I am not here asking the question of what makes something a work *of art*, but rather that of what makes something a *work* of art. On reading the literature on the definition of art, one could be forgiven for thinking that these are in fact the same question. Most philosophers in the analytic tradition who address the question of the definition of ‘art’ move quickly,



often without explanation, to a proposed definition of ‘artwork’. One might think that although this fact is of some interest to the scholar, it does not create any problems for the question I am interested in. If I were interested in art *in general*, rather than just *works* of art, you might think, this focus on works would leave a gap that needed filling. But if I am interested in what makes something a *work* of art, then a definition of ‘artwork’ is precisely what I want. In fact, though, I am not convinced that philosophers working on the definition of art *really are* providing definitions of ‘artwork’. Though they are not working on a general definition of ‘art’, I suspect that they might be providing definitions not of ‘artwork’, but rather of ‘art artifact’, or even ‘art object’, where ‘object’ is very broadly construed.<sup>1</sup>

Consider a selection of well-known recent definitions of art. In a concise statement of his institutional definition, George Dickie begins by describing his goal as a ‘theory of art’, but by the end of the second paragraph he is talking exclusively about ‘works of art’ (1983: 47). Later in the essay he does distinguish the term ‘art’ from ‘work of art’, but says nothing about that distinction, and the definition he provides is of the term ‘work of art’: ‘A work of art is an artifact of a kind created to be presented to an artworld public’ (Dickie 1983: 53).

When Monroe Beardsley provides his aesthetic definition, it is of the term ‘artwork’. Beardsley, like Dickie, notes that ‘artwork’ might be inextricably bound up with other art terms, such as ‘artistic activity’, but (again like Dickie) does not explicitly consider art objects other than works. He argues that ‘[a]n artwork is something produced

<sup>1</sup> To say a little more about these distinctions: there is a sense in which paintbrushes and music stores are art objects, but they are clearly art objects in a different sense from that in which maquettes and finished sculptures are art objects. It is the latter sense of ‘art object’ that I believe most definitions of art aim to define.

with the intention of giving it the capacity to satisfy the aesthetic interest' (Beardsley 1983: 58).

Jerrold Levinson opens his proposal of an intentional-historical definition of art with the following sentences: 'The question of what makes something a work of art is probably the most venerable in aesthetics. What is the artness of an artwork?' (1979: 35) In the first paragraph he provides a list of objects from various arts – all works – and again, though he uses the more general terms 'art' and 'art object' at some points, the definition proposed is: ' $X$  is an artwork at  $t =_{df}$   $X$  is an object of which it is true at  $t$  that some person...having the appropriate proprietary right over  $X$ , nonpassingly intends... $X$  for...regard in any way...in which objects in the extension of 'artwork' prior to  $t$  are...correctly...regarded' (Levinson 1979: 40).

Now, one problem with Dickie's definition is in fact that it is too *narrow*, due to its inclusion of artifactuality as a necessary condition for workhood (S. Davies 1991a: 120-41).<sup>2</sup> Not all artworks are artifacts. For example, a piece of driftwood found by an artist and displayed unaltered in a gallery may be an artwork. Other works' artifactuality may be orthogonal to their arthood. For example, Duchamp's *Fountain*, though a urinal and thus an artifact, is not an artifact of Duchamp's. It was an artifact before it was an artwork, and Duchamp did nothing to artifactualize it as he turned it into an artwork.<sup>3</sup> Suppose for now that Dickie's definition has been broadened, say by substituting 'object' for 'artifact', construing 'object' broadly, as Levinson does in his definition: 'By "object"

<sup>2</sup> This problem is somewhat mitigated by his rather broad understanding of 'artifact'.

<sup>3</sup> In fact, this case is not quite so clear-cut. Duchamp did 'sign' *Fountain* 'R. MUTT, 1917'; but clearly one can transform found artifacts into artworks without pseudonymously signing them.

I meant, and mean, *any thing whatsoever*. Thus, material objects are of course comprised, but also words, thoughts, structures, events, situations...’ (Levinson 1989: 39).

The problem with Dickie’s definition now, and the one that is relevant to the topic of this chapter, is that it is too broad – it encompasses many objects that are not strictly *works* of art, but art objects of other kinds. Consider, for example, a performance of Shostakovich’s twelfth string quartet. This is an object, in Levinson’s broad sense of the term, created to be presented to an artworld public. But such a performance, while *of* a work, is not in itself a work, nor identical with the work of which it is a performance. Of course, this should not be taken as belittling the performance. It is clearly an art object, and, in classical music at least, performances are arguably as important as, if not more important than, works.

Nor do I consider myself to be merely quibbling over words. Anyone who understands classical music understands the difference between a performance and the work it is of, even if they insist that performances are works of art too. What I hope to convince such a person of over the course of this chapter is that various considerations suggest that, whatever we decide ultimately to call them, the kind of thing Shostakovich’s twelfth string quartet is, is importantly different from the kind of thing performances of that quartet are. These considerations lead us, I argue, to group what we commonly call the work – the quartet, in this case – with things like Seurat’s *La Grande Jatte*, Kubrick’s *2001: A Space Odyssey*, and Eliot’s *The Waste Land*, and not with things like the performance of the quartet, or the work’s cello part, sketches for the painting, the costumes for the movie, or the passages of verse deleted from the poem in various draftings. I do not argue that the objects in the latter list are naturally or interestingly

grouped together, except to the extent that they can be classified as art objects that are not works. What I do argue is that the objects in the former list – the works – share some features by which we distinguish them from non-work art objects.

Do the other definitions I have mentioned suffer from the same problem as Dickie's? Do they also encompass more art objects than just works, despite their claims? Beardsley's definition is clearly too broad in this respect. One criticism often leveled against it is that it is so broad it encompasses more than just *art* objects, let alone more than just works.<sup>4</sup> But even if we grant the revision of our intuitions that Beardsley seems to suggest, it is clear that performances, sketches, drafts, etc., can be produced, if anything can, with the intention of giving them the capacity to satisfy an aesthetic interest. Thus Beardsley seems to be offering, at best, a definition of 'art object' rather than 'artwork'.

What about Levinson's proposed definition? The recursive nature of his definition would seem to make it difficult to argue that he casts his net too widely in attempting to capture all and only artworks. For what counts as an artwork at a time,  $t_1$ , depends on what counted as an artwork at some previous time,  $t_0$ . Thus, one might think that although the definition might not tell us much about what, if anything, artworks have in common, at least it will correctly identify things as works. But, again, a common objection to Levinson's definition can be adapted for our purposes. That objection is that some things that are not art objects of any kind are intended for regard in ways that previous artworks are correctly regarded. The variant of the objection I am interested in is that some things that *are* art objects, but not art *works*, are encompassed by Levinson's definition. One

<sup>4</sup> For introductory discussions of Beardsley's definition, see S. Davies 1991a: 50-77, Carroll 1999: 155-204, and Stecker 2005: 90-92. For further reading, see the references given in those places.

obvious example would be the performance of Shostakovich's twelfth string quartet. I take it I need not go to any great lengths to argue that musical performances are intended to be treated with the same kind of sustained attention to their aesthetic and artistic features with which we standardly treat works of art. Yet, I maintain, performances such as this are importantly different from works.

## II. THE PRIMARY FOCUS OF CRITICAL ATTENTION

What, then, are the features that distinguish works from other art objects? The first, I suggest, is that a work of art must be of a kind that is a primary focus of critical attention in a given art form or tradition.<sup>5</sup> Other objects may be the focus of critical attention, but in a secondary way, usually as a means to ultimately understanding a particular work. So, for instance, though the cello part of Shostakovich's twelfth string quartet may be assessed for the aesthetic value of its phrases, this assessment will be understood in the context of the work as a whole. It would betray a misunderstanding of the object under consideration if one were to criticize the monotonic repetitiveness of a particular passage as boring when it serves as a pedal for exciting harmonic changes effected by the other three parts.<sup>6</sup> The costumes for *2001: A Space Odyssey* might similarly be the object of

<sup>5</sup> I take the locution 'primary focus of critical attention' from Theodore Gracyk (1996: 18), substituting 'focus' for 'object' to avoid confusion. In this section, for simplicity, I often say works are *the*, rather than *a* primary focus of critical attention in an art form or tradition. But as my discussion of classical music in the next section makes clear, there may be more than one (equally) primary focus of critical attention in a form or tradition.

<sup>6</sup> Kendall Walton gives some sense of the many different things (sound structures, or patterns) created when a classical work is created (though he would not express the point in those terms; 1988: 252-3):

1. a figured bass pattern;
2. a figured bass pattern with restrictions on the general shape of the upper voices;
3. a note pattern; and in addition
4. a pattern such that to fit it a sound event must not only contain certain notes and no others, but must also have certain dynamics, tempos, phrasings, accents, etc., that is, approximately the pattern indicated by Brahms's actual score.

critical attention for the contribution they make to the movie as a whole. On the other hand, these costumes might be considered works of art in their own right within the couture tradition (assuming for the sake of argument that this is an *art* tradition). There should be no air of paradox about one work of art ‘containing’ another in some sense. One can make new artworks out of old, as Robert Rauschenberg did in creating ‘Erased De Kooning’ (1959). One can combine artworks in a very literal fashion, for instance by gluing two sculptures together to make a new one. But artworks can be used in other artworks in less easily described ways. An example close to that of the costumes in *2001* is that of the film *Russian Ark* (2002), shot in the Hermitage in St. Petersburg and featuring many of the great works of art contained therein.<sup>7</sup>

Some art objects, though, are neither works of art, nor parts of works. Sketches and studies for a painting or symphony, and deleted sections of drafts of a poem fall into this category. Because of their functional provenance, these art objects are usually studied for the light they can shed on a particular artwork by way of understanding how the work was created. They are often interesting for their manifestation of artistic options seriously considered but ultimately rejected by the artist, or even for their own aesthetic and artistic properties, as is often the case with sketches and studies for paintings or sculptures by great artists. Of course, these non-work art objects can be put to many different uses. One can use them to understand the psychology of the artist, or the society in which the work was created, to kindle a fire, to prop the door open, and so on. But none of these uses distinguishes these objects from works. They are distinguishable from works in that they are not the primary focus of critical attention within the given tradition.

<sup>7</sup> For discussion of complex cases of such containment relations, see Livingston 2003.

One might reasonably ask for more specificity about what exactly I mean by works' being 'the primary focus of critical attention' in an art form or tradition. Clearly, it is not the case that any *individual* work is the primary focus of critical attention. But nor is it the case, I think, that somehow the complete set of works, or all of its members, are the primary focus of critical attention within the tradition. There is certainly, and properly, more attention lavished on Seurat's sketches for *La Grand Jatte* than on the complete oeuvres of many lesser painters (such as my sister, for instance). Thus it seems to me it would be difficult to argue that the set of things that receives the most critical attention, or *somesuch*, is the set of works within a tradition. Rather, I suggest, it is the *kind* of thing that is the primary focus of critical attention within a tradition that determines which objects in that practice are the works.

By 'critical attention', I do not mean the attention of critics in any sense. I mean something like 'appreciation'. But people can be said to appreciate all sorts of things, and I intend to pick out with this term the appreciation proper to artworks. Also, David Davies (2004) uses the phrase 'focus of appreciation' as a technical term in his processual ontology, discussed in chapter two. Thus I prefer the locution 'critical attention'. Of course, the normative notion of attention that is 'appropriate' or 'proper' to works of art will be contested, but I do not think it faces insurmountable obstacles. For discussion and defense of the notion, see Levinson 1979, 1989, and 1993c.

What I mean by saying that artworks are the *primary* focus of critical attention is that there is a relation of asymmetric dependence between the critical attention focused on works and that that focused on other art objects. We can only explain the attention focused on Seurat's sketches for *La Grande Jatte* by reference to the critical attention

focused on *La Grande Jatte* itself. The converse does not hold. The critical attention focused on *La Grande Jatte* is explicable only at a higher level – by way of explaining why we look at paintings at all, for instance. It does not require, and indeed it would be odd to hear, an explanation in terms of the critical attention focused on the sketches for the work.

This particular example, like many others, might suggest that ‘the *ultimate* focus of critical attention’ would be a more apt phrase. For, as I noted above, attention is often paid to the sketches for a painting, or the costumes in a movie, as a means to understanding the painting, or movie. Appreciation of the work, on the other hand, is an end in itself (at least relative to appreciation of a sketch or costume; perhaps work appreciation serves higher ends). But there are other objects of secondary (asymmetrically dependent) critical attention, where such attention arguably does not serve as a means to the ultimate appreciation of the works in the tradition. One example might be a sketch for a painting or draft of a poem that was never completed. It might be argued that appreciation of such objects is in the service of appreciation of works *in general* in the relevant tradition, but I would not like to have to prove such a claim. Live rock performances might be another example of such objects of critical attention. I argue in the next chapter that the primary focus of critical attention in rock is replete recordings, and that live rock performances are of the songs manifested by such recordings. If this is right, then it does not seem to be the case that the secondary focus of critical attention here is used as a means of appreciating the primary focus.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> I return to these issues in the following chapter.



Having discussed the cogency and plausibility of my first proposed condition, perhaps I will be allowed some speculation as to why we have a work-concept that includes this condition.<sup>9</sup> The widespread move towards contextualism in analytic aesthetics over the past few decades has led to much more explicit recognition of art as a social practice. This can be seen in aspects as diverse as Dickie's institutional definition of art, which inter-defines artist, audience, and artwork, a growing interest in performers and audiences in addition to the traditional focus on 'creative' artists, and Levinson's hypothetical intentionalist theory of interpretation. Clearly, one thing that helps bind the members of the community of a particular art form for tradition together is a set of art objects that they recognize in common, and that they contribute to an on-going discourse about. Moreover, because this discourse is crucially comparative – assessing the relative merits of different works is surely a central feature of art criticism – a certain uniformity among the objects they attend to would facilitate that discourse. This is one important role of the concept of the work of art.

### III. PERSISTENCE

One might think that classical music offers a *prima facie* counter-example to my suggestion for the distinction between works and other art objects. For it seems plausible that in classical music, performances are the primary focus of critical attention. I use 'plausible' advisedly, for there are a couple of objections that come quickly to mind. One is that although the performance is the *immediate* object of critical attention, it is such

<sup>9</sup> One aspect of the first condition I have not discussed is how one establishes the 'given' artform or tradition. The individuation of artforms or traditions is no easy task, to be sure, but it is more a task for the sociologist than the philosopher, I think. Throughout this dissertation I take the art practices I am discussing as given, as the data for the ontological theories I am developing. We clearly (and, to the philosopher, perhaps surprisingly easily) distinguish painting from sculpture, classical from jazz, and so on. This is one of the points from which I take my departure.

because it is our means of access to the work, which is what we are primarily interested in. Reflection on the nature of classical music shows this objection to be based on a rather blinkered view of that tradition, however. Classical works are works for performance; they are instanced in performances, with all the interpretive variation that implies. Much – in standard cases, arguably all – of their value lies in the value of performances of them. Thus, even though by attending to a performance we attend to the work it is of, it is still plausible to identify the performance as a primary focus of critical attention, perhaps a status it shares with the work.

A second quick objection to the idea that performance is the primary focus of critical attention in classical music is that since a performance is an *instance* of a work, saying that the performance is the primary focus is equivalent to saying the work is the primary focus. But this objection misunderstands the relationship between performance and work. Even if you thought classical works were complex properties and their performances instantiations of such properties, and even if you were an Aristotelian, and thus thought that any property exists only in its instances, a work would be a determinable, not a determinate, property.<sup>10</sup> Knowledgeable about the tradition, we can of course attend to the work in attending to the performance, but it must also be acknowledged that the performance – with all of its specific values of tempo, dynamic, phrasing, and so on – is distinct from the work, and, to repeat, an important focus of critical attention, plausibly on a par with the work.

From the point of view of the dialectic, I should not be worried by these objections. For if it can be shown that, in fact, performances are not a primary focus of

<sup>10</sup> Of course, I do not subscribe to this view; the point is that this is the ontology that makes this objection most plausible, and that the objection fails even *given* this implausible ontology.

critical attention in classical music, then I need not fear the assimilation of performances under the work concept, given my arguments that works are the primary focus of critical attention in a given tradition. But, firstly, I believe that performances *are* a, if not the only, primary focus of critical attention in classical music, and, secondly, reflection on this fact leads us to uncover a second necessary feature of works, as opposed to other art objects. This second feature is that works must be enduring objects – they must persist through time, they cannot be ephemeral events.<sup>11</sup> Clearly this feature of works contributes to the function I identified when discussing the first feature. If an art object endures, then it can be experienced by more people than if it is an ephemeral event. Thus it enables a much wider community to have experiences in common, and to have an ongoing discourse about the objects they are concerned with.

As with my first condition on workhood, I do not have any knock-down arguments for this criterion. But reflection on some cases should show that the distinction between persistent art objects and art events plays an important role in our art practices, and thus should be reflected in any ontology of art. I will begin by replying in advance to some objections I foresee will be made to the claim that all art objects must be persisting things. The simplest is that, on reflection, one might come up with all sorts of things that seem to fall under the concept ‘work of art’, and yet are not enduring objects. Classical performances, for one, are often called works of art. Some recent art forms produce only ephemeral events as the primary focus of critical attention – performance art, jazz, and

<sup>11</sup> In what follows, I use ‘enduring’ and ‘persistent’ interchangeably, and use ‘event’ or ‘ephemeral event’ in a non-technical sense to refer to our common-sense distinction between objects and events. I discuss the relation between this usage of these terms, and more technical ones, at the end of this section.

any tradition focused on improvised performances.<sup>12</sup> To this sort of counter-example I must repeat my earlier caveat. I am not primarily concerned with the *words* we use for the classifications we make, but with the concepts underlying those classifications. We commonly use the phrase ‘work of art’ in an evaluative way, for example when praising someone’s having mixed the perfect margarita. We must put that use aside if we are to arrive at a definition of ‘work of art’ in the classificatory sense. The case of classical music performances is usually just such an evaluative use, I suggest. The case of performance art is more difficult, but reflection on the tradition strengthens my case, rather than weakening it. Performance art developed in part as a reaction against the dominance of enduring artifacts in Western art, and the values that dominance supposedly implied. Thus, any understanding of performance art requires an understanding of the concept I am attempting to excavate. Whether we ultimately use the phrase ‘work of art’ to label this concept is of less concern to me. But, as the example of performance art indicates, my usage has art history on its side.

A second kind of objection that might be raised against my proposed second condition takes performance art’s critique of the work concept to heart. By requiring artworks to be enduring objects, we are denying that status to many important and valuable art objects – particularly performances of various sorts. Moreover some art *forms* – performance art and jazz, for example – will be accorded a secondary status, since they are denied any works on my analysis. But this objection misunderstands the project. Nothing evaluative is being claimed about works as compared to other art

<sup>12</sup> See my chapter on the ontology of jazz, below, for arguments that performance events are the primary focus of critical attention in that tradition.

objects.<sup>13</sup> Of course, the fact that they are the primary focus of critical attention in a given form implies that they will in general, or in the long run, reward such attention more than other things produced in the tradition. But being a primary focus of critical attention is a necessary condition of workhood, not the other way around. Clearly, ephemeral performances are the primary focus of critical attention in performance art, and arguably in jazz as well, but since they are ephemeral they are not works. This is not to imply that they are any less valuable than works. The performance art movement succeeded in highlighting the singular rewards of attending to ephemeral performances. Any concert-goer is familiar with these rewards, and need not think them inferior to those afforded by enduring art objects. (Indeed, an economical beauty of classical music is that in a single experience one can receive both sorts of rewards, since during a performance one can attend to both a fleeting event and an enduring object – the work.)

Another reason we may feel that ‘work of art’ is an evaluative term is an abiding prejudice that work creation is a more creative activity than performance (D. Davies 2004: 206-35). There are two significant roots of this prejudice. One is the tendency to ignore the existence of performances that are not of works.<sup>14</sup> The other is that, since works endure, we can elect to spend time with the best, or at least our favorite, works. Thus we tend to think that works in general, or on average, are better than performances. But this is simple selection bias.

<sup>13</sup> Compare Feibleman (1970) who argues that performers should (somehow!) eschew making any contribution to the performance, and simply present the work. Feibleman clearly valorizes works over performances, even in the case where the performance is of a work.

<sup>14</sup> Of course, the issues become difficult to tease apart here – many claim that there are no such performances, that all performances are performances of works. For detailed discussion of these issues, see the chapter below on the ontology of jazz.

I have pointed out that one reason for making enduring objects the primary focus of critical attention in an art form is that it enables a more widespread audience to share a single object of appreciation. Though this is a valuable attribute of enduring art objects, again it need not be seen as elevating them above performances. For there are valuable rewards to be gained from enjoying an ephemeral event in the ‘real time’ company of others, which the appreciation of an enduring object, even contemporaneously, cannot provide (Alperson 1984). To give just a couple of examples, the rewards of witnessing someone making something up on the spot, such as in a typical jazz performance, cannot be gained from something that has been presented to a public after consideration, such as a completed painting. Similarly, there is the possibility of ‘real-time’ interaction between artist and audience during a jazz performance, but no such possibility in the case of painting or sculpture.<sup>15</sup> In sum, it is worth noting that there are unique and valuable pleasures to be gained from the appreciation of ephemeral art objects. But that is no reason to assimilate all art objects, or even all those that are the primary focus of critical attention, under the concept of the work of art.<sup>16</sup>

Now I will examine two kinds of borderline case. The first is recordings. I will focus on music recordings, but the comments I make could easily be adapted for other recordable art forms. Given that recordings endure, and given that the performances they encode are a primary focus of critical attention, my account seems to accord recorded

<sup>15</sup> Of course, a painting or sculpture could be produced in an audience-collaborative fashion, as some of Yves Klein’s paintings were, but then the audience involved is that of the event that results in the painted canvas, not the audience of the completed canvas itself. I discuss complex cases like these, where it is not immediately clear whether the primary focus of critical attention is a persistent work, an ephemeral event, or both, below.

<sup>16</sup> Lee B. Brown (1996, 2005) is one of the few philosophers to have discussed the tendency to ignore non-work art objects. Hein (1970) argues that the valorization of works over performances is unjustified.

performances the status of works. But my account does not accord live performances that status. This is an odd consequence, since I have argued above that both live and recorded performances bear the same kind of relationship to the works they are of.

It will come as no surprise that the first thing I would want to do in discussing this issue is to distinguish between various musical traditions. For, as I will argue below, rock is ontologically very different from both classical and jazz music. Rock is like cinema, and unlike classical music, in that the primary focus of critical attention is the replete recording. Thus in rock, since the recording is also an enduring object, I would argue that the recording is a work of art. In which of the above respects are classical recordings any different from rock recordings? The difference lies in what critical attention is focused on. With rock, one listens to the track as a studio construction, with all the huge variety of sonic possibilities that that implies in mind.<sup>17</sup> But with classical music, one listens to the performance encoded on the recording, and by listening to it as such, one listens to it as an ephemeral event, even though one is aware that it is most likely not a record of a single performance event in the studio. Consider, for comparison, a snapshot of a performance art event.<sup>18</sup> One can see the art event, now over – a primary focus of critical attention – in the snapshot,<sup>19</sup> and the snapshot is an enduring object. But the snapshot is not thereby an enduring art object that is a primary focus of critical attention. It is merely a record of such a (non-enduring) object. This case parallels that of a recorded performance of a classical musical work for performance in the relevant respect, namely

<sup>17</sup> I defend this claim in the following chapter.

<sup>18</sup> I use the word ‘snapshot’ deliberately. Someone could take a photograph of such an event that would itself be an artwork. But, for reasons springing from the ideological roots of the performance art movement discussed above, much documentation of performance art events is not accorded work status.

<sup>19</sup> Assuming Kendall Walton (1984) is correct about the transparency of photographs.

its transparency. Thus, whether a recording is a work of art depends upon the tradition in which it is produced. Rock tracks and recordings of classical electronic music are works of art. But recordings of jazz performances and of classical works for performance are not works of art, since it is not the enduring recordings themselves, but the ephemeral performances they give access to, that are the focus of critical attention.

The second kind of borderline case is putative artworks that are relatively transitory. I have in mind such artworks as those by Christo and Jeanne-Claude, and Andy Goldsworthy. Christo and Jeanne-Claude's art is more easily dealt with. Its transitoriness is due solely to the fact that it is installation art, albeit on a grand scale. On June 14, 1995, for *Wrapped Reichstag*, Christo and Jeanne-Claude had the Reichstag wrapped, and for various reasons unwrapped it fourteen days later.<sup>20</sup> This is simply a case of someone's creating an artwork and then destroying it. The fact that the work is transitory in the sense that it lasts for a shorter time than most works, does not militate against its being an artwork any more than a painter's irritated destruction of a sub-par painting a couple of weeks after its completion. Of course, since the destruction of *Wrapped Reichstag* was conceived as part of the project from the very beginning, it might be argued that the work possesses aesthetic or artistic features a (relatively) permanently wrapped building would not possess. But this does not militate against the work's being an enduring object any more than the sculptor's knowledge of how a patina will develop on his works over time, and the aesthetic or artistic consequences of that,

<sup>20</sup> A lot of information on this and other works of Christo and Jeanne-Claude, including their professed reasons for creating transitory works, can be found on their website:  
<http://christojeanneclaude.net/index.html>.



militate against sculptures' being enduring objects.<sup>21</sup> But even if it could be argued that Christo and Jeanne-Claude's work is not the wrapped Reichstag, but the event of its being in a wrapped state for fourteen days, this would be no problem for my analysis. Give the concept I have been elucidating, if we think of *Wrapped Reichstag* in an 'eventish' way, we will see that it does not fall under the concept 'artwork'. My categorization of particular works is defeasible without my distinction's being rendered irrelevant. In fact, that people knowledgeable about this art are willing to debate my categorization is a sign that my *categories* are in fact implicit in art discourse, and thus should be reflected in any ontology of art.

Andy Goldsworthy's art is a little more difficult. Goldsworthy typically produces artifacts made out of ice, branches, sand, and other natural materials, that decay as a result of natural forces (wind, rain, sun, etc.) over a relatively short period of time. Unlike the cases of Christo and Jeanne-Claude, and the disappointed painter discussed above, Goldsworthy does not act to destroy his pieces after he has created them. But, nevertheless, he creates them with their destruction in mind, and thus, as with Christo and Jeanne-Claude's works, their decay is artistically relevant, containing statements about the transient nature of art and artifacts, and the tension in our perception of nature as both beautiful and powerfully destructive.

Of course, much art changes over time. The pigments in a painting can be altered by exposure to light and air, transforming a spring scene into an autumnal one.<sup>22</sup> A sculpture might acquire a patina as the result of slow oxidation, or transform its shape as

<sup>21</sup> These comments might raise old metaphysical questions about the distinction between objects and events. I discuss this matter at the end of this section.

<sup>22</sup> See, for example, Titian's *Diana and Actaeon*.

thousands of viewers succumb to the temptation to caress the cool marble buttock. These transformations can be intended by artists or not.<sup>23</sup> I see Goldsworthy's pieces as solidly within the sculpture tradition. They are crafted to be beautiful when he stops working on them, and though their decay embodies part of their artistic content, to the extent that it is the sculptural object as it decays that is the focus of critical attention, that object is a work of art. It could be that there are two closely related art objects here: the decaying sculpture and the event of its decay. If so, the former is a work of art, the latter not. I would treat self-destructive art, such as Jean Tinguely's sculptures, in the same way.<sup>24</sup> It is an advantage of my analysis of the work concept that it enables us to think more precisely about these borderline cases.

#### IV. ONTOLOGY AND ONTOLOGY, AGAIN

Before closing, I would like to reply to an objection raised against my account by Michael Morreau (in private communication). Morreau suggests that if one is a four-dimensionalist or perdurantist, meaning that one takes ordinary persistent objects to be space-time worms, then an event, such as a performance, and an enduring object, such as a sculpture, look a lot more similar to each other than either does to a classical musical work (on either a realist or nominalist conception of such works). Thus we should group

<sup>23</sup> One disingenuous case is particularly close to my spleen. Having constructed the unoriginal eyesore 'Sky Tower' to dominate the Auckland skyline, the architects claimed to have left the majority of the 328m concrete shaft uncladded to enable the texture to weather over time. Architectural drawings of the projected tower, showing it fully clad, reveal the ugly truth: the owners simply ran out of money.

<sup>24</sup> It might seem surprising that I suggest there are *two* art objects here, when there seems, *prima facie*, to be only one thing, undergoing change. But, in fact, there are familiar cases of this sort of thing in other arts. For instance, as mentioned above, when one listens to a classical music performance, one hears both the work and a performance of the work.

art events and (concrete) objects together, and distinguish them from things ontologically like classical musical works.<sup>25</sup>

One way to resist this objection would be to argue that four-dimensionalism is false. Such an argument is beyond the scope of this dissertation, but there are other ways of responding to the objection. My basic response is that there is nothing stopping the fundamental ontologist from grouping art objects precisely as Morreau suggests. What I would point out, though, is that this is not the way people who know about art group art objects. This is perhaps because most people who know about art, like most people *simpliciter*, know very little about fundamental metaphysics. But it is precisely their concept of a work of art that I am trying to characterize here. Most people operate with a distinction between enduring concrete objects on the one hand, and events on the other. The four-dimensionalist cannot (and does not) *ignore* this distinction; at best he can explain it away. But even such an explanation will account for why it is that people treat certain art objects the way that they do. They *mistakenly* believe that there is a distinction between enduring objects and events according to such a four-dimensionalist. Since I am engaging in a descriptive metaphysical project here, I believe that is all I need. My account is neutral between various more fundamental ontological theories.

## V. CONCLUSIONS

I have argued that there is a useful distinction to be drawn between artworks and other art objects. Works are enduring objects that are a primary focus of critical attention in their art form or tradition. This analysis implies that some traditions, such as performance art

<sup>25</sup> For an introduction to the issues motivating four-dimensionalism or perdurantism, see Haslanger 2003. It is important to distinguish four-dimensionalism in this sense from four-dimensionalism as the name for the view that (some) temporally non-present objects exist. For an introductory discussion of that topic, see Rea 2003.

and jazz, might contain no works. But this should not be considered a shortcoming of the theory since, firstly, there is no obvious reason to value works more highly than other art objects and, secondly, the analysis helps us to understand central features of these traditions.

## 5

### **MAKING TRACKS: THE ONTOLOGY OF ROCK**

Philosophers of music have traditionally been concerned with the problems Western classical music raises. But recently there has been growing interest both in non-Western musics and in Western musical traditions other than classical. Motivated by questions of the relative merits of classical and rock music, philosophers have addressed the ontology of rock music, asking if the reason it is held in lower esteem by some is that its artworks have been misunderstood to be of the same kind as classical musical works. In classical music, the production of the sound event that the audience listens to is the result of two quite distinct groups of actions. First the composer creates the work, by writing a score. Then a performing artist or group of artists performs the work, of necessity producing an interpretation of it.<sup>1</sup> Often the composer is closely involved in at least the first performance of a new work, but even then her contributions as a composer are clearly distinguishable from those she makes as a performer. Shortly after the Second World War, some classical composers began focusing on producing works that did not require any performance. Using technology developed to record and reproduce the sounds of performances, they began creating tapes that when played back produced sound events that could not be considered an accurate record of any performance occurring in the

<sup>1</sup> In a broad sense of 'interpretation'. For a narrower one, which a work performance might lack, see Levinson 1993a.

studio, in any sense. Any authentic copy of the master tape produced an authentic instance of the work when played back (S. Davies 2001: 317-18). In such 'electronic music', the sound of the work, in an important sense, came straight from the composer, without the mediation of a performing artist. The end of traditional compositional techniques was solemnly predicted. In fact, in the classical tradition, electronic music remains a minority culture. It was a different musical tradition that took up the recording studio as its workshop.

### I. TWO COMPETING ONTOLOGIES OF ROCK

In the first book-length philosophical aesthetics of rock, *Rhythm and Noise*, Theodore Gracyk (1996) argues that *rock music* is the tradition that has cut out the performing middleman, and delivers music straight from the composer to the audience. Although he resists the temptation to provide necessary and sufficient conditions for being a rock work, Gracyk does say that he is talking about rock music in a broad sense: not as a style, but as a wider artistic tradition. He comes close to providing a definition when he says that 'rock is popular music of the second half of the twentieth century which is essentially dependent on recording technology for its inception and dissemination' (Gracyk 1996: 13). He argues for this conception by providing a history of the tradition beginning with Elvis Presley's early recordings at Sun Studios, and hitting its stride with Bob Dylan's first electric albums and the Beatles' shift of focus from live shows to the recording studio (Gracyk 1996: 1-17). The ontological thesis that Gracyk develops through the first half of his book is that the primary work of art in rock music is not a 'thin' sound structure to be instanced in different performances, as in classical music, but the almost

maximally thick sound structure encoded on a recording and properly instanced through playback of a copy of the recording (1996: 1-98).<sup>2</sup>

In his recent book on musical ontology, *Musical Works and Performances*, Stephen Davies (2001) criticizes Gracyk's view, pointing to important rock practices that Gracyk ignores or sidelines, particularly the importance placed on live performance skill in the rock world.<sup>3</sup> In summary, Davies says

[t]he facts are these: more groups play rock music than ever are recorded; almost every recorded group began as a garage band that relied on live gigs; almost every famous recording artist is also an accomplished stage performer; [and] although record producers are quite rightly acknowledged for the importance of their contribution, they are not usually identified as members of the band... (2001: 32)

Elsewhere he also points to the fact that cover versions and remixes are treated more like new interpretations of existing works – more like *performances* – than like new works in their own right (S. Davies 2001: 31-2). Davies proposes an alternative account of rock ontology intended to correct these shortcomings. He argues that rock works, like classical ones, are created for performance, but whereas classical works are for *live* performance, rock works are for *studio* performance, where works for studio performance implicitly

<sup>2</sup> The terminology of ontologically 'thin' and 'thick' works is Davies's: 'Pieces consisting of abstract structures of note types are ontologically thinner than those specified at the level of note tokens. Thinner works determine less of the fine detail of their performances than do thicker ones, but performances are always thicker than the works they are of' (S. Davies 2001: 3).

<sup>3</sup> One criticism Davies does not focus on is Gracyk's sidelining of the importance of lyrics in the rock tradition. Gracyk oddly treats rock music as an almost purely sonic (that is, non-verbal) art: 'To be blunt, in rock music most lyrics don't matter very much' (Gracyk 1996: 65). But the lyrics of Bob Dylan's early work were surely at least as important as his 'sound' in earning him the central place Gracyk knows he occupies in rock history. Gracyk redresses the balance somewhat with his second book on rock (2001), which in focusing on how people use rock tracks in constructing their identities, implicitly assumes that lyrics are an important part of a rock track.

include a part for producer and sound engineers (S. Davies 2001: 34-6).<sup>4</sup> It is important to note that Davies's claim is not that there are classical works and rock works, of some common ontological kind, and that the classical ones are intended for a certain sort of performance, while the rock ones are intended for a different kind of performance. The claim is that classical works are of the *ontological kind* work-for-live-performance, while rock works are of a different ontological kind: work-for-studio-performance.

While I am sympathetic with Davies's reclamation of the importance of live performance skill for rock, I believe we can find a place for such values in rock without recourse to the notion of a work-for-studio-performance.<sup>5</sup> Several of the problems with his account of rock come from a tension between the idea of rock works' being for-studio-performance and the very rock practices Davies highlights in his criticisms of Gracyk.

First, although many garage and pub bands may hope to be recorded one day, it is not clear that they write their songs with a part for sound engineer even implicitly in mind. When playing in the garage or pub, without those technicians, these bands seem to think they are providing audiences with fully authentic performances of their songs, not with performances missing a part.<sup>6</sup> Of course, even pub bands use amplification, so that one might argue that the role of engineer is being played by someone, even if that someone is the bass-player who also does the sound-check at the beginning of the gig. But this much engineering is merely the result of using electric instruments. Live

<sup>4</sup> Clearly, this is a different notion from what I call a 'recorded performance' in my chapter on classical recordings.

<sup>5</sup> I make some of the following points in my 2003.

<sup>6</sup> I will sometimes talk of rock 'bands', sometimes of 'artists'. In all cases, what I say applies generally, to both solo artists and groups of musicians.



performances of classical works involving electric instruments, from Anthony Ritchie's concerto for amplified acoustic guitar (referred to by Davies), through the weird innovations of the early twentieth century such as the theremin and ondes martenot, to the wind machine in Vaughan Williams's *Sinfonia antartica*, require an engineer one way or another.<sup>7</sup> That does not make those engineers performers of the works (despite there being an 'implicit part' for an engineer to 'play'); nor does it make those works ontologically for-studio-performance. Moreover, as Davies says in the quotation above, in rock music, producers and engineers are not identified as members of the band.

Second, Davies maintains both that rock songs are works for studio performance, and that 'works for studio performance...cannot usually be played live' (2001: 190). Any account of rock music that makes live concerts an unusual phenomenon is surely misguided. At rock concerts, even by bands that have produced studio albums, neither the musicians nor the audiences suppose that those bands do not simply perform their songs. This intuition is admittedly defeasible in the face of a theory with more explanatory power, but Davies (2003) thinks that his account fits our intuitions about live rock *better* than mine. This cannot be so if it virtually rules out live rock shows.

Davies has suggested (in private communication) that rock musicians and fans might be acquiescing in the inferior simulations of recordings that go on at rock concerts simply as the result of contingent current technological shortcomings. More and more equipment is making the move from the recording studio to the stage, as its size decreases and its flexibility increases. Perhaps one day all that is achievable in the studio will be

<sup>7</sup> Here I refer to the person who plugs the machine in, keeps it well-oiled, and so on, not the person who operates it in the performance, who *is* a performer.

achievable onstage. At that point there will be no reason to withhold the label ‘studio performance’ from ‘live’ rock concerts.

There are three relevant responses to this suggestion. First, as noted above, although rock musicians may use on stage some of the same technology they use in the studio to produce the same sounds, they are still expected to *perform* their songs. There is already technology available to reproduce the sound of a recording on stage – your home CD-player and amplifier will do that. But rock audiences want to hear musicians play their instruments and sing, just as do classical and jazz audiences, as the occasional lip-syncing scandal shows.<sup>8</sup>

Second, when performers *do* attempt to emulate the sound of a studio recording, this does not by itself imply anything about the ontological status of the works performed. A choir may attempt to recapture in live performance the accuracy of intonation, tight ensemble, and even passion of a particular recording of theirs without this implying that the work they are performing is for-studio-performance. I will revisit these issues when I present my positive account below.

Third, no matter what studio technology becomes available for live shows, the most salient feature of what goes on in the studio can never be exported to the stage. In the studio one can take one’s time to pick and choose which of the sounds that get on tape should go into the mix. One can always in principle go back and change something until one is happy with the result. So it is not mere current technological shortcomings that

<sup>8</sup> I have in mind here cases where a performer presents himself as producing certain sounds on stage, typically by singing or playing an instrument, while he is in fact just miming those actions as a prerecorded track is playing. Thus I do not have in mind prerecorded backing tapes played as part of the live performance, or the production of music videos, in which the singer, and often the rest of the band, mime the live performance of a song to the playing of the single. The first case is clearly one of deception, while the latter two are not. Here, as elsewhere, the line between acceptable practice and misrepresentation is drawn by the tradition.

make studio and live performances different. They are different in a fundamental *metaphysical* way.

The last problem with Davies's ontological account of rock that I will address here is a process/product ambiguity in his use of the term 'studio performance'.<sup>9</sup> Sometimes it is used to refer to the final *product* – the seamless whole you hear when you play the recording. For example, in the summary of his chapter on performance, Davies says '[s]tudio performances...are identified with the simulated or virtual performances encoded on a master, or its clones' (2001: 197). But elsewhere 'studio performance' is used to refer to the set of all the actions – playings, tapings, electronic manipulations, editings, etc. – that go into the production of a record. This is evident in Davies's label for his proposed category: works 'for studio performance' are works for which a particular kind of action is appropriate, a particular *way of performing*. Some things he says earlier in the chapter just quoted capture this *process* sense of 'studio performance': 'This is not to say things are always easier for the studio *performer*...studio performances depart from the normative conditions applying to live performances...A [studio] performance is *finished* when it is "in the can"' (S. Davies 2001: 192, my emphases). These quotations imply that the studio performance is what *results in* a virtual performance, rather than being *identified with* that virtual performance.

This ambiguity is problematic, for while anyone should accept that a finished recording, when played back, gives rise to a phenomenal unity, this does not require that the production of a recording is some kind of performance. For instance, Davies does not think of classical electronic works as for performance. They are of the ontological kind

<sup>9</sup> For discussion of the ambiguity of 'performance' in the classical tradition, see Levinson 1987: 378-9.

that Gracyk thinks rock works are members of; they are for-playback. So Davies must allow that classical electronic works are studio performances in the *product* sense. But he clearly thinks they are not the results of studio performances in the *process* sense (S. Davies 2001: 25-34). If Davies is conflating these two senses of ‘studio performance’, then the usefulness of his proposed ontological category (work for-studio-performance) is thrown into question.<sup>10</sup> In my positive account below, I find different uses for both the process and product senses of Davies’s conception of ‘studio performance’. Since the product sense simply refers to the track or recording, I will not use the term ‘studio performance’ in that sense. Nor will I use the term in the process sense for traditions, such as classical electronic music and (I argue) rock, where the process of creating the recording is not usefully conceived of as a performance. Only in classical music (and relevantly similar traditions) is the process of creating a recording usefully thought of as a performance, and thus only in those traditions will I refer to the process of producing a recording as a performance, though I label it a ‘recorded performance’ to distinguish my concept from Davies’s. In discussing rock and other traditions which produce works for playback, I use two new terms – ‘track’ and ‘track construction’ – for the two senses of Davies’s term ‘studio performance’.

Finally, I believe a case can be made for the primacy of tracks as objects of critical attention in rock by looking at the asymmetric dependence of live on recorded rock practices. There are at least two ways in which live and recorded rock are related in

<sup>10</sup> There are further problems for Davies’s account which there is no space to go into here. Particularly interesting is the case of ‘cross-over’ versions, for example rock recordings of jazz songs, jazz treatments of rock songs, and classical ‘orchestrations’ of rock hits. For instance, the latter, if produced in a recording studio, will count as authentic instances of their respective works. These are complicated issues for any account of musical works, but I suspect Davies’s division of works into the ‘for-live-performance’ and ‘for-studio-performance’ categories does not simplify the situation.

this asymmetric fashion. The first is that in which live rock performances ‘look to’ rock tracks in some sense, as opposed to the relationship in the classical world, whereby recordings attempt to capture, or simulate, what happens in a live performance situation. I discuss the relations between live and recorded rock in more detail below. The second asymmetric dependence applies at a higher level. If, due to a highly infectious plague, say, all rock musicians were confined to their studios, the production of rock tracks would continue in much the same way it has for four or five decades. If, on the other hand, a Luddite revolution wiped out all the recording technology, concerts would become the only way of attending to rock music and hence the recreation of a pre-existing record’s sound could no longer be part of what is aimed for (or rejected) in a live performance. In short, live rock practice is dependent upon recorded rock, but not the other way around. Comparison with classical practice is again helpful. Classical music is a tradition wherein live performance was the only option for accessing the music for centuries. The destruction of recording technology would result only in a return to the old days, with all their good and bad aspects, whereas in a Gouldian paradise where all the concert halls have been razed, the tradition would be in danger, at least, of transforming into something quite different.

Of course, these thought-experiments drastically oversimplify matters, leaving out untold possible developments in the two traditions I discuss that might result from the radical changes in their environments, and more importantly, the effects of their long histories on what would happen given these unlikely changes. But rather than consider them hopelessly speculative as a result, I would rather they be taken as parables. For surely the morals I draw from them are reasonable claims about the traditions as they

now stand. Classical music is, as it has always been, a live performance tradition, and its recordings assimilate themselves to that tradition. Rock music is primarily a recording tradition, and its live performances depend partly on that tradition for their value. Thus, live rock performances, while undeniably an important part of the rock world, are not the primary focus of critical attention in that tradition.

## II. TRACKS THAT MANIFEST SONGS: A SYNTHETIC VIEW

What position is available, then, to someone who sympathizes both with Gracyk's arguments that the primary work in rock music is the ontologically thick recording, but also with Davies's counter-arguments that rock is importantly a performance art, like classical music? I think that Davies is right in seeing rock *songs* – the very thin structures of melody, harmony, and lyrics – as pieces of music that may be performed, that is, instanced in live performances. But these pieces of music are not the, or even a, primary focus of critical attention in rock, and thus are not musical *works*. Given their thinness, and their creators' awareness that they may be both performed live and used in the construction of tracks, I think it is wrong to consider these pieces of music, these sound structures, ontologically *for* anything in particular, be it performance *simpliciter*, or a particular kind of performance. Gracyk, on the other hand, is right in seeing rock *tracks* – the recordings that rock musicians create on the basis of, or more often along with, their songs – as musical works in their own right – the kind of thing that is the primary focus of critical attention in rock.

The view I defend is this: Rock musicians primarily construct *tracks*. These are ontologically thick works, like classical electronic works, and are at the center of rock as an art form. However, these tracks also manifest *songs*. Rock songs, like jazz songs, but

unlike classical songs, tend to be very thin ontologically, allowing of alterations in instrumentation, lyrics, melody, and even harmony. But while classical and jazz songs are works for performance *simpliciter*, rock songs are not works, nor are they *for* anything in particular. Rock tracks are not special kinds of performances of the thin songs they manifest, as Davies would have it. Rather, they are studio *constructions*: thick works that *manifest* thin songs, without being *performances* of them.

I draw on Gracyk's terminology in talking of rock tracks 'manifesting' songs without being performances of them. Davies criticizes this talk as 'awkward and obscure' (2001: 34), since if something is of a kind for performance, fully authentic instances of that thing must be performances.<sup>11</sup> I have argued that rock songs are not for performance. Thus, for me, manifesting a rock song simply amounts to being an instance of it. But I believe there is useful work for the concept of manifestation as opposed to instantiation. A rock track might manifest a work for performance, without being an instance of that work. Take Jeff Buckley's track 'Corpus Christi Carol' (1994), for instance. It is a rock version of Benjamin Britten's 'In the Bleak Mid-Winter' from his choral variations *A Boy Was Born*, manifesting that work without being a performance of it. (A performance of this work requires a choir, at least.) Or it might turn out that I am wrong, and that rock songs *are* of an ontological kind for performance. In that case, it would seem, if the recording authentically instances the song, the recording must be a performance of some sort. But one person's *modus ponens* is another's *modus tollens*. I would argue in that case that in rock the recording does *not* authentically instance the song for performance. The concept of *manifesting* a work is supposed to be intermediate between that of

<sup>11</sup> Davies puts this in terms of works, but he would surely subscribe to the generalization.

*authentically instancing* a work and that of having *no relation* to it. A manifestation of a work represents the work, displaying many of its properties, without being an instance of it.

A few examples should illustrate the idea. One might say that a photograph of the Mona Lisa in an art-history book manifests that work by being an accurate photograph of the painting. But it cannot be an authentic instance of the painting, since oil paintings are singular works – they have only one ‘instance’, the original. One might say that a musical score manifests the work it is of. Anyone working within the classical tradition can ‘read off’ the score every element of the work’s sound structure. Indeed, it is often *easier* to extract the work from a manifestation (for example, a score) than an instance (that is, a performance). Even someone well versed in contemporary classical music might not be able to tell, say, how many, and which, of the notes one hears in a performance of a contemporary piece are work-determinative rather than the result of a requirement in the score to improvise, or engage in some aleatoric procedure. But this will be clear in the score. Yet scores are not authentic instances of classical works, because they are not performances. In my view, rock tracks bear this same relation to rock songs. Someone knowledgeable in the tradition can ‘read off’ a track the song that is manifested by it. But the track is not thereby a performance of the song.

Why not simply use the term ‘representation’ instead of ‘manifestation’? Partly because ‘representation’ brings along with it connotations of interpretation, making rock tracks look more like interpretations, and thus performances, of songs. This is not merely a rhetorical move, however, since, as the preceding examples make clear, we have such a notion of manifestation without performance, or interpretation, or representation in this



thick sense. One more musical example to illustrate my point: a performance of a string quartet, taken as a whole, manifests the cello part without being an interpretation of the cello part.

On the other hand, there is something to Davies's notion of a 'virtual performance'. When we listen to a recording, whether rock or classical, we do think of it *in some way* as continuously caused, to the extent that we experience it as a phenomenal whole.<sup>12</sup> However, this does not require us to believe that all recordings are the result of performances of some sort.<sup>13</sup> Davies must agree, because he does not think classical electronic works are works for studio performance, though they provide a unified phenomenal experience. I am arguing that the situation is the same in rock.

Someone might argue that I am willfully ignoring the important role of performance skill in the production of rock recordings. After all, respect for, and valorization of, the ability to play instruments – particularly electric guitar, bass, and drums – seems just as central in the rock world as the same respect for instrumental skill in the classical world. And rock audiences expect the guitar solos on the Pixie's studio recording of 'Where is My Mind?' (1992) to be just as much the product of Joey Santiago's playing his instrument in real time as the classical audience does in the case of

<sup>12</sup> *Contra* Roger Scruton, who argues that one distinctive feature of music as an art is that we can hear its sound as sourceless (1999: 1-13).

<sup>13</sup> Perhaps we undergo a perceptual illusion when we listen to recordings, just as we cannot help but see film images as continuously moving, despite knowing that they are not (Kania 2002). Or perhaps we engage with recordings in a way analogous to how some argue we engage with visual art: we *imagine hearing* a continuous performance. (See, for example, Levinson 1993b and Walton 1990 on imagining seeing.) Perhaps we do *both* these things, but in response to different kinds of recordings. For instance, it might be that the appearance of continuity in recordings of classical works for performance and their ilk is purely illusory, while in listening to rock tracks and classical electronic works we *imagine hearing* a continuous performance. A conflation of these modes of listening might go some way to explaining why Davies's view of rock recordings as performances of some kind is intuitively plausible.

a John Williams recording of a Bach lute suite.<sup>14</sup> Doesn't this suggest that rock recordings should occupy a place on the ontological spectrum between the recorded works of classical electronic music and the recorded performances of classical works for performance – a place Davies is trying to locate with his notion of 'studio performance'?

I would argue that such a middle position is unnecessary. Think again of classical electronic music. Historically, that name (originally in German – *Elektronische Musik*) was given to works for playback produced without any actually recorded sounds as input; only synthesized sounds were used. Pioneers of this school were Werner Meyer Eppler, Hubert Eimert, and Karlheinz Stockhausen. A rival tradition, begun by Pierre Schaeffer and Pierre Henri, created works for playback by manipulating pre-recorded sounds in various ways, and went by the name of *musique concrète*. In under ten years, however, even the leaders of these schools had come to see that these different modes of production were 'twin facets of one genre' (Sadie 1988: 235). That is, I would say, they had come to realize that they were producing the same kind of artwork in two different ways, as two sculptors might differ in their preference for marble or granite. Now, as in the sculpture case, the different means of production of this kind of work might be aesthetically relevant. Two sculptures of exactly the same dimensions might differ in their aesthetic properties were one made of marble and the other granite. Similarly, two sonically identical works for playback might differ in their aesthetic properties if one was produced from pre-recorded sounds and the other completely synthetically. (The verisimilitude of the baby's cry will be much more impressive in the case of the synthesized recording, for instance.) Or two such works might differ aesthetically if each

<sup>14</sup> In fact, I think Santiago duets *with himself* on this track. Nonetheless, we expect both solos to be the product of real-time guitar-playing skills.

were constructed out of *different* pre-recorded sounds. (The verisimilitude of the baby's cry will be much more impressive in the work made entirely out of manipulations of a recording of a ringing telephone.) These considerations can be transferred directly to the rock case. The acknowledgement that rock works are recordings for playback – are neither songs, nor studio or recorded performances – need not demote the importance of the instrumental skill that goes into the production of many of them.

Nonetheless, one consequence of my view is that it makes rock seem a somewhat dichotomous tradition, with one type of activity at its core – the production of rock tracks, non-performance artworks – and with another type of activity less central, but still important – live performances of songs. These two realms are linked in various ways of course. The songs rock musicians perform live are usually those manifested by the non-performance tracks those same musicians produce; and the skills displayed in their live performances are usually drawn upon in the production of those tracks. But the view of rock music I am proposing is nonetheless bipartite.<sup>15</sup>

### III. LIVE ROCK PERFORMANCES

Davies criticizes my view on this account, calling it 'unacceptably schizoid' (2003c). His view of rock is more unified, in that the same artwork is at the center of both the recorded and live rock worlds – the song-for-studio-performance. In the studio, of course, this song simply receives an authentic studio performance. But what of live performances, on Davies's view? One option open to him is to gloss 'studio performance' as 'electronically mediated performance'. That is, he could back off the sharp metaphysical distinction between studio and live performance, allowing any performance primarily using electric

<sup>15</sup> Gracyk helpfully reminded me that he nods in this direction (Gracyk 1996: 79).

instruments or apparatus as a studio performance. On this suggestion, live rock performances would count as authentic studio performances, since they are, almost without exception, electronically mediated. There would thus be no sharp distinction on metaphysical grounds between rock performances (literally in the studio, or on stage) and live performances of classical works calling for electric instruments, such as *ondes martenot* or wind machine.

But Davies does, in fact, want to hold on to the metaphysical divide between studio and stage. When he expands on what he takes ‘studio performance’ to denote, he says that

a clumsier but more accurate specification [than that given in Davies 2001] would have contrasted live with electronically mediated performance in which it is normative that some processing, adaptation, or sequencing is not achievable in real time, and in which multiple takes may be recorded, mixed, and edited as part of the production process. (S. Davies 2003c)

Thus, live rock performances cannot be authentic studio performances, since whatever is achieved during a rock concert is necessarily ‘achievable in real time’. But live and studio rock practices are nonetheless as unified as the corresponding classical practices, on Davies’s view. As he says,

the rock musicians’ live performance is a mirror image of the classical musicians’ recording. Whereas the latter simulates a live performance, the former simulates the (or a) recording. This is because the performances’ ontological commitments face in different directions – one to the live setting presupposed by the work and the other to the studio, with its technological resources...[T]he standard target of

the live [rock] performance is the recorded track, not the thin song, of which most rock musicians and fans would be unaware. (2003c)

Before discussing my main objection to Davies's view of the relation between live and recorded rock, let me pause to note the oddness of this last claim. Davies's view is that rock tracks are studio performances of thin songs. Yet he claims that the song is an entity of which most rock musicians are unaware. It seems odd that musicians in a tradition of performances of songs would be unaware of those songs.

The symmetry of Davies's views of the relations between live and studio practices in the classical and rock music worlds is aesthetically appealing, but it is unfortunately based on a misunderstanding of what goes on at a rock concert. Rock musicians often do employ a 'sound' for a particular song in their live shows similar to that of their recording of the same song. That is, they use what a classical musician might call similar instrumentation. But this should not be construed as an attempt to simulate the sound of the recording in a narrow sense, that is, as an attempt to produce a sonic doppelgänger of the recording. For there are often obvious structural differences between live performances of a rock song and the 'virtual performance' encoded on the track. Typical differences include an extended introduction, often during which the identity of the song being performed is concealed as long as possible, alternative lyrics, including interpolated verses, improvisatory instrumental breaks, and an extended coda. These are not the results of the musicians' being bored of playing the same material night after night. Audiences expect, even *require* this kind of performance. It is not surprising that the overall sound chosen for the performance of a song is that of the recorded track, any more than it is surprising that a classical performer's live shows should exhibit the same

interpretation of a work as her recordings, since the rock track, like the classical recording, is the considered result of a long process of artistic experimentation. If the band has decided that these particular timbres, rhythms, melodies, harmonies, and lyrics sit well enough together to produce an infinitely repeatable addition to their oeuvre, it is unsurprising that they choose a similar combination when performing live. It is clear, too, that bands *could* produce live sonic doppelgängers of their tracks, since there are bands that produce nothing but such doppelgängers – of *other* bands' tracks – exclusively. 'Cover bands' attempt to simulate on stage, often with remarkable success, the sound of particular tracks by more famous bands. Someone unfamiliar with the peculiar pleasures of karaoke might call this 'slavish imitation'.<sup>16</sup>

On the other hand, more radical departures from the sound on a band's studio recordings are possible live. This often happens with older material, and thus *can* be seen to some extent as a result of boredom, or, considered more positively, as springing from a desire to explore as yet untapped potential in a song. (But note that it is *extremely* uncommon for a band to record a new studio version of the same song – to cover their own tracks, as it were.<sup>17</sup>) Often, also, a song can be performed in an extremely simple fashion, being sung to the sole accompaniment of an (amplified) acoustic guitar. An

<sup>16</sup> One of the many possible permutations I cannot hope to get to in this chapter is the likes of the Dark Star Orchestra: a band that attempts to reproduce on stage *particular historical live performances* by the Grateful Dead.

<sup>17</sup> Theodore Gracyk discusses one way this happens – when an artist changes labels and rerecords his or her earlier hits – for inclusion on a 'best of' for the new label, for instance (1996: 29).

example is Radiohead's 'True Love Waits',<sup>18</sup> notable for being just such a simple performance, but at a concert by a studio band *par excellence*.<sup>19</sup>

These considerations suggest that Davies is wrong to view live rock performances as simulations of the recordings of the bands performing, even when they are established studio artists. My view, that live rock shows consist of performances of thin songs, while studio recordings are electronic works in their own right, is admittedly dichotomous, but its dichotomy reflects rock practice, and thus, *contra* Davies, is not fairly characterized as 'schizoid'.

#### IV. COVER VERSIONS

A *prima facie* question for my view is: What makes one rock track a 'cover', or new version, of some previous track, if it is not some kind of performance of the song 'covered'? (One important note about terminology: When I talk of 'covers', I am talking about recorded cover *versions*, not the live performances of cover *bands*. So for instance, we talk about Rod Stewart's 1991 cover of Tom Waits's 'Downtown Train' (1985) or Johnny Cash's 2002 cover of Nine Inch Nails's 'Hurt' (1994). Cover bands are a very different phenomenon. They are bands, as described earlier, that attempt to reproduce live the sound of particular tracks by other, more famous bands. I will be discussing cover tracks at length, and will only make some brief remarks about cover bands.)

Gracyk does not have much to say on the topic of covers.<sup>20</sup> He discusses different versions of a track such as the CD re-release of an originally vinyl track, alternative cuts,

<sup>18</sup> *I Might Be Wrong: Live Recordings*. Capitol (2001).

<sup>19</sup> Another permutation I do not have space for is the phenomenon of live recordings of rock concerts. As a first pass, I would consider them to be in the same ontological boat as live recordings of classical concerts that incorporate electric instruments. See my 1998: 96-100 and Davies 2001: 301-7.

and remixes, but does not talk about recordings of the same song by different artists. On Davies's view, the rock case parallels the classical: a recording is an authentic (studio) performance of a particular song iff the necessary conditions for (studio) performance of a work are met: '(1) [T]he performance matches the work's content, more or less; (2) the performers intend to follow most of the instructions specifying the work, whoever wrote them; and (3) a robust causal chain runs from the performance to the work's creation' (2001: 196-7).<sup>21</sup> Since I argue that a rock track is *not* a performance of the song it manifests, I cannot group covers together as different studio performances of the same song. But since I have defended the notion of a track's manifesting a song, I can just as easily group covers together as tracks (successfully) intended to manifest the same song.

Davies would doubtless respond that rock musicians and fans talk of covers as if they are new performances of old songs. But the analogy with film is helpful here. Films occasionally get 'remade': a new film is produced that shares many important properties with a pre-existing film. The plot, the way the plot is presented, and the title are the most commonly transferred properties. But much can be altered. The action can be moved from the Midlands to the Midwest, from the '60s to the '90s, the dialogue can be completely rewritten, so long as it presents broadly the same story. But even here, relatively major changes can be made. For instance, in the remake of *The Thomas Crown Affair* (1999), what was a happy ending only for Steve McQueen's womanizing Thomas

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<sup>20</sup> Ontologically, at least. He discusses the different purposes a cover can be made for, and put to, in his 2001: 63-6.

<sup>21</sup> I ignore the modifications to this proposal that I suggested in an earlier chapter. One new consideration relevant here is that the second condition would need to be modified for rock music, since the song is not usually specified in written instructions. But Davies is well aware that a work can be communicated through a model performance, so a charitable reading already includes this alternative.



Crown becomes a happy-couple ending for Pierce Brosnan's more sensitive Crown and Rene Russo's Catherine Banning with the addition of a new final scene.<sup>22</sup>

Now, audiences, of course, compare the original and the remake.<sup>23</sup> Directors, knowing this, insert into remakes (or sometimes lard them with) subtle references to the original – a cameo by the aged star of the original, the theme song from the original used intradiegetically, and so on. But there is an important difference between comparisons of an original film with its remake, and comparisons of two performances of a symphony, for instance. When one performance is preferred over another for, say, its sensitive handling of tempo changes in a certain section, the two are being compared as performances, or presentations, *of the same work*. One listener might agree with another that, in itself, the first performance of the section is more exciting, but that ultimately the second is truer to the work as a whole. But similar judgments are not made in the comparison of an original film and a remake. Two critics might disagree about whether the chase scene in the remake is more exciting, or better edited, than the parallel sequence in the original. One might grant that although the original chase scene is less exciting in itself, it is better suited to the pacing of the movie taken as a whole than the remade chase scene is to the pacing of the remake. But there is no talk of which movie is truer to 'the work' – for there is no obvious referent for this term in cinema, other than a given movie.

<sup>22</sup> Of course, there can be extremely 'faithful' remakes and covers. In the first category, recall Gus Van Sant's (1998) remake of Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960), which remade the original (almost) shot for shot. In the second, consider Sixpence None the Richer's 1997 cover of The La's 'There She Goes' (1990) or their 2003 cover of Crowded House's 'Don't Dream It's Over' (1986).

<sup>23</sup> I do not mean to beg any questions by my adoption of the usual term 'original' for a film that gets remade, or a track that gets covered. The word is not intended evaluatively; a remake can be better – even more *original* – than the 'original' film or track.

It would be odd to say the remake is a better representation of the *script* or screenplay for several reasons. First, we are not used to thinking of scripts as works in their own rights, to be ‘performed’ or instantiated in various ways by various sets of directors, actors, designers, cinematographers, etc. Second, even when an ‘original’ movie is being made, the script is an extremely fluid entity – it can be, and is frequently, changed (that is, ignored) in accord with how the director (typically) wants the resulting film to look. Third, when a movie is being remade, it is not the original script the director or writers turn to (though this may, of course, be one source they use). Rather, it is the original *movie*.

Of course, the remakers do not attempt to make a visual doppelgänger of the original. Instead, it is customary to take over, adapting where necessary, those basic structural elements I listed above: the plot (story, *histoire*, *fabula*) and the way the plot is presented (discourse, *récit*, *syuzhet*), though, as we also noted above, even these can be altered in quite major ways. Let us call this thin structure of plot-plus-way-of-presenting-it, the ‘narrative’, for want of a better term. Clearly the narrative is a better candidate than the script for the ‘work’ ‘performed’ in both the original and remade films. The original and remake rarely have the same script in common, while the narrative is, virtually by definition, the abstractum they share. The narrative is what filmmakers and viewers recognize as that which must be preserved in order for one film to count as a remake of another. But none of this implies that the two films are usefully viewed as performances, of any sort, of the narrative they have in common. One can speculate on the reasons why this is so – the narrative is so slight a structure, admitting of such various embodiments, that there is simply not enough to it to warrant interpretations thereof. But this is not the

evidence for my claim that a remake and original are two separate works while the narrative they share is not. The evidence is the fact that people knowledgeable about cinema treat the two films as works in their own right, comparing them directly, advertizing to their internal properties, rather than comparing them by reference to a third, different kind of entity – the narrative – to which both are related in some representational fashion. The two films are the kind of thing that is the primary focus of critical attention in cinema. The narrative is not.

How does this digression into the philosophy of film relate to our primary concern, the work of art in rock music? Just as we compare film remakes with their originals, yet do not think of films as performances of the narrative they have in common, so we compare cover versions without thinking of them as performances of the songs they manifest. The parallels between the way films and rock tracks are created are relevant here. A film may begin as a script and the artistic vision of a director, but we do not think of the script as the primary focus of critical attention in cinema. Similarly, a track may have its genesis in someone's writing a song with pen and paper at the piano, but this does not show that the resulting recording is a performance of a thin song. Rock tracks, like films, are works in their own right, and the primary works in their respective traditions.<sup>24</sup>

A final point worth noting, having focused for so long on film remakes and rock covers, is that remakes and covers are quite uncommon in the worlds of cinema and rock. Almost all films and tracks released are original material. This further suggests, I would argue, that rock, like film, should not be seen as a performance tradition like classical

<sup>24</sup> This argument – that covers are not new performances of pre-existing songs – stands independently of my arguments that the rock song is not a work of art.

music. It might be countered that it is unfair to compare, in this respect, rock music and film, two art traditions very much alive, with classical music, which is arguably an enfeebled if not quite dead tradition. Even if one were not to go that far, the fact that classical music has hundreds of years' more history to draw on than rock or film might suggest that there would be more recycling of material in the classical world.

But such an objection betrays a superficial understanding of the traditions under discussion. Even if in Beethoven's milieu one might have encountered more works that were new to one, even more premières on the average concert program than one would in the classical world today, nonetheless everyone in the audience would have understood that the performance they were hearing was of a work that was intended to receive multiple performances instantiating different interpretations. The contemporary classical composer intends exactly the same thing, though with perhaps less hope of having her intention fulfilled. On the other hand, when listening to a rock track, one does not focus on the thin song manifested in it, nor wonder what another rock band would have done with it; rather, one listens to the track as an entity complete in itself, not as one among many possible representations of a further entity it instantiates.

#### *4.1 Goodman's zig-zag redivivus*

My proposal that covers should be grouped together as tracks successfully intended to manifest the same song may disinter an old musical-aesthetics chestnut that most people believe has been successfully put to rest. I refer to the 'wrong-note paradox' that arises from the notorious constraints Nelson Goodman places on the relations between traditional classical scores and performances. Goodman claims that scores and performances must be carefully choreographed in what Nicholas Wolterstorff calls a 'zig-

zag ballet' (1980: 99-105). This is because, according to Goodman, '[a] score...has as a primary function the authoritative identification of a work from performance to performance' (1976: 128). Immediately upon making this claim, Goodman notes that

[t]his is by no means true of everything commonly called a score;...systematic use involves a specialization from ordinary use...Obviously, what is commonly called but does not by the above criterion qualify as a score is not thereby disparaged but only reclassified. (1976: 128n)

The zig-zag ballet is successfully choreographed when '[i]dentity of work and of score is retained in any series of steps, each of them either from compliant performance to score-inscription, or from score-inscription to compliant performance, or from score-inscription to true copy' (Goodman 1976: 178). The danger of allowing more freedom in the dance is made clear by Goodman:

The innocent-seeming principle that performances differing by just one note are instances of the same work risks the consequence – in view of the transitivity of identity – that all performances whatsoever are of the same work. If we allow the least deviation, all assurance of work-preservation and score-preservation is lost; for by a series of one note errors of omission, addition, and modification, we can go all the way from Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony* to *Three Blind Mice*. (1976: 186-7)

Finally, Goodman reminds us that he is not 'quibbling about the proper use of such words as "notation", "score", and "work"'. That matters little more than the proper use of a fork.

What does matter is that [a score should provide a] means of identifying a work from performance to performance...’ (1976: 189).<sup>25</sup>

Most commentators have found themselves in a dilemma with respect to the application of the principle of charity to Goodman’s zig-zag ballet. On the one hand, one can take seriously his eschewing of the ordinary usage of such terms as ‘work’, ‘score’, and ‘notation’, but then one is forced to note that, however interesting the formal apparatus he assembles is in itself, he cannot make any interesting claims about the nature of musical works, scores, and notations. On the other, one can read his disclaimers more weakly, whereupon one is forced to criticize his theory as wrong-headed from the start, since his opening claim, that the primary purpose of scores is the identification of works from performance to performance, seems indefensible.<sup>26</sup>

I make no such disclaimers about my ontology of rock music. It is fully intended to capture how people think about rock, and thus explain, among other things, why they say some of the things they do in connection with it. But it might be argued that I am thus open to a criticism closely related to the wrong-note paradox. The original paradox is that if we reject Goodman’s unintuitively stringent criterion that performances of works must be note perfect, we are forced to acknowledge that all performances are of the same work, because of the possibility of transformation from Beethoven’s *Fifth Symphony* to *Three Blind Mice*, referred to above. Most philosophers of music have resolved this paradox by arguing that scores do not function the way Goodman describes them as

<sup>25</sup> I have altered this quotation from Goodman’s negative particular form (he is denying that a particular Cage score is notational, in his sense) to a positive general form.

<sup>26</sup> For a variety of responses critical of Goodman’s argument, see Tormey 1974, Wolterstorff 1980: 98-105, Levinson 1980: 87n, 1990a: 257-8, Edlund 1996, Scruton 1999: 111-12, Sharpe 2000: 98-9, Davies 2001: 135-49, and Ridley 2003. A notable exception is Stefano Predelli (1999b), who argues that Goodman’s account of the relationship between performance and score can be saved with minor modifications.

functioning. My view, following Davies (2001), is that performances are not linked just to some score or recent performance. The classical world is set up so that each performance is supposed to reach back *through* the score to the work as it was originally constituted by the composer's act of composition. Thus each performance of a work is related in the same way to the same work, and no slow quasi-transitive transformation can take place through a series of performances and/or score tokens.<sup>27</sup>

But the case of rock covers seems importantly different. A band will usually learn a song by listening to a track that manifests it, and many tracks may manifest the same song. But because the song is so thin in the rock tradition, it runs the risk of being lost in the mix, as it were. For instance, in 1987, the Pet Shop Boys released a cover of 'Always on My Mind'. 'Quite why we ever agreed to perform one of Elvis Presley's hits on a tribute TV show is lost in the mists of time[,] but this was the song we chose and recorded in a version that was meant to sound as unlike Elvis Presley as possible.'<sup>28</sup> Two aspects of this quotation are relevant for our present purposes. First, the Pet Shop Boys (Neil Tennant and Chris Lowe) talk of recording 'one of Elvis Presley's hits', even though they know that the *song* was written by Wayne Thompson, Mark James, and John Christopher (as evidenced by other parts of the liner notes). This indicates once more that the primary work of art in rock, what, in this instance, the Pet Shop Boys want their track to be measured against, is *Elvis's recording* of the song, rather than the thin song itself. Second, the Pet Shop Boys wanted to construct a track that sounded as different from Elvis's as possible. In this they surely succeeded. Elvis's track is a slow ballad, with the

<sup>27</sup> Put this way, it is perhaps clearer why the paradox arises in Goodman's nominalistic framework. For the nominalist there is no work created in the act of composition to which each performance must be related.

<sup>28</sup> Liner notes to Pet Shop Boys, *Discography: The Complete Singles Collection*. EMI (1991). Note the group's casual yet clear distinction between live performance and track construction.

King's lugubrious rendition of the melody accompanied by piano, male backing singers, and a mawkish slide guitar. The Pet Shop Boys's cover is an energetic dance track, pulsing with electronic beats and clean synthesizer chords. Neil Tennant's vocal is characteristically emotionally disengaged, lending an arch air to the somewhat ambiguous lyrics. Moreover, the Pet Shop Boys's track is more interesting harmonically. Where the transition from chorus to verse or bridge in Elvis's version is effected by a simple iv-v-i in the bass, the Pet Shop Boys spice things up with a fully harmonized IV-V-III<sup>b</sup>-IV-I progression (synthesizer faux-orchestral timbre!).

The potential problem for my account of rock covers – call it the ‘striking-cover paradox’ – is this: If rock songs are so thin that they admit of ‘thickenings’ as varied as Elvis's and the Pet Shop Boys's versions of ‘Always on My Mind’, we can imagine a chain of tracks, A through Z, where B is a cover of A, differing in some significant properties (such as the harmony and instrumentation of the Elvis–Pet Shop Boys example); C is a cover of B, differing from it as significantly, though perhaps along different dimensions; D is a cover of C; and so on, until we reach Z, a track which, though it is a cover of a cover of...a cover of ‘Don't Be Cruel’, sounds to the casual listener like a version of ‘Pop Goes the Weasel’. The problem, of course, is that if I am right in asserting that covers can be grouped together as tracks intended to manifest the same song, then the successful intentions of B's artists to manifest A's song, C's to manifest B's, and so on, should imply that Z manifests A's song, while *ex hypothesi* this is not the case.

One thing it is important to get straight on before attempting to solve the paradox is the status of the striking divergences between an original track and its cover. For we



are in danger here of making claims about the relationship between cover versions as implausible as those Goodman makes about the relationships between scores and performances. Take again, for example, the Pet Shop Boys's cover of 'Always on My Mind'. As I noted earlier, one striking difference between Elvis's track and the Pet Shop Boys's is their substitution of a III $\flat$ -IV-I progression for the simple iv-v-i bass line leading out of the chorus. It is easy to regard this substitution as somehow altering, perhaps adding to, the song manifested by the original track, so that the song is an ontological snowball, accreting elements as it is covered again and again. But there are two things to note about this hypothesis. The first is that if it *were* true (which it is not), then the Pet Shop Boys's track *would not qualify* as a cover of the Elvis track on my account. For the Pet Shop Boys's track would now manifest a *different* song from that manifested by the Elvis track. This hypothesis thus both (i) misrepresents my theory, and (ii) has unintuitive consequences in terms of what counts as a cover of what. The second, more important thing to note is that the assumption is false. It makes a confused inference from the fact that the cover *track* is thicker than the original *song* to the mistaken idea that the *song manifested by* the cover track is thicker than the song manifested by the original. Other rock musicians, on hearing the Pet Shop Boys's 'Always on My Mind', might like the III $\flat$ -IV-I progression and include it in their own cover of the song. But they would not feel obliged to, conversant as they are with the tradition. They would realize that this progression is just a fancy substitute for a simple IV-V-I, and would feel free to 'revert' to that progression, even if they were not aware of the Elvis original. Moreover, if they did go with the Pet Shop Boys's progression, adding further some prog-rock counterpoint between an electric guitar and keyboard, they could not, given the

tradition within which they are working, expect other bands covering *their* track to include that counterpoint. Rock songs are exceedingly thin, and rock musicians are aware of this fact.<sup>29</sup>

There are a number of avenues open to me as possible solutions of the striking-cover paradox. One is to deny that the covering relation is transitive in any way. On this view, if track C is a cover of track B, and B is a cover of A, we cannot say anything about the relation between C and A. But this is unappealing for a number of reasons. Firstly, although a band may take just one version of a song as their target, knowledge of this does not seem relevant to critical assessment of their track. Willie Nelson covered ‘Always on My Mind’ in 1982, between Elvis’s and the Pet Shop Boys’s versions. Both of the later versions are covers of the same song. It would not make any difference to this situation if the Pet Shop Boys had never heard Elvis’s track and only intended to cover Nelson’s. Secondly, and relatedly, rock audiences seem to group covers with respect to the song they are intended to manifest, rather than simply by the track(s) taken as the immediate object of the covering intention. Covers do not only occur paired one-to-one with originals.

A different strategy is to appeal to the intentional aspect of my account. Z’s artists *intend* to manifest Y’s song, which Y’s artists intended to be X’s song, and so on. Thus at some level of description, the intentions of Z’s artists were to construct a track manifesting A’s song. However, a path from Z to A paved solely with this kind of intention does not appeal to me. My claim is that the intentions involved must be

<sup>29</sup> Or so the philosopher puts it. Of course, what I am attempting, throughout this dissertation, is to describe what artists and audiences do in a clear, systematic way. Thus this sentence in the main text should not be construed as implying that the thinness of rock songs is somehow prior to, or independent of, what rock musicians do.

*successful*, and even if there is a sense in which Z's artists intended to manifest A's song in their track, that intention has not been successful. Yet, *ex hypothesi*, the intentions at each link in the chain from A to Z *were* successful. Hence the paradox.

Perhaps, then, I should resist precisely this latter part of the thought experiment – the claim that each successive band was successful in their intention to cover the preceding track in the chain. Perhaps if I am to grant that we got from 'Don't Be Cruel' to 'Pop Goes the Weasel', I must insist that at some point along the chain, some track, say, N, must have failed to manifest its predecessor's (M's) song. One way to do this would be to argue that though the proposed chain of covers is theoretically possible, it would never happen in practice, because rock musicians, like any others, are generally well aware of the history of the tradition within which they are working. Thus N is, in practice, much more likely to be a cover of the original A, or perhaps the well-known F, with an awareness of several other previous versions, than simply a cover of M as if it were the original manifestation of the song in question.

Although these points contain some truth, I do not consider this to be a satisfying response. Given the great differences possible between a cover and its original, a critic of my theory probably does not need to posit a chain of twenty-six covers to make her point. And it is surely not inconceivable that one distinctive cover might be taken alone as the target of another quite transformative cover, and thus that the paradox can be accomplished in a plausible hypothetical scenario. I suggest the solution to the paradox does lie in a rejection of the hypothesis that each link in the chain of covers is a successful intention to manifest the song of the target track, but that this is due to a more complicated intentional structure than we have so far considered. The covering artist

intends his new track to manifest the song manifested on his target track *whatever that song is*. Because he is knowledgeable about rock practice, he is unlikely to get that wrong. However, if the target track is a striking cover of a previous track, and moreover the artist is *unaware* of this fact, we can see how he might fail in his intention. He will fail in the same way that a classical musician playing a very old work might fail. If the score she is playing from has been greatly corrupted through many individually minor copying errors, the classical performer will fail to instance any work at all. She will still produce a musical performance, but it will not be of the work she intends to perform (arguably that which began the causal chain resulting in the score she is playing from) nor of any other work.

Thus a track may be intended to cover a certain target track, be as similar to that track as many other (successful) covers are to their targets, yet fail to be a cover of its target by failing to manifest the song manifested by that target.<sup>30</sup> As with Goodman's original wrong-note paradox, the striking-cover paradox is the result of over-simplifying the relations between various entities involved in a musical tradition.

## V. CONCLUSIONS

The work of art in rock is a track constructed in the studio. Tracks usually manifest songs, which can be performed live. A cover version is a track (successfully) intended to manifest the same song as some other track. This ontology reflects the way informed audiences talk about rock. It recognizes the centrality of recorded tracks to the tradition, but also its valuation of live performance skills. It draws relevant distinctions between

<sup>30</sup> I am indebted to Lee Brown and Jerrold Levinson for drawing my attention to the special role of the original track in a series of covers, though they did not do so in the context of the striking-cover paradox, and should not be held accountable for the solution to it given here.

what goes on in the studio and what ends up on the recording, but also between what happens in the studio and what happens on stage – a relation importantly different in the rock and classical traditions.

## 6

### ALL PLAY AND NO WORK: THE ONTOLOGY OF JAZZ

The question that exercises me in this chapter is what kinds of works are produced in the jazz tradition, if any. I take as my primary target ‘standard form’ jazz, where a paradigmatic performance consists of a number of solo choruses framed by a pair of statements of the head. But what I say should apply to almost all jazz, including free improvisation and performances of highly-detailed jazz scores.<sup>1</sup> One jazz tradition that I will put to one side is the jazz song tradition, by which I mean the tradition in which the focus of the performance is a singer singing a song. This tradition may have a different ontology from primarily instrumental jazz. The fact that it is a relatively autonomous tradition can be seen in its being given a separate treatment (some might say its being largely ignored) in historical, musicological, and philosophical writing about jazz.<sup>2</sup> I *do not* mean to exclude vocalizations within the instrumental tradition, such as scatting solos by instrumentalists, Dizzy Gillespie’s calls of ‘salt peanuts!’, and even the applause, laughter, and non-verbal commentary of the performers that make up part of some instrumental jazz performances.

<sup>1</sup> A possible exception is jazz fusion, which I discuss below.

<sup>2</sup> Usually a few early singers are mentioned – Bessie Smith, Billie Holiday, and, of course, Louis Armstrong – to illustrate the conflation of vocal and instrumental sounds that began in the early days of jazz. But the vocal tradition drops out of the picture around the Swing era. See, for example, Hodeir 1956, Megill and Demory 1989, and Tirro 1993.

My discussion of the ontology of other traditions above, together with a little knowledge of jazz, suggests four possibilities for a jazz ontology:

- I. Jazz music is ontologically like classical music; there are works for performance which receive various performances.
- II. In jazz, the performance *is* the work.
- III. Jazz music is ontologically like rock music; the primary works are recordings – works for playback rather than performance.
- IV. In jazz, there are *no* works, only performances.

I will consider these suggestions in turn.<sup>3</sup>

#### I. WORKS FOR PERFORMANCE

The first suggestion is that jazz is like classical music. Just as *The Rite of Spring* is a work of classical music, composed by Igor Stravinsky and performed by numerous groups (led, in a few cases, by the composer himself), so ‘Sophisticated Lady’ is a work of jazz music, composed by Duke Ellington and performed by numerous groups (led, in a few cases, by the composer). This view is defended explicitly by Carol S. Gould and Kenneth Keaton (2000) and James O. Young and Carl Matheson (2000), but it seems to be implicit in many other discussions of jazz, whether philosophical, musicological, or popular. See, for example, Alperson 1984 (on one reading), Tirro 1993, and Wynton Marsalis in Ken Burns’s documentary, *Jazz* (2001).

<sup>3</sup> For ease of exposition, I shall sometimes use the language of a position I ultimately reject, for instance, talking about a performance of a jazz work. But by the end of the chapter, the reader should see how I intend to rephrase such formulations in the language of my final proposal.

### 1.1 Locating the work

One objection to this way of describing jazz practice which may suggest itself is that, unlike in the classical tradition, in jazz there is no score, or if there is, a performance of the work does not follow it. For instance, Ellington doubtless notated much of what we hear on his orchestra's 1933 recording of 'Sophisticated Lady',<sup>4</sup> but Chick Corea's group, in their 1989 recording of the same number,<sup>5</sup> does not play what Ellington notated – how could they, given that they are less than a quarter the size of Ellington's group? If we are to see jazz as like classical music in having scored works, the relationship between these two performances might seem more like that between a performance of the Prelude from J. S. Bach's third partita for unaccompanied violin and a performance of the first movement of Eugène Ysaÿe's second sonata for the same instrument, a fantasia based on the Bach, fittingly titled 'Obsession'. Moreover, in many examples of jazz there is no score at all – for instance, the Fletcher Henderson Orchestra often played 'head-arrangements' – arrangements that were communicated to the players without use of a written medium, and memorized for performance without scores.

But this objection confuses a number of issues. For one, it is a mistake to identify a musical work with what is recorded in a score.<sup>6</sup> For instance, most bowing indications in classical scores are merely recommendations – a performance might deviate from them, and yet be fully authentic (whereas a deviation from the *notes* indicated would, *ceteris paribus*, take away from its authentically instancing the work it is of). Thus, one

<sup>4</sup> *Reminiscing in Tempo* (Columbia/Legacy CK 48654).

<sup>5</sup> *Akoustic Band* (GRP Records GRD 9582).

<sup>6</sup> Young and Matheson make something like this mistake (2000: 125), as does Paul Thom (1993). The confusion is not helped by the New Musicology's habit of referring to works as 'texts'. (See S. Davies 2001: 91-7.)



might argue that Ellington's notation for 'Sophisticated Lady' includes not only work-determinative instructions, but many recommendations as well – like a performer's edition of the Bach cello suites. If this is accurate, then Chick Corea may have successfully instantiated the work by detecting what is essential to it (through knowledge of Ellington's score or recordings and of the jazz tradition) and producing a performance with all of those features.

Further, the existence of non-literate musical cultures with enduring works for performance shows that the existence of a work does not require a score *at all*. Given a body of conventions implicit in a musical tradition, such as that of the New Zealand Maori, a knowledgeable musician can produce a performance of a given work on the basis of a 'model' performance of it. So Chick Corea could be performing Ellington's piece on the basis of Ellington's 1933 recording, given that Corea, as a skilled jazz musician, knows how to separate the work-determinative wheat from the performers' discretionary chaff. The same considerations might be used to argue that head arrangements code works as successfully as scores do.

This suggestion, however, that jazz musicians, knowledgeable about their tradition, can effortlessly extract the work from a performance might paper over some complexity in jazz practice. Consider the claim that an improviser creates a sound structure while performing, leaving aside for now the question of whether that structure should be called a work. Now consider someone – a solo saxophonist, say – freely improvising, not basing his improvisation on any pre-existing tune. This musician is producing sounds, and they surely have a structure, in a broad sense – he produces sounds of various frequencies and amplitudes in a certain order. This structure could be

represented by a sonogram, and we could compare the sonograms of various improvisations to see how similar those improvisations are. Of course, such a comparison will not be a mechanical affair, since we will be interested in certain vectors of similarity. For instance, the fact that two improvisations are exactly similar in terms of their amplitude profile – that is, they get louder and softer in exactly the same pattern – will not necessarily strike us as a musically relevant similarity, whereas the fact that two others share the same frequency profile – that is, their pattern of pitches is exactly the same – will be very relevant. It is common enough for an improvised solo to build up to a climax shortly before its end, but uncommon enough to raise suspicion for two improvisations to contain exactly the same notes. Again, relations of timbre between the improvisations will seem unimportant compared to relations of pitch; what instruments people play when improvising is less important to us than what notes they produce.

So, improvisations, like all sounds, have a certain rich structure that can be represented in a sonogram. But there is another kind of structure that the sounds produced by a jazz improviser, even a free improviser, has. This is the structure that would be recorded in a standard transcription of the improvisation, of the sort to be found in the musicological, and occasionally philosophical, literature about jazz.<sup>7</sup> Occasionally, such transcriptions become parts of scores. For instance, one of Barney Bigard's solos was incorporated by Ellington into the score for 'Mood Indigo'.<sup>8</sup> This structure is coarser-grained than that represented by the sonogram. It divides the improvisation up into packets of sound individuated by their pitch-range (G, A ♭, etc.) and relative duration

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Schuller 1968, Tirro 1993, Berliner 1994, and Day 2000.

<sup>8</sup> Hence Bigard's writing credit, along with Irving Mills, who wrote the words for the song version.

(quarter-note, eighth-note, etc.), with perhaps some further indications such as tempo, articulation, dynamics, and so on.<sup>9</sup>

But we have jumped over a level of description in moving from the sonogram to the transcription. Consider the practice of learning to regurgitate improvisations in jazz, for instance learning to play ‘Body and Soul’ just as Coleman Hawkins does on his landmark 1939 recording.<sup>10</sup> Such regurgitation is not a central jazz practice; such feats are not the aim of jazz, they are not usually featured in public performances, or recorded.<sup>11</sup> But they do occur, and serve a number of functions. They are homages to performers, useful pedagogical exercises, and displays of virtuosity both in terms of technical ability and memory.<sup>12</sup> Note that the structure that gets re-instantiated in such regurgitations is not that represented by the transcription, as described above. For such a transcription is too coarse. Instantiations of that structure admit of variations that would be considered defects in the regurgitation game.<sup>13</sup> Of course, one could soup up the notation and make the transcriptions represent more and more of the replete sonic structure of the improvisation. But a moment’s consideration will reveal that such tweaking will not get the transcription close enough, say, to enable one to learn the solo

<sup>9</sup> One might use Davies’s concepts of ‘thick’ and ‘thin’ to describe, for instance, the sound structure represented by a transcription as thinner than that represented by a sonogram. But I prefer to reserve these terms for describing works.

<sup>10</sup> *Body and Soul* (RCA Bluebird 5717-2-RB).

<sup>11</sup> I am not considering here the jazz practice of quotation, where a small part of an improvisation by a well-known performer is regurgitated as a homage, an allusion, or a joke.

<sup>12</sup> One might consider, as a parallel in the classical world with regurgitation in jazz, learning to play a Brahms cello sonata, say, with Jacqueline du Pré’s interpretation. By doing this, you might learn things about performing that you could not learn in other ways. But one would expect to encounter such a performance in a regular concert.

<sup>13</sup> The new game would be a lot like that of the performance of classical works, as a result of the use in transcribing jazz of classical notation developed to enable performance of classical works.

solely on the basis of the transcription. This will be partly because certain symbols will doubtlessly be introduced arbitrarily to represent sounds in the improvisation like honks, squeaks, and certain degrees of flatness and sharpness that can only be learnt through contact with the original performance, whether live or through a recording.<sup>14</sup> Nor is this surprising. Such transcriptions are usually intended only as tools for study. Writers point *through* the transcription to the recording to make a claim, they do not (usually) point to the transcription as if it were a complete representation of the improvisation under discussion.<sup>15</sup> So, there is a structure intermediate between the sonogram, and any transcription of an improvisation. This is the structure that is reproduced in a ‘perfect’ regurgitation of the improvisation. Note (as the scare quotes around ‘perfect’ indicate) that two perfect regurgitations of an improvisation will differ with regard to their sonogrammatic structure, and that various transcriptions, due to the detail of their notational resources, will represent different, because coarser- or less coarsely grained, structures. Moreover, these are not the only kinds of structures immanent in an improvisation. Depending on the improvisation, perhaps, we can find structures based on melodic or rhythmic motifs, and on harmonic changes. Perhaps in some improvisations we can go all the way down to a simple Schenkerian structure of I-V-I.<sup>16</sup>

So one challenge for the ontologist who argues that jazz is like classical music is to argue for a principled way to determine at which structural level the work resides. A

<sup>14</sup> For a detailed discussion of the relations between scores, transcription, and works, with a focus on Western classical and non-Western music, see S. Davies 2001: 99-150.

<sup>15</sup> Paul F. Berliner develops a detailed notation for the transcriptions in his 1994. At the same time, he is well aware that even these transcriptions are merely aids to listening to the recordings they transcribe (Berliner 1994: 505-757).

<sup>16</sup> For another discussion of the different structures contained within a single musical entity, see Walton 1988.

common suggestion is that the work in jazz is quite a coarse structure, something like the harmonic structure plus a melody, or at least a melodic shape. Young and Matheson call this the ‘canonical model’ (2000: 129). But they point out problems with both parts of the proposal. For a start, in some performances of a standard, no melody close to the original is played. (Lennie Tristano’s performance of ‘All of Me’ is their example.) But if we discard that aspect of the proposal for what the work is, and rely on the harmonic structure alone, we are left with too coarse a structure, since there are many different standards with the same harmonic structure. Just think of all the various blues, for instance.

Young and Matheson also consider performances of free jazz (2000: 131).<sup>17</sup> Relying on harmonic structure and/or melody to determine the work here, they argue, would result either in free jazz performances’ not being of works, or in their being of works that are instantiated in only one performance.<sup>18</sup> I am not sure that the latter suggestion is even coherent. The concept of a musical work that Young and Matheson are working with is that of a work for performance, of the kind common in classical music. But these are works appropriately, intentionally, and commonly performed multiple times. This is a fundamental part of the culture of classical music. But this is clearly not what is going on in free jazz. It is not just a *coincidence* that free jazz ‘works’ do not receive multiple performances. Nor is the problem that it would be too difficult to

<sup>17</sup> The phrase ‘free jazz’ is commonly used to refer to one of three things. One is Ornette Coleman’s 1960 album, and related entities. Another is jazz that is harmonically or metrically freer than preceding jazz (especially bop). A third is freely improvised jazz. The second includes the other two, is what Young and Matheson seem to be referring to, and is what I will be referring to with the term here.

<sup>18</sup> I defend a general version of the first suggestion below.

perform such a 'work' again. Merely making the attempt would be considered bizarre in the jazz world, and is arguably antithetical to the whole ethos of free jazz.

Another problem is what exactly would need to be re-instantiated before one had another performance 'of *this* work' in free jazz. This is the problem of locating the appropriate structure again. Young and Matheson consider two possibilities, both of which are also considered by Richard Cochrane (2000: 140-1). Cochrane defends a conception of musical works as sets of rules concerning what is compulsory, forbidden, and optional in the production of a performance. He then points out that there are such rules governing free jazz performances. You must not regurgitate Coleman Hawkins's 'Body and Soul' over and over again throughout a free jazz session, for instance. One conclusion he draws is that many, or all, free jazz performances may be considered performances of *one and the same* work. This strikes me as better interpreted as a reductio of his position.<sup>19</sup> Young and Matheson agree that this suggestion 'does not bear serious consideration' (2000: 131). If these sorts of rules constitute musical works, then all classical performances can be considered performances of the same work, and all performances with the same harmonic structure, and so on. There is more to a work than merely being a common denominator of several performances.

But the other suggestion considered by both Cochrane and Young and Matheson is amenable to the latter's general conclusion. Young and Matheson suggest that the work in free jazz performances might be something like a cluster of motives – with neither

<sup>19</sup> In much the same way that many consider Nelson Goodman's claim (1976), that a supposed performance of a work with one wrong note is in fact no such performance, a reductio of the theory it is a consequence of.

melodies nor harmonies determined.<sup>20</sup> On this view, two takes for Ornette Coleman's *Free Jazz* might be considered two performances of the same work. This accords well with Young and Matheson's general conclusion that there is no single kind of work in jazz. We cannot pick just one level of description, one kind of structure, to designate as the right level at which to look for jazz works. 'Jazz works are defined...by sets of tacit guidelines for performance. Two performances...can follow these guidelines and be said to instantiate the same jazz standard. No completely general account can be given of these guidelines, which differ from one period and style of jazz to another' (132-3).

This conclusion might sound initially like that Stephen Davies has argued for, over a number of years, with respect to classical music (1991b, 1987, 1997b, 2001, 2003a). Davies argues that there is variation in the ontologies of classical works. Some are 'thinner' than others; that is, fewer of the properties of a fully authentic performance are determined by the work. So, like Young and Matheson, Davies argues that there is no single ontological level at which we should look for works in classical music. The musico-historical context, in conjunction with what the composer does, determines the constitutive features of the work.

But this seeming agreement between the ontologies of classical and jazz, between Davies and Young and Matheson, conceals an important distinction. Although Davies argues for the social constructedness of classical works, in that their musico-historical context partly determines their constitutive features, he resists the further claim, argued

<sup>20</sup> Cochrane does not consider so specific a suggestion, but he does say that 'free improvisers often work to a vague score [i.e., set of rules], which may be no more complicated than a verbal agreement. These, if acknowledged within the group to constitute a new performance practice that they may want to use again, could then constitute a new type' (2000: 141).

for by some,<sup>21</sup> that the constitutive features of works change over time (1996, 2001: 95, 2003b: 43-4). For instance, Mozart's piano concertos include 'gaps' where the performer is supposed to improvise a cadenza. But, like many composers, Mozart wrote out cadenzas for several of his concerti, as options for those who were unable to improvise. By the end of the nineteenth century, such 'gaps' were no longer left in concertos, for various reasons.

Some have explained this shift by citing the impatience of composers toward performers who would disfigure their compositions by inappropriate improvisations. Moreover, as we see it, one must consider the influence of the romantic concept of the artist as an authoritative and solitary hero. Then, too, as musical composition expanded during the romantic period, the integrity of the musical structure became too complex for a spontaneous improvisation of pitches and durations to be dependably supportive. (Gould and Keaton 2000: 144)

But this did not mean that the cadenzas *Mozart* wrote out for *his* concertos became constitutive of those works. Perhaps as improvisation became a lost art to most classical performers Mozart's cadenzas were played more frequently (though some performers still compose their own cadenzas ahead of time, or play the composed cadenzas of others). But the work still calls merely for some cadenza, ideally improvised, in the style of Mozart's day. For a contrasting example, the fact that figured bass was common in the harpsichord parts of ensemble works in Bach's day, including throughout his Brandenburg Concertos, does not mean that the harpsichord parts he wrote out, such as the famous proto-cadanza in the Fifth Brandenburg, are *not* constitutive of those works.

<sup>21</sup> Davies cites various pieces by Graham McFee, Richard Shusterman, Michael Krausz, and Joseph Margolis.



The variations in jazz performances that Young and Matheson point to are not like the variations in classical works that Davies discusses.<sup>22</sup> Recall that Young and Matheson claim that (1) ‘[t]wo performances...can follow [the same] guidelines and be said to instantiate the same jazz standard’ (2000: 132), and that (2) ‘[n]o completely general account can be given of these guidelines, which differ from one period and style of jazz to another’ (132-3). If the structural level at which the jazz work is located differs from work to work, and from one period to another, as it does in classical music, then the period in which a particular standard is composed determines the ontology of that work. Take Ellington, for example – as good an example as there is of a jazz composer. If Ellington composed ‘Sophisticated Lady’ with a particular ensemble in mind (characterized in terms of number and kind of instruments, say), and his musico-historical context allows such things to be work-determinative, then on the current proposal, any authentic performance of that work will require that same ensemble, just as any authentic performance of Bach’s Fifth Brandenburg Concerto requires a harpsichord.<sup>23</sup> But the jazz case clearly does *not* parallel the classical here. Chick Corea’s performance of ‘Sophisticated Lady’ is just as authentic as anyone else’s – for instance, Ellington’s – despite its utilizing very different forces, containing no obvious statement of the melody, and substituting chords all over the place. One response to this example is to claim that I have beefed up Ellington’s work, claimed it is thicker than it in fact is. This response inherits all the problems of the theory that jazz works are very thin ontologically. But the more serious problem for the ontological variety Young and Matheson propose is that the

<sup>22</sup> Garry Hagberg (2002: 189-90) can perhaps be read as proposing a variable ontology for jazz. But this goes against the grain of his use of the term ‘work-indeterminacy’.

<sup>23</sup> Assuming *Bach*’s context made *his* instrumentations work-determinative. For arguments to this end with which I am largely in agreement, see S. Davies 2001.

variation in performance guidelines ‘from one period and style of jazz to another’ is not variation that would affect how to extract a piece from a performance or score, say, as the relevant variation is in classical music. Thus it is not variation in the ontology of various works. Rather, the variation in jazz is variation in the performance guidelines about how to approach *any given piece*. Corea approaches ‘Sophisticated Lady’ in a very different way from Ellington, and different again from Charlie Parker. If this is variation in *ontology*, then Young and Matheson are saying that Corea’s ‘Sophisticated Lady’ is a different work from Ellington’s. And this is clearly not their intention. Thus, their proposal of a variable ontology of jazz does not solve the problem of the location of the work.

I have expressed skepticism about two views of how we should characterize jazz works if the ontology of jazz is like that of classical music: the view that all works in the tradition are thin, and the view that there is an ontological variety of works in the tradition. But this seems to leave me with a significant datum about jazz practice unexplained, namely, the fact that jazz performers and audiences routinely identify jazz performances as versions (not to beg any questions) of ‘Sophisticated Lady’, ‘Don’t Get Around Much Anymore’, and so on. Doesn’t the fact that there is convergence on these judgments, suggest that there is some thread running through all versions of ‘Sophisticated Lady’ that the performers are clinging to, and audiences detecting? Something like this is doubtless going on a lot of the time. But I would argue that these sorts of connections are of relatively little interest to jazz musicians and audiences. Take, for example, Charlie Parker’s performances of ‘KoKo.’ These are based on Ray Noble’s ‘Cherokee.’ Why the different title? The usual explanation is that Parker completely

reworked ‘Cherokee.’ (See, for example, Tirro 1993: 301-2.) Few vestiges of the tune remain, though the same harmony underpins it. But, of course, this is just the sort of transformation that happens all the time in jazz, and only occasionally are new titles bestowed upon such transformations. What would determine whether a contemporary jazz performance should be titled ‘Cherokee’ or ‘KoKo’, or ‘Warming up a Riff’ for that matter?<sup>24</sup> Perhaps which prior performers, recordings, or scores the performers had uppermost in their minds? Perhaps whether they felt they were working more in the tradition of Noble or Parker? I would think that such questions are more likely to be ignored by jazz audiences (and worse than ignored by the musicians!). What matters is not one of the sources of the performance we are listening to, but the performance itself as it unfolds in the moment.

### *1.2 Improvisation*

A different objection that might be raised against the idea that jazz is a tradition wherein enduring pieces are given repeated performances is that jazz is essentially an *improvisatory* tradition.<sup>25</sup> If improvisation – the invention of the music on the spot – is

<sup>24</sup> ‘Warming up a Riff’ was the title given to a recording of an incomplete jam on ‘Cherokee’ from the same session that produced the famous recording of ‘KoKo’ (November 26, 1945).

<sup>25</sup> Much of the small philosophical literature on jazz has focused on what exactly improvisation is. See Alpers 1984 and 1998, Valone 1985, Brown 1996 and 2000a, Hagberg 1998, Gould and Keaton 2000, Sterritt 2000, and Young and Matheson 2000.

Sometimes the centrality of improvisation to jazz is questioned on the basis of the slickness of performances captured on early recordings. Lee B. Brown cites some apparently more damning evidence: ‘alternative recording “takes” of performances by Bessie Smith show that, as improvised as her phrasing sounds, it was probably often worked out in advance’ (1991: 119). But a lack of improvisation in the early recording studio proves nothing about early jazz in general. By all accounts there was improvisation in jazz from its very beginnings. At the same time, musicians are always concerned to be represented at their very best in recordings – the only enduring record of their performance skills (Frith 1996: 232-3). But, of course, in the 1910s and ’20s one could not record so many takes, let alone splice the best of various takes together into a reasonable representation of the musicians’ skills. Thus, even if the performances captured on early recordings were in fact rehearsed, that is not a very strong argument against the centrality of improvised performance to the tradition those recordings are a part of. Also, note that it would be odd for a performer to practice an improvised sound if improvisation were not expected and valued by her audience.

central to a jazz performance, then surely the performance cannot be of a pre-existing work?

Consideration of classical music shows that the inclusion of improvisation in a performance is not a guarantee that there is no enduring work being instantiated. Consider our Mozart piano concerto again. The fact that such a work contains one or more ‘gaps’ wherein the soloist is supposed to improvise a cadenza, displaying both her understanding of the work and her technical prowess does not militate against Mozart’s concertos’ being works of art in the fullest sense. Or, going further back, consider baroque ensemble compositions. They frequently contain continuo parts wherein only the melody, bass line, and harmonies are determined. The individual notes of the inner voices which realize those harmonies are at the discretion of the performer, and a performer well-versed in this tradition is able to improvise such counterpoint on the spot. In these works, as in jazz performance, improvisation is *required* of the performer. They are works nonetheless.

On the other hand, it is difficult to find works in the classical tradition that are as thoroughly or centrally improvisatory as jazz works must be if they are like classical works ontologically. There will be examples, of course, from the late-twentieth-century avant-garde, but these are protests against the tradition, rather than paradigm works, whereas highly improvisatory jazz works are paradigmatic. Moreover, in classical performances where there is an amount of improvisation similar to that in a jazz performance, we are not so ready to call the performance one of a pre-existing work. Stephen Davies gives the example of Bach’s improvisation of a three-voice ricercar on a theme provided by King Frederick II of Prussia. It would be wrong to call Bach’s

performance a performance of Frederick's work. What Frederick provided was something like a springboard for Bach's creativity. Thus if we are to follow through with the parallel to classical music, we must similarly conclude that jazz improvisations are not performances of pre-existing works (S. Davies 2001: 13).

Perhaps, though, classical and jazz improvisation should *not* be considered the same kind of thing. Almost all of the philosophical literature on improvisation is about jazz (and almost vice versa). And it all connects improvisation with ontology in one way or another. The first paper dedicated to jazz and improvisation in the *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* was Philip Alperson's 'On Musical Improvisation' (1984). Alperson points to two pairs of terms which are usually opposed in the philosophy of art. One is the distinction between process and product. We tend to think of art in terms of works, and works in terms of products, with processes occupying a subsidiary but necessary role in bring the products about.<sup>26</sup> Alperson points out that in attending to an improvisation we attend to both process and product, the artist's performance in both senses. Of course, performances of typical classical works admit of this ambiguity too (Levinson 1987: 378). Perhaps what is distinctive about jazz improvisation is that the process is a *creative* one. But we must tread carefully here. It is already implicit in the 'product' half of the ambiguity that something is being created. Performers bring performances into being, and this is creation of a sort.

Alperson's second distinction is relevant here. This is the distinction between composition and performance. In classical music, these two processes (and products!) are

<sup>26</sup> There are some notable exceptions to this rule. Both Gregory Currie (1989) and David Davies (2004) have proposed impressive ontologies of art that argue that all artworks are processes rather than products. There are hints at such ideas in Hein 1970 and Alperson 1984.

kept well separated: composition is what composers do, and results in works, while performance is what performers do, and results in performances. But Alperson thinks this separation *even in classical music* is a mistake, an oversimplification of actual musical practice. For composition almost always involves performance, if by that we mean the production of musical sounds, whether real or imagined. Almost all composers surely either play some music out loud to aid their composing, or run through in their heads how what they are writing sounds. All performance, on the other hand, involves composition, in the sense of determining how the resulting music sounds. This is clear in the case of improvisation, but Alperson points out the same is true of performance of classical works. For no work for performance is maximally thick, to use Stephen Davies's terminology once more. Such works, of necessity, leave performative options open for the performer.

Helpful though these observations are in spurring one to look at composition and performance in a new light, Alperson uses these two central terms too loosely to establish his thesis (Spade 1991). In arguing that composition involves performance, he clearly has our standard concept of composition in mind – the determining of the properties of a work for performance. Yet when he comes to argue for the necessity of composition in performance, he is using 'composition' in a much looser sense, where it now means something like 'determining the sonic properties of a performance'. Similarly, while here he is using a standard sense of performance – the tokening of a work for performance – earlier, when arguing that composition requires performance, by 'performance' he just means 'the tokening of some musical sounds', whether real or imagined, whether of the work being composed or not. And as Paul Vincent Spade points out, much of the

‘performance’ that occurs during composition is in the service of rejecting the sounds ‘performed’ from being constitutive of the work (1991: 367-8).

In sum, I agree with Alperson’s first conclusion that in improvisatory traditions, the performance is a creative act, in some special sense in which performances of works are not creative, and would further argue that those performances are thus the focus of appreciation in some different sense from performances of works. But so far we have not discovered what these different senses of ‘creative’ and ‘focus of appreciation’ are. On the other hand, I reject his attempt to show a continuity between improvisation and work-performance in that both involve composition. In fact, what my arguments thus far show is that improvisation and work-performance are alike in that *neither* involves composition. It is a necessary condition of a work-performance that there be some already constituted (i.e., composed) work that is the thing being performed; no performer’s decision, whether spontaneous or not, can affect the constitution of that work. My earlier arguments in this chapter, together with those in my chapter on works of art in general, make a strong case that what is going on in an improvisatory performance is not the production of a work either. Again, decisions about how a performance should sound, whether spontaneous or planned, are only compositional if the performance serves as a model for future performances in a relatively strict sense. (See S. Davies 2001: 20-2, *et passim*.)

Unfortunately, a recent paper on musical performance and improvisation makes a mistake similar to Alperson’s. Carol S. Gould and Kenneth Keaton (2000) argue for the thesis that ‘all musical performance, no matter how meticulously interpreted and no matter how specific the inscribed score, requires improvisation’ (143). Thus, their claim

is that all musical performance, whether of free jazz, or of a Beethoven piano sonata, is improvisatory to some extent. They argue first that improvisation need not involve the creation of a musical work, a claim I agree with. Improvisations can take place relatively autonomously ‘within’ a performance of a work, as with an improvised cadenza, or coextensively with a performance, as with improvised embellishments of a tune during the recapitulation of a *da capo* aria. But their second premise is that improvisation need not be spontaneous.

Improvisation...is a relation between the score and the performance event. While many improvised performances are indeed spontaneously executed, they need not be. That is, improvisation is conceptually independent of spontaneity...[I]s it not the case that a classical performer interpreting a work produces a unique sound event and does so with an element of spontaneity? For instance, two different interpretations of, say, a Bach cello suite will elicit different tempi, bowings, execution of chords, ornamentation...Moreover, each time one plays a piece or even a phrase, the different nuances can create aesthetically different effects.

(Gould and Keaton 2000: 145)

The first thing worth pointing out is the old confusion between work and score. A performance can, indeed must, ‘depart’ from the score, in one sense. Scores, like works, necessarily underdetermine performances. Further, scores may contain recommendations that are not constitutive of the work, and may not represent constitutive features of the work that are part of the implicit performance conventions. Moreover, not all performances are from scores, even if they are of works. And, finally, in case ‘score’ is being used as a proxy for ‘work’, not all performances need be of works. A totally free



improvisation cannot be a matter of a relation between its work and performance. There is no work in this case, *ex hypothesi*. But I think Gould and Keaton's account could be recast without these errors. More important is their claim that improvisation need not be spontaneous. (Admittedly, shortly after making this claim, Gould and Keaton point to the supposed spontaneity of classical performances in support of their claim that such performances are improvised, but their considered view seems to be that this can have only rhetorical force.) The central argument for all musical performances' being improvisatory seems to be that all musical performances are different, both from each other and from the score (or work). But such an analysis leaches 'improvisation' of any content, as consideration of what counts as improvisation on this new account shows. Suppose a performer works for months on her new interpretation of the Bach cello suites, and suppose her efforts pay off – in a series of concerts, she is able to perform the suites according to her new interpretation flawlessly. Each performance of even the first note of the first suite will, of course, sound slightly different, due to minor variations in the condition of her instrument, the fact that she is not a robot, and so on, even if she has masterful control of her instrument, and conveys her interpretation perfectly each time. These differences count as 'improvisations' on Gould and Keaton's account. Indeed, it seems that the sound of a breaking string will count as an improvisation on their account. It will be tempting for Gould and Keaton to appeal to the performer's intentions at this point, but such an appeal would undermine their thesis, since the subtle differences between performances of the first note of the suites were not intended by the performer.

What is improvisation, then? Despite the centrality of the concept in the literature, few have offered an analysis of it. I do not think this is surprising, since I suspect most

people with some musical knowledge share the same concept. But counter-intuitive proposals, like that of Gould and Keaton, make explication of the concept advisable. I suggest that an improvisation is a performance event guided by decisions about that event made by the performer shortly before the event takes place.<sup>27</sup> ‘Shortly before’ should be construed so as to make the inclusion of ‘spontaneity’ in the proposed definition redundant.<sup>28</sup> My analysis allows for free improvisation, and for improvisation in the performance of a piece. It also entails that one cannot necessarily tell just from listening to it whether a performance is improvised, or which aspects of it are; there is an intentional element in improvisation. If a classical performer has practiced his interpretation of a piece over and over again, but during the performance ‘loses it’ for a moment, and plays a run where he didn’t intend one (even at that moment, causing him to curse under his breath), that is not improvisation. On the other hand, a classical performer may improvise his interpretation anew during each performance.<sup>29</sup> The proposal differs from previous accounts such as Alperson’s (1984, 1998, 2003) and Gould and Keaton’s (2000) in not requiring that the decisions be about a *work*. It differs from Gould and Keaton’s proposal in requiring spontaneity. It is similar to (but a slight improvement

<sup>27</sup> I think this analysis may be generally applicable, but it need only apply to musical performance for my purposes here. I was pleased to find, when completing this chapter, that my proposed analysis closely echoes the first sentence of the article on improvisation in the *New Grove Dictionary of Jazz*: ‘The spontaneous creation of music as it is performed’ (Kernfeld 2002: 313).

<sup>28</sup> Such a construal is not trivial, and brings us to a point where I suspect intuitions vary, or become vague. For instance, does a decision you make during your solo about how you will play the opening of the out-chorus make the way you play the beginning of the out-chorus improvised? I’m not sure. However, if you decide to *play a certain figure right now and then repeat it at the beginning of the out-chorus* (all one decision), I would argue that this counts as one (spread out) performance event, and thus both playings of the figure qualify as improvised on my analysis.

<sup>29</sup> Janos Starker claimed that he does this in a question-and-answer session after a recital of Bach’s first Suite for Solo Cello for the American Society of Aesthetics at their 1998 annual meeting (November 6, 1998, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN). Ironically, on that occasion Starker played with a facsimile of Bach’s score in front of him, despite knowing the suites by heart. He said that graphic beauty of Bach’s penmanship inspires him to new interpretations during performances.

over) an analysis by Lee B. Brown, and another he quotes with approval. Brown states that ‘an improviser makes substantive decisions about what music to play *while* playing it’ (1996: 354), and quotes King Palmer’s claim that ‘[i]mprovisation is music which is created as it is performed, without previous preparation or detailed notation’ (Palmer 1975: 109, quoted in Brown 1996: 366, n. 8). Palmer’s exclusion of preparation goes too far, since any serious improviser, like any serious performer, spends a lot of time preparing for his performances, as Brown is clearly aware. What Palmer is presumably getting at is the idea that the actual decisions made during the performance must be spontaneous, not worked out in advance, even if the musician’s ability to make those decisions is the result of hours of practice. I reject the use of the term ‘music’ in both analyses, however, since it is a term that can be used to refer to composed works, performances, scores, and so on. The different ways the term ‘music’ is sometimes used in the literature, I think, results in some of the confusions I have been attempting to sort out here (for example, those between a sound structure, a work, and a performance).

Finally, my proposal differs from Young and Matheson’s analysis in one important respect. Young and Matheson argue that ‘an improvised performance is one in which the structural properties of a performance are not completely determined by decisions made prior to the time of performance’, where ‘structural properties’ include ‘melody, harmony, and length’ as opposed to ‘expressive properties’ like ‘tempo, the use of vibrato, dynamic, and so on’ (2000: 127). I disagree with their restriction of the domain of improvisatory decisions. I see no reason to deny that a performer could improvise, say, the rubato in her performance. Nor do Young and Matheson provide an argument for this conclusion. They claim that ‘the line between expressive and structural

properties...must be drawn if we are to avoid the conclusion that virtually every musical performance involves improvisation' (Young and Matheson 2000: 127). But when it comes to the example that is supposed to 'clarify this point', we hear that '[a] concert pianist who performs a Beethoven sonata does not improvise....Even if the player spontaneously adds rubato or varies the tempo, she or he is not improvising...since she or he is simply varying the expressive properties of the work' (Young and Matheson 2000: 127). This is a circular argument if ever there was one. A further question the proposal raises is what the status of the expressive properties of a (structural) improvisation are. Since the notes of the improvisation have not been worked out in advance, neither, presumably, have the expressive properties. But according to Young and Matheson, such properties cannot be improvised. Perhaps their view is that the improvisation of structural features opens the way for the improvisation of the expressive features. But this seems an arbitrary restriction on the possibility of improvising expressive features.

Young and Matheson are right to emphasize that a performance can be improvisatory without being *completely* improvised *from scratch* (2000: 127-9; see also Alperson 1984: 21-2, Brown 1996: 354, and S. Davies 2001: 12). One can practice improvising, work up a repertoire of licks, figure out various ways around tricky progressions, and so on. As we have already seen, even 'free' jazz improvisations are not without their implicit conventions. But I see broader scope for 'improvisation' than Young and Matheson do. At the minimal end of the improvisation spectrum, I would place a performance of a classical work where the performer decides to improvise the vibrato, or rubato, or tone color, of a short part of the piece. There will be no way for the audience to know that the performer is so improvising, nor would the improvisation be

noteworthy, even if well executed. (For once, I can say that *even I* am capable of pulling off such a feat!) And such improvisation would be well within the bounds of a completely authentic performance of, say, a Romantic violin sonata. In a jazz solo, of course, we expect a performer not to have memorized exactly which notes she will play during a given performance. But we can say, across the board, that the more decisions get made during the performance, the more improvisatory it is.

To return to the point of this exploration of the nature of improvisation, and its role in classical and jazz performances, we have seen that ‘improvisation’ is univocal across the classical and jazz traditions. But this does not by itself answer any ontological questions about jazz, even given an ontology of classical music. Neither what is notated in the jazz tradition, nor the mere fact that there is improvisation in a jazz performance, proves that there are not enduring works in the jazz tradition which are instanced in performances. However, the sheer amount of improvisation in a typical jazz performance and the centrality of improvisation to the tradition seem to indicate that the proposed candidate for the enduring work in jazz – the standard – is more an aid to the performers’ real-time creativity, like Frederick’s theme for Bach’s *ricercar*, than a work to be instanced in multiple performances, like Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony. (See S. Davies 2001: 16-17.)

As a final objection, the ontologist who believes that jazz and classical music share an ontology might point to the most convincing cases for that commonality – apparent works for performance that receive multiple performances and have very little room for improvisation. Duke Ellington would seem to be the best example of this – a central figure in the evolution of jazz widely considered to be one of America’s great

composers. Ellington's 'Concerto for Cootie' ironically seems to be a work like a latter-day classical concerto: fully scored for a particular ensemble and, while making use of a particular performer's skills, leaving no more room for improvisation than a typical late-Romantic work for performance. But one might similarly argue that many of Ellington's arrangements for his band over his lifetime are ontologically like classical works and transcriptions. Many are completely scored, with little room for improvisation.

I would argue, though, that in the case of Ellington's various arrangements of a given piece such as 'Rockin' in Rhythm', what we have is not one work, several transcriptions of that work, and multiple performances of each transcription, but rather that each performance is to be compared with each other, on its own terms, as it were, not as a performance of some other entity – a work.<sup>30</sup> Why? First, the incessant rearranging that Ellington did for almost all his pieces suggests that he was constantly thinking of new ways to produce exciting performances, rather than perfecting an enduring entity. Of course, classical composers revise their works, but even in the most extreme cases there are nowhere near the number of reworkings common in jazz, even with such a 'composely' musician as Ellington. Another sign that Ellington is focused on the performance rather than some reinstantiable work is that his arrangements were made for particular personnel as his ensemble changed, focusing on their particular abilities. Again, classical composers write with particular performers in mind, but they cannot restrict the performance of their works to particular performers (S. Davies 2001: 66-8).

<sup>30</sup> This listening need not be *ex nihilo* any more than improvisation is. A listener can be well aware of not only other performances, but also any number of abstracta that various sets of those performances have in common, and these comparisons can be aesthetically relevant. But this does not make those performances performances of works, for all the reasons given in my chapter on the distinction between works and other art objects.

The 'classical' composer can still afford not to know who is going to play his music; this attitude is out of the question for the true jazz composer. It would be unthinkable for an arranger to have a piece played by Duke Ellington's band when it was originally written for Count Basie's. (Hodeir 1960: 91)

Second, the very few instances where Ellington (or anyone else) did not rearrange a piece, but continued to perform it, as with 'Concerto for Cootie', are not enough to determine the ontology of the entire tradition. As mentioned in my chapter on works and other art objects, a very few movie remakes are very close to their originals – Gus Van Sant's *Psycho*, for instance. This does not make cinema an artform of interpreted instances of works – the narrative that Van Sant's movie shares with Hitchcock's, for instance. Nor does it make it the case that in this one particular case we have such an isolated ontology. Van Sant's work is a work of cinema, and thus shares its ontology with the other works in that tradition. Performances of 'Concerto for Cootie' are jazz performances, and thus not performances of works, despite their superficial similarity with the ontology of classical music (*contra* Hodeir 1956: 90-3). A succinct way of putting these points is that no abstractum that any jazz performances share is a primary focus of critical attention in the jazz tradition.

The above reflections on the problem of locating the jazz work, if any, the nature and role of improvisation in jazz, and the relations between various jazz performances with the same name, strongly suggest that jazz is not ontologically like classical music – it is not a tradition of performances of works.

## II. PERFORMANCES AS WORKS

A more radical interpretation of the jazz improvisation as a work in its own right might be suggested, though. One could agree that jazz improvisations are not works in the classical sense of being for repeated performance, but that they are products of intentional human action intended for aesthetic appreciation,<sup>31</sup> and thus are artworks just as much as sculptures or symphonies are. That is, the event itself, rather than the sound-structure it instantiates, is a work of art. This view is defended by Philip Alperson (1984, 1998) and arguably by Garry Hagberg (2002) and Stephen Davies (2001: 16-19, 2003b: 156). Though Alperson talks of the improviser as the spontaneous composer of a sound structure, he also argues that improvisations should not be heard as interpretations of works, and that '[i]f anything, musical improvisation seems ontologically closer to the creation of a wood sculpture...than to a conventional [i.e., classical] musical performance' (1984:26). Hagberg explicitly argues for the 'work-indeterminacy' of jazz, as a result of the considerations discussed in section one. But I think that without his implicit assumption that works of art in jazz must be repeatable sound-structures he might be tempted by the view that jazz performances themselves are works of art.

Clearly, this view is at odds with my conclusions regarding the nature of works of art, namely, that works must be not only the kinds of things that are the primary focus of critical attention in an art form – a condition surely met by jazz performances – but also enduring objects.<sup>32</sup> If Alperson and Hagberg were to agree with my general conclusions about works of art, their views could easily be modified into the ontology of jazz I will

<sup>31</sup> If this phrase offends, please feel free to substitute your preferred definition of 'art'.

<sup>32</sup> It is perhaps worth mentioning again here that Lee Brown is one of the few philosophers to make this condition explicit (2005: 215, 1996: 353 and 366, n.2). Alperson considers it briefly, but rejects it (1998: 478-9).



ultimately defend here. We disagree not about the nature of jazz, I believe, but about the nature of artworks. Thus I will focus here not on their arguments, but on the roles that the concepts of work and performance play in the specific case of jazz, in an attempt to bolster the general conclusions I argued for in the last chapter.

First, recall that if jazz performances are works of art in their own right, then so must classical performances be, since classical performances are produced with an eye to their being aesthetically rewarding (or something), and are a primary focus of critical attention in their tradition. Yet, in classical music, performances are precisely distinguished from the works they are of. Of course, an advocate of this proposal might *recommend* this change to classical discourse, pointing to the ill-founded, but long-running, valorization of the work over performance in musicology and aesthetics. But recall, also, that we can do away with this baseless valorization without having to change our concept of a work of art. The move is somewhat parallel to a feminism that acknowledges the equal worth of men and women, without arguing that men and women are essentially the same.

A more important consideration, however, has to do with the durability of works of art, compared to the fleeting nature of jazz performances. This is where Alperson's comparison of jazz performances with wood sculptures breaks down. Works of art are not just things intended to be worthy of aesthetic appreciation, but things worked on over time, so that their aesthetic value can be maximized. Jazz performance, to the extent that it is improvisatory, is not perfected ahead of time, like these paradigms of work creation. And note that this is precisely one of the grounds upon which jazz music has been mis-evaluated throughout its history. Critics familiar with other musical traditions have

accused jazz of being harmonically uninventive, of containing lots of wrong notes, in the sense of both ‘inappropriate for this musical moment’, and ‘poorly executed’. Discussing Miles Davis, for example, Robert Walser writes that

‘The problem of Miles Davis’ is the problem Davis presents to critics and historians: how are we to account for such glaring defects in the performances of someone who is indisputably one of the most important musicians in the history of jazz?...The uneasiness many critics display toward Davis’s ‘mistakes,’ and their failure to explain the power of his playing, suggest that there are important gaps in the paradigms of musical analysis and interpretation that dominate jazz studies. (Walser 1995: 165-7)

Admittedly some of these criticisms have been the result of critics’ ignorance of jazz’s harmonic traditions (for instance, the neutral third it inherited from some West African music), and its widened conception of timbral possibilities (stretching back through Ellington’s horns’ jungle effect, to precursors such as Robert Johnson’s blues guitar, and Leadbelly’s field-holler vocal inflections). But much of it has come, I think, from a misconception of jazz performances as like, or intended to be like, classical works – worked out in advance to maximize their aesthetic value. Critics knowledgeable about jazz, on the other hand, have found value precisely in the in-the-moment extemporizing that jazz performance makes possible. Note also that if this ‘perfectibility’ is a mark of work-hood, then classical performances are *more* like works of art than jazz performances, since in the classical tradition one is expected to learn the piece and work out one’s interpretation thoroughly before performing it. Though one does something akin to this in preparing for jazz performances – developing improvisatory techniques,

learning various changes, building a repertoire of licks – one cannot work out one's improvisation ahead of time. It would no longer be an improvisation, for the reasons discussed above. Thus, if one is content with the traditional division of classical music into works and (non-work) performances of them, one can only hold that jazz performances are works of art on pain of inconsistency.

### III. RECORDINGS AS WORKS

The ontology of rock music that I defended in the previous chapter might be co-opted by the jazz ontologist as a third proposal. For recordings provide a way to turn a fleeting event into an enduring object. As far as I know, no one has proposed this as a theory of jazz ontology. However, Lee B. Brown conjectures that 'as recorded, [jazz] may have an entirely different phenomenology from that of the living thing. Indeed, it may have a different ontology' (1996: 336).<sup>33</sup> He also claims that André Hodeir's talk of jazz 'works' clearly refers to recordings (2000b: 121).

Theodore Gracyk, in his arguments for recordings' being the works of art of rock music, points to the centrality of records in the tradition – records, rather than live performances, are what people mainly talk about in rock, and people learn how to play by listening to and imitating their favorite records (1996: 1-36). Similar claims could be made about jazz. Musicians exchange and talk about recordings; they learn to play by imitating their favorite recordings; and the recording studio has had other wide-reaching effects on the history of jazz. For instance, one of the great early jazz groups – Louis

<sup>33</sup> He points to Evan Eisenberg's arguments that most musical recordings should be considered works of 'phonography' (Eisenberg 1987: 109-59), but Eisenberg does not make a particular case for jazz, and I have argued against his general view elsewhere (Kania 1998).

Armstrong and his Hot Five – existed only in the recording studio, since contemporary live audiences preferred syncopated dance music to their hot New Orleans style.

But for all the similarities, there are more important differences between rock and jazz approaches to recording; here jazz seems to be a lot closer to classical music than it is to rock. Just as notation enabled classical composers to create more and more complex enduring musical works, recordings enable the preservation of works with all the replete detail of a sound event. Rock, like classical electronic composition, has embraced this aspect of recording technology to the extent that informed rock audiences do not expect rock recordings to be transparent to live performance events. Rather than focusing on capturing a live performance for reproduction, rock artists are concerned with producing, by whatever means necessary, a record that will yield the best possible sound event each time it is played. (There is much disagreement, of course, about what the best sound event would be.)

On the other hand, both classical and jazz audiences expect the phenomenal performance heard on a recording to be connected to the active performance of the musicians in the right way. Different takes may be spliced together, and extraneous noise removed, but nothing should be done that would result in the recording's representing a sound event that the musicians would be incapable of producing live. As live performance traditions, both classical and jazz music have embraced recording technology's ability to represent artists' capabilities in the best light,<sup>34</sup> but both traditions maintain a distinction between 'authentic recording practice' and studio trickery; in both

<sup>34</sup> Musicians from many different live-performance traditions seem to embrace this idealizing aspect of recording technology. See Frith 1996: 232-3.

traditions, one is supposed to listen *through* the recording to the represented performance, rather than *to* the recording as a studio construction.<sup>35</sup>

It is also worth noting that, as in the above consideration of live performances as works of art, if one argues that jazz recordings are works of art in their own right, classical recordings must be too, by parity of reasoning. But, again, though some might embrace this conclusion, note that (i) recordings must be works in a different sense from that ordinarily applied, since a recording of Elgar's *Sea Pictures* in *some* sense manifests the 'ordinary' work – the orchestral songs, and (ii) as in the case of live performances, classical recordings probably have *more* claim to being works of art than jazz recordings, since the interpretations they contain can be worked on over time with a clear conscience, unlike jazz improvisations. Another way of grasping this point is to think about the asymmetric dependence of recorded jazz practices on live jazz practices, just as is the case with classical music, in stark contrast to rock, as I argued in the previous chapter.<sup>36</sup>

Classical and jazz music are alike, then, in being live performance traditions. But they are unlike in that classical performances are performances of works, while jazz performances are not. I have also argued that jazz performances, like all performances, cannot be works of art. What views remain for the jazz ontologist to subscribe to?

<sup>35</sup> A case could be made that fusion is a significant counterexample to my thesis that jazz is a live performance tradition. For fusion artists arguably take an approach to recording technology similar to that taken by rock artists, embracing all its possibilities as part of the artistic medium. If this is in fact the case, I would attempt to give an account of jazz fusion similar to an account of classical electronic music. Though the latter is part of the classical tradition rather than the rock tradition for historical reasons, the radical ontological difference between traditional and electronic classical music has made the latter a quite distinct and autonomous sub-tradition within classical music as a whole. Thus, perhaps the 'war between fusion and other jazz practices' (Brown 1998: 6) could reach an armistice if both sides acknowledged that each employs a distinct artistic medium.

<sup>36</sup> Indeed, due the centrality of improvisation to jazz, even less studio manipulation is standardly allowed. For instance, individual note correction is much rarer.

#### IV. ART WITHOUT WORKS

A final possibility, the one I favor, is that in jazz there are no artworks. This view is implicit in an article by Lee B. Brown (1996). It is more explicit in his own summary of that article's conclusions:

A genuinely improvisational performance, even though based upon such a mini-work [as a Broadway tune], is not itself a musical work, with everything that this concept implies. In particular...such a performance is not re-identifiable in multiple instances. (Brown 2000a: 115)

Stephen Davies argues that jazz performances are not performances of works, but he does not go so far as to say that there are no works in jazz (2001: 16-19). Rather, he implies that in jazz the performance is the artwork, as noted above (S. Davies 2003b: 156).

My view may sound unappealing and unnecessary. It sounds unappealing if you think of the production of artworks as the central goal of any artistic tradition.<sup>37</sup> But, as I argued in chapter four, there is no reason why this should be so. I have already mentioned above my agreement with much recent musicology that performances should not be given second place to works in discussions of classical music. So why should an art with *only* performances, and no works, be considered inferior to one with *only* works (such as sculpture), or one with both works *and* performances (such as classical music)?

My view may sound unnecessary since one could accept all that I have said above, and yet find enduring musical objects in the jazz tradition. But this is to ignore the distinction between artworks and other kinds of art objects. Ellington wrote parts for his

<sup>37</sup> Young and Matheson (2000), and Garry Hagberg (2002) beg the question of whether there are works in jazz by simply beginning their inquiries with the question of what, rather than whether, works exist in jazz. Lee B. Brown is exceptional in his recognition that not all art exists in the form of works (1996: 353 and 366, n. 2).

musicians to play, and he expected them to stick to what he wrote, just as a classical composer expects her performers to play what she wrote. Ellington thereby brought a re-instantiable sound-structure into existence. But where Ellington crucially differs from the classical composer is that he did not expect, or even desire, *future* performers – himself and his band included – to play what he wrote on this occasion. This is bound up with the fact that future performances that are ‘of the same piece’ do not get assessed as instances of some third entity – the work. Just as rock covers are compared directly with one another, not as performances of the same song, so jazz performances based on the same head get compared directly with one another, not as performances of the same work. Standards such as Ellington’s are worthy of attention, but, as Ellington was probably the first to make explicit, in jazz a composition is merely the vehicle for a performance. This can be seen in a whole range of jazz practices, from the complete normalcy of picking and choosing whatever aspects of the standard suit the contingencies of the performance and preferences of the performers, to the jokey arbitrariness with which many improvisations, though destined to become standards, are named.

#### V. CONCLUSIONS

Jazz, like classical music, and unlike rock, is a live performance tradition. The centrality of improvisation to jazz, and the direct comparison of performances with one another, rather than with some separate, enduring entity, however, show that, unlike classical music, jazz is not a *work*-performance tradition. Since performances are different kinds of things from works of art, yet are the primary focus of critical attention in jazz, I conclude that jazz is a tradition without works.

## CONCLUSIONS

The web of similarities and differences between classical, rock, and jazz is quite complicated. Classical and jazz are alike in being live-performance traditions. This results in the similar attitude each takes towards recording technology, using it to produce, in a sense, durable performances. Yet the classical tradition is centered around enduring works, which are the creations of composers, while in jazz the primary focus of critical attention is ephemeral performances, to the extent that the tradition cannot be said to contain works in the same sense as in the classical tradition.

Rock music, on the other hand, while including an important practice of live performances, is centrally a recorded art, whose works are replete recordings that manifest songs which can be performed live, without the works themselves being performances of those songs. In spite of the ontological dissimilarity between rock and jazz music, it seems that the criticism of those traditions might depart from conventional classical-music criticism in similar directions. For it is a consequence of both the improvisational environment in which jazz performances are produced and the studio environment in which rock tracks are constructed that small details of timing and timbre, for instance, can be of great import, and used to great effect. The reasons for this commonality are different, however. In rock, details can be very important because the rock musician has every timbre imaginable at her fingertips. In jazz, details can be very



important because the improviser has very little to work with, relatively speaking, and thus every nuance counts.

Two qualifications need to be added to these claims immediately. The first is that such criticism already exists, and is part of the data upon which I build my ontology.<sup>1</sup> One of the things I hope to have done here is make explicit the (correct!) ontological assumptions implied by such criticism. The second qualification is that the methods of analysis these critics apply to rock and jazz, such as those focused on timing and timbre, can be usefully applied to classical music. Similarly, standard classical musicological tools can be of some use with respect to rock and jazz.<sup>2</sup> The development of these aesthetic implications is an important task, but one beyond the scope of this dissertation.

From a purely philosophical viewpoint, perhaps the most pervading idea in the dissertation, though one it is difficult to articulate clearly, is the complexity of the ontology of art. Perhaps the best way to get a sense of it after all the preceding pages is simply to consider a list of some of the questions it was necessary to raise in order to proceed: What is the proper methodology for investigating the ontology of art? What is the relation between art ontology and ‘more fundamental’ metaphysical ontology, on the one hand, and empirical science on the other? What is the relation between the ontology of art and other philosophical questions about art, such as questions of value? What is the relation between musical ontology and musicology? What is the relation between art ontology and artistic practice? What role does the concept of a *work* of art play in artistic practice?

<sup>1</sup> For two academic examples, besides the massive journalistic literature, see Walser 1995 and Daley 1998.

<sup>2</sup> For examples, see Cogan and Escot 1976, Covach and Boone 1997, and Schuller 1968, respectively.

I do not pretend that I have answered any of these questions definitively. But, first, it should be clear that none of these questions have *easy* answers, or can simply be dismissed, and, second, if I have shed some light on them, in concert with the many other thinkers in the tradition I am working within, and on whose shoulders I stand, I will consider this study a success.

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