

The Ontology of the Musical Work

La ontología de las obras musicales

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Confronta ciertos enigmas surgidos en torno a la naturaleza e identidad de la obra musical, y rechaza estos enigmas por irreales: o bien ellos conciernen a la obra musical en sí misma, en cuyo caso son enigmas acerca del estatus metafísico de un objeto intencional, y por lo tanto susceptibles a una solución arbitraria, o bien ellos conciernen a los sonidos con los que la obra es escuchada, en cuyo caso simplemente se trata de casos especiales de los problemas concernientes a la naturaleza e identidad de los eventos.

Eventos · Identidad · Objeto Intencional · Obras Musicales · Ontología.

Confronts certain puzzles raised about the nature and identity of the musical work, and dismisses these puzzles as unreal: either they concern the musical work itself, in which case they are puzzles about the metaphysical status of an intentional object, and therefore susceptible to an arbitrary solution, or they concern the sounds in which the work is heard, in which case they are simply special cases of the problems concerning the nature and identity of events.

Events · Identity · Intentional Object · Musical Work · Ontology.

The Ontology of the Musical Work

ROGER SCRUTON

IN DESCRIBING THE *PHENOMENAL* NATURE OF MUSIC, I have avoided raising the ontological question: what exactly *is* a work of music? When is work A the same as work B, and what hangs on the answer? And with this question of identity come others, no less interesting and no less difficult: what is the relation between a work and a (true) performance of it? What is the relation between a work and an *arrangement* of it? What do we mean by «versions» of the same work? When judging a work of music, how do we separate the qualities of the music from those of the performance? If an improvisation is written down and played again, is that a performance of the very same work? And so on. Such questions may not be equally important, and they may also be less important than they have seemed to recent philosophers. Nevertheless we must answer some of them before we can give a clear account of the meaning of music.

Before beginning, however, there is a point of method that needs to be borne in mind. Several writers (notably Carl Dahlhaus, Edward Said, Lydia Goehr, and others influenced by Adorno)¹ have argued that the habit of identifying individual *works* of music is a recent one, coinciding with the rise of a listening public, and with the institution of concert-going as a cultural practice. Music was not always the solemn occasion that it has become in the culture of bourgeois Europe and America. Far more often in the history of mankind it has been part of a larger event: worship, dancing, ceremony, even battle. In such circumstances people do not stand back and focus on the piece itself, nor do they savour the sounds as modern listeners do. Some argue further, that aesthetic interest is not a human universal, as Kantian philosophers claim, but part of the ideology of bourgeois culture.² Only in the context of that culture does the practice of identifying individual works of art and their authors make

¹ Dahlhaus, *Esthetics of Music*, tr. W. Austin (Cambridge, 1982), and *The Idea of Absolute Music*, tr. R. Lustig (Chicago, 1989); Said, *Musical Elaborations* (London, 1991); Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works* (Oxford, 1992).

² See esp. P. Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, tr. R. Nice (London, 1984); and T. Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford, 1990).

sense.

To both these claims see chapters «14. Performance» and «15. Culture» of my *The Aesthetics of Music*³. But a preliminary response is called for, if we are to venture with confidence into the realm of musical ontology. It is an important and interesting observation, that the practice of *listening* to music, and in particular of listening to it in the reverent hush of a concert hall, is neither a human universal, nor the whole of musical experience. It is also an interesting observation (should it be true) that the habit of identifying specific musical works arose precisely in the context of a «listening» culture. The fact remains, however, that we *do* identify individual works, and identify them as the particular objects of aesthetic interest. Even when the habit of identifying works of music was not yet established, people had an aesthetic interest in performances: the writings of Plato, St Augustine, and Boethius abundantly testify to this. And while people then listened in a different way, nevertheless they listened, and heard at least some of the musical phenomena that I described in chapter «2. Tone» of my *The Aesthetics of Music*. The questions that now concern us will not dissolve merely because such people did not notice them. For they are questions that may be raised whenever people listen to music, and whenever they experience the thing listened to as «the same again».

There is a general question, too, about the bearing of historical theories on philosophy. Many writers—particularly those from a Marxian background—remark on the «historicity» of intellectual problems, implying that they become problems only in certain historical contexts, and cease to be intelligible outside the cultural conditions from which they arose. (Consider the question: What is virtue? as discussed by Plato and Aristotle; or the question: How is private property justified? as posed by Locke.) The implication is that the problems arise always within the ideology of a period, from concepts which are neither necessary to us as human beings, nor useful when lifted from their cultural roots.

I doubt that any such thing is ever true of a philosophical question. It is not merely that history has shown that philosophical questions, once discovered, do not dissolve with a change of the cultural climate. It is that they are not of a nature to dissolve, any more than are the questions of mathematics. People in our culture take an intense interest in works of music. They listen to them for their intrinsic qualities, and are eager to compare one work with another. The philosophical question is this: *what* are they listening to and assessing with such

³ See Scruton, *The Aesthetics of Music* (Oxford, 1993)

fervour? That question will not dissolve, just because people at some future time should cease to listen, or cease to notice the existence of individual works, any more than the question «What are numbers?» will disappear, when people lose all skill in mathematics. Our ability to notice philosophical questions may change with historical conditions; the questions themselves do not.

§1. Some puzzles about Identity

Although we distinguish works of music from their performances, we are by no means clear as to how the works themselves should be counted. Is an arrangement of a work *another* work, or just the same work adjusted? You might say that it depends on the adjustment. For example, Mahler made an arrangement for string orchestra of Schubert's «Death and the Maiden» Quartet, D810. He did very little to the quartet, apart from preventing the double basses from swamping the lower register, and for pages the two scores look almost identical. Is this arrangement a new work, or merely a «version» of the old one? Or consider a piano reduction of a symphonic score: does this bring a new musical work into being, or is it merely a «version» of the old one?

I put the word «version» in inverted commas, precisely because the question will not be solved by the distinction between a work and its versions: for we have no clear conception of what a «version» is. Certainly there are arrangements which are something more than «versions»: Liszt's arrangements of operatic scenes for the piano, for example, or Percy Grainger's incredible two-piano meditation on Bach's «Sheep May Safely Graze», entitled *Blithe Bells*. Likewise we distinguish among orchestrations, between those which are merely orchestral *versions* (such as the versions made by Mahler or Vaughan Williams of their early songs for voice and piano), and those which are something more than that—which involve a creative act that changes the character of the piece and raises again the question of identity: for example, Schoenberg's orchestration of Brahms's Piano Quartet in G minor, Op. 25, which is sometimes referred to as Brahms's Fifth Symphony, so much does it take on a symphonic character in this transformation. (Though Brahms would surely not have used a xylophone!) More modest orchestrators than Schoenberg may yet add creative touches which change the character of a piece entirely. One of the many contributors to *Les Sylphides* (not Glazunov) orchestrated the Waltz in C sharp minor, Op. 64 No. 2, with the inner voice of Ex. 1.1. This voice is added to, and also in a sense discovered in, the musical line, and represents a real creative achievement. Perhaps we should speak of a variation, rather than a version, in such a case. (I

heard this on a record the label of which contained no indication of the arranger's identity.)

Ex. 1.1. Chopin, arr. anon., *Les Sylphides*, Waltz in C sharp minor, Op. 64 No. 2, in original key, second episode.

NB. Orchestrators of this waltz tend to follow Glazunov's example, and transpose it up a semitone to D minor, often preceding it with a cello solo derived from the C#-minor study Op. 25 No. 7. The inner voice is not present in Glazunov's version: it may be due to Roy Douglas.

Another puzzling example should once again be considered: Webern's orchestration of the six-part «Ricerca» from Bach's *Musical Offering*, in which the melodic line is broken into motifs, and stuttered out in timbres so opposed that the piece seems as though pulverized and reconstituted out of tones that Bach would never have imagined (Ex. 1.2). The result is reminiscent of the famous story by Borges, «Pierre Menard, Author of *Don Quixote*». This tells of the writer Pierre Menard, who set out to compose a work which would be word-for-word identical with Cervantes's classic, but written out of the experience and the sensibility of a modern writer. Similarly, it is as though Webern had set himself the task of composing anew the «Ricerca», from the sensibility of the serial composer, but arriving *at the very same notes* that Bach wrote. Not surprisingly, the result is not a version of Bach's great fugue, but another work—and a minor masterpiece.

Ex. 1.2. Webern, orchestration of the six-part Ricercar from Bach's *Musical Offering*

Add to such puzzle cases the vast differences that we notice between performances, the effects of transposition (necessary at times in vocal music), the indeterminacy of musical scores, and the fact that much music is improvised and enjoyed *as* an improvisation (as in jazz), and you will begin to see that there are real puzzles about the identity of musical works, and that we ought to try to solve them. At least we should try to give some procedure for relating the work to its performances, and distinguishing versions of a work from departures that are so radical as to be versions of something else. In this work I shall explore the background metaphysical questions, returning to the concepts of performance and arrangement in chapter «14. Performance» of my *The Aesthetics of Music*.

§2. Numerical Identity

We can proceed only if we can avail ourselves of a concept of numerical identity. When two objects have all their properties in common, they are qualitatively identical; but if they are two, then they are not numerically identical. (Leibniz famously denied the possibility that they *could* be two, thus reducing numerical to a special case of qualitative identity, with interesting but highly counter-intuitive results.) Could there be a useful concept of numerical identity applied to musical works? Why should we require it, and what disadvantages would

follow should we abandon it?

Numerical identity is not always a clearly defined notion, so let us consider the various metaphysical categories, in order to ascertain what is required in order to define it.

1. THINGS. I use this vague term to cover, not only the «re-identifiable particulars» discussed by Strawson in *Individuals*, but any of the following:

- (a) Ordinary physical objects.
- (b) Organisms, including animals.
- (c) Persons, including human beings.
- (d) Theoretical entities, such as atoms and quarks.

Modern philosophy has shown that these are not all in the same boat, as far as identity goes. Sometimes the question whether *a* is identical with *b* seems to be answered by a convention or decision; at other times the answer seems to lie in the nature of things. Consider Hobbes's example of the ship of Theseus,⁴ the planks of which are replaced one by one until not a plank remains unchanged. Suppose now the old planks are re-assembled in their original form. Which is the ship of Theseus—the one that emerged as the result of successive repairs, or the one that is put together from the debris? It does not matter which you say—though you cannot say both.

In the case of personal identity we are presented with the opposite paradigm: here it really *does* matter what we say—legally, morally, and personally. Although one philosopher—Derek Parfit⁵—has argued vigorously that the concept of personal identity is just as unfounded as that of the identity of ships, and indeed that it would be better not to employ the concept at all because of the moral confusion that it engenders, his arguments have not found general favour. The person, after all, is the thing that I identify as myself: it is that which I pick out incorrigibly as the subject of my first-person avowals, which stares from these eyes and hears with these ears: the very thing that fears for the future and learns from the past. Surely it is not arbitrary for *me* that I should be identical with a particular past or future person?

⁴ Hobbes, *De corpore*, bk. 2 ch. 1—p. 136 in *Thomas Hobbes opera philosophica*, ed. Sir Thomas Molesworth, ii.

⁵ *Reason and Persons* (Oxford, 1984).

In between those two cases are the non-rational animals: members of natural kinds, whose identity is established by their continuity as living beings. And it is in the life of the animals that we gain access to *one* secure conception of identity through time—an identity that is neither bestowed by us nor a matter of convention. When we turn to the physical world, we find the «individuals» that abound in it all too ready to crumble before our enquiries, to dissolve into heaps of atoms, which in turn fragment into the bewildering entities of subatomic physics—entities that seem hardly to be things at all. It is at the level of systems (animals and people especially) that we seem most convinced that numerical identity lies in the nature of things, and is irreducible to an identity of qualities. The real puzzle about personal identity comes about because persons exemplify two different forms of organization: they are animals, members of a natural kind, organized by the principle of life; and they are also persons, members of a peculiar moral kind, organized according to a principle of intention and responsibility. And we seem to have no a priori guarantee that the two forms of organization will always coincide.

2. PROPERTIES. Thing-identity is not reducible, I have suggested, to quality- or property-identity. But what about properties themselves? Is it ever true to say that property *F* is numerically identical with property *G*? The problem, of course, is that we do not have any reason, in normal discourse, to *count* the properties of things. An object has as many properties as there are true ways of describing it; nothing is added by saying that one of these descriptions attributes precisely the *same* property as some other. Besides, what would be our criterion of identity? It is a truth of biology that the description «has a heart» is true of all and only those things that have a kidney. But this coextensiveness of two predicates seems to fall far short of proving that they attribute the same property. Maybe we should get nearer to a criterion of identity if we think in terms of necessity: property *F* is identical with property *G* if *F* and *G* are coextensive in all possible worlds. But that too might be questioned, since it implies that «having equal angles» and «having equal sides» denote one and the same property of Euclidean triangles—a result that we suppose to be counter-intuitive, since we can understand and attribute the one property, without having acquired any competence in the other. (Yet are we justified therefore in asserting that the properties are really *two*?) It is likewise a truth of physics that all and only blue things emit or reflect light within a certain range of wavelengths. Does this mean that blueness is the same property as that of

emitting light of that wavelength, or merely that the two properties are always conjoined? In chapter «1. Sound» of my *The Aesthetics of Music*, I gave reasons for thinking that this fact would not establish the identity of blueness and the property of emitting light of the relevant wavelength. But what *would* establish such an identity? And what hangs upon the answer to such a question?

I have dwelt on the case of properties for two reasons: first because identity cannot here mean identity across time—time and change make no inroads on the being of properties—but only an eternal unity. Secondly, because properties show us that the question of numerical identity may be undecidable. We have no clear criterion of the identity of properties; but we can cheerfully attribute properties to objects, and describe the objects themselves as identical in their properties. A paradox? I do not know.

3. KINDS. There has been a growing recognition among philosophers, ever since John Stuart Mill and C. S. Peirce introduced the topic, that there is a distinction among properties between those which identify a kind and those which do not. A kind is defined in such a way as to determine the nature of the things which fall under it. Blue things do not form a kind: elephants and tables do. Some kinds are natural; like the kind *elephant*, their nature is not bestowed upon them by us, but is inherent in the things themselves. Other kinds are artificial, like the kind *table*, defined in terms of a function. Not all kinds are kinds of object: there are also kinds of stuff, like water, carbon, or ice-cream, and again the distinction can be made between the natural and the artificial among them.

While the identity of properties in general remains obscure, the same is not always true of kinds. For the nature of a kind is the nature of its instances, and kind *a* is identical with kind *b* if and only if, in all possible worlds, something is an *a* only if it is a *b*, and vice versa. Numerical identity is here parasitic on the numerical identity of objects.

4. TYPES. A particular kind of kind has proved interesting to students of aesthetics: namely the *type*. The distinction between type and token was made by C. S. Peirce,⁶ though it is to this day unclear how we ought to define it. The relation he had in mind was that between the letter «a» of the alphabet, and all the individual inscriptions of it. But the example is unhelpful, since no one quite knows what it is that we recognize, when we see that a letter is an «a».

⁶ *Selected Writings*, p. 406.

Consider all the many ways of writing an «a»: is it a *shape* that we notice? Which shape? Or a movement of the hand? Or a fixed contrast with other letters? Think of the Arabic alphabet, where to recognize a letter may be to recognize *where the script is going*, a notion that is itself far from transparent. One person's *a* may look like another person's *d*: only in the system of a person's handwriting is its identity as a letter determined. Our ability to recognize that one person's *a* is the same letter as another's is therefore predicated upon our ability to recognize identity of *actions*: itself a highly problematic application of the concept of identity, as we shall see.

A better instance might be the relation that obtains between a particular model of a car, and the many instances of it. The Ford Cortina is a type; its instances are tokens of the type. The Ford Cortina is also a kind. So what makes a kind into a type? Here is my suggestion: a kind is a type when its definition lists all the salient features of an individual token: all the features in which we should naturally take an interest, if interested in that kind of thing. (For example, all the features that contribute to the performance of its function.) On this view the elephant is not a type: nor is any other natural kind, since natural kinds are not defined by their functions, nor by their salient features.

5. PATTERNS, structures, and abstract particulars. When describing a type, we tend to use a singular term, as though identifying a particular rather than a universal: *the* Ford Cortina. Yet the type has instances, which are its tokens, and there is no limit to the number of these instances. Types seem to straddle the ontological divide between particular and general: we can describe them either as abstract particulars (like numbers or sets), or as universals which are instantiated in their individual tokens.

Each type is associated with a genuine abstract particular, which is the pattern, or set of instructions, from which it derives. When Henry Ford invented the Model T, he produced a pattern: a formula for producing the tokens of a type. This pattern is not identical with any concrete object. But nor is it a universal—a predicate of other things. It is an abstract object, which itself bears the predicates of the individuals that exemplify it. The Model T Ford has four wheels, a 25 hp engine, and a maximum speed of 60 miles an hour, just like the car that is standing in your drive (which is a token Model T).

Patterns are sometimes called designs—in order to emphasize the creative act that produced them. The fact that we understand them as the *product* of a human *action* explains some of the problems about their identity, as I argue

below. But there are abstract particulars which are not designed in this way, yet exemplified by objects in the natural world. For example, the structure of the human skeleton is exemplified by all normal humans. It can be displayed in a model, and described independently of its instances. It is something shared by indefinitely many individuals, and yet described as a particular, a bearer of properties, which can be varied and changed. It would not be normal to describe its instances as tokens of a type, since that would imply that we identify the structure through its function, and that we have a prior sense of its salient characteristics. Nevertheless, its instances stand to the structure very much as the tokens of a type stand to the design that produced them.

In ordinary thought and action, we do not bother to distinguish the token, the type, and the pattern: since we always have the same salient features in mind. But we are more concerned to distinguish the structure from its instances. This is because the pattern is *realized in* its instances (in the tokens of the relevant type), while the structure is *abstracted from* its instances. We always know what we are talking about, when we describe a design or pattern: about a structure we may be half in the dark. Still, designs and structures are alike abstract particulars, and their identity-conditions are determined in the same way as the identity-conditions of kinds in general. Design or structure A is identical with design or structure B when every realization or instance of A is identical with some realization or instance of B, and vice versa. Hence a design can be identical with a structure. (You could produce a design which is identical with the structure of the human skeleton.)

6. EVENTS. I have already argued⁷ that the concept of numerical identity can be applied only problematically to events. The case is in fact reminiscent of case (2) above. Events are happenings: they take time. This means that we may be uncertain as to how we should reidentify them through time. Much depends on the circumstances. Presumably my neighbour's noisy party is an event: and I awake in the night to find that the very *same* event is still in being. The next night's party is presumably another event. In such cases events are *processes*: and a process is characterized by a governing causal influence. My neighbour's party lasts so long as it sustains itself through the gregarious acts of its participants. At a certain point the interaction ceases, and the party is over.

⁷ See chapter «1. Sound», *The Aesthetics of Music* (Oxford, 1993).

Event-identity cannot always be reduced to process-identity, however, even when a process is continuously occurring. The wind constantly waves the branches of the tree outside. But how many events are involved here, when does each one start and finish, and when do we reidentify an event across time? The answer is surely arbitrary: the movement of that frond of leaves was one event: or two if you consider the movement first to the left, and then to the right. In such circumstances we have as little use for the concept of event-identity as for that of property-identity (case (2) above). This is not to say that a philosopher committed to an ontology of events—the process philosophers such as William James and Hartshorne, or Donald Davidson in his quixotic attempt to imprison reality in the predicate calculus—could not devise a criterion of numerical identity that would deliver consistent and systematic results. But, as I suggested in chapter «1. Sound» of my *The Aesthetics of Music*, the most plausible attempt so far made —Davidson's theory of events, as identified through the totality of their causal relations— is a far cry from any test that *we* could apply, and suggests an almost Schopenhauerian contempt for the world of appearance, and for the things that figure in it.

The insecurity of identity is even more evident when we turn to pure events, as I have called them—events which do not happen *to* any thing, but which are identified in themselves, and not through other things. Sounds and smells are the paradigm cases: secondary objects that are produced by things, but do not inhere in them. We certainly speak of numerical identity here. The question «Did you hear that sound?» implies that I heard a sound, and that I am wondering whether you too heard a sound, and, if so, whether the sound heard by you is the same as that heard by me. But here our concept of numerical identity is that of identity at a time. When it comes to identity over time the case is far less clear. We could adopt various criteria of course: for example, we might say that a sound lasts as long as the physical process that produces it. But this will not fit the normal case of musical sounds, which endure through radical changes in the mode of their production, as when a sustained tremolando on the violins is maintained by handing it from one desk to the next in the orchestra. From the point of view of music, as we have seen, the mode of production of a sound sinks away into the background, and our experience of duration and change resides in the tones themselves. And here there seems to be nothing independent that constrains our decision to say that a given sound is numerically the same, but changed, rather than a new individual.

In the pure sound world it is qualitative identity that determines numerical

identity; identity is then merely the last stage of similarity. Our experience of «same again» is really an experience of similarity, and not the «recognition of an individual» in any strict sense. Yet we have a version of the latter experience too, as when we recognize a theme or a chord, changed in this or that respect, but still the same. What exactly is going on here?

Two facts should be borne in mind. The first is that sounds belong to recognized types. Sounds have salient features which fill our attention; and when identified in terms of those features, they are identified as types. Each token of the type will then be recognized as the same again. Music exploits these salient features: pitch and timbre in particular, and the notation devised for music is devised precisely so that sound tokens can be prescribed and reproduced in accordance with a type.

The second fact is that the individuals which we hear in music do not exist in the material world of sounds: they are not sounds, nor even sound types, but tones. The theme is an intentional object, and to recognize a theme as «the same again» is to make a judgement of «intentional identity». There is no way of specifying «sameness of sound» which will capture what we mean by the identity of a musical individual. To this point I shall return.

In the musical context, the most salient features of a sound are pitch and duration of pitch. The primary experience of «same again» is an experience of these two. For a musical experience however, we require temporal organization of successive sounds: and that means not merely measure and tempo, but the experience, far more vivid than that of pitch itself, of the relative pitches of neighbouring sounds. These provide other dimensions of «same again»: the dimensions that we perceive as rhythm and movement. When we have prescribed pitches, durations, tempo, and measure, we have specified a type of sound event that will be a recognizable vehicle of the musical experience. This is what a piano score presents: pitches and durations are specified by the notes, measure by the barlines. Of course those are not the only relevant variables from the musical point of view. But they are the features that form our primary way of identifying the sound types which interest us as music. They are identified in terms of a design: instructions that are realized in a performance, when a particular instance of a sound pattern is produced. If there are problems about the identity of musical works, I suggest, it is not because the idea of such a design is vague or incoherent. It is in part because the individuals that are produced in *realizing* it—the individual sound events—have only fuzzy conditions of identity. They suffer from the metaphysical insecurity that

surrounds the concept of a pure event. But it is also because musical designs are the products of human actions.

7. ACTIONS. Actions are events, and share the identity-problems of events. But they have further problems of their own, which stem from their intentionality. Wittgenstein's well-known rhetorical question —«What is left over if I subtract the fact that my arm goes up from the fact that I raise my arm?» (*Philosophical Investigations*, § 621)— reminds us of the distinction between movement and action. The same action can be performed by different movements, and one and the same movement can be made when performing two quite different actions. And an action depends for its identity on the intention behind it: a movement which causes death may be a murder; in the absence of *mens rea* however, that is certainly the wrong description.

The problems of action-description and identity are familiar to students of philosophy and law, and their complexity must excuse me from discussing them. Nevertheless, we should recognize that works of music, whatever they are, originate in human actions, and are understood as *intended* objects. The design which determines the performances of a work of music is an intended design, and the intention is underdetermined by the score which records it. Whether we count an arrangement as a version of the original or as a new work, will depend in part on the intention of the arranger. And the difference between a performance and a travesty lies in our sense of the distance between the composer's intention and the performer's product.

Moreover, we perceive human action differently from the way in which we perceive other events. The *Verstehen* with which we grasp the intention and reasoning behind an action is part of our unconscious dialogue with the agent. Actions are shaped in our perception by the question «why?», asking for a reason rather than a cause. And the same is true of the musical design. A sense of the composer's intention inhabits our musical perception, and influences the translation of sound into tone.

§3. The Identity of the Musical Work

What in the world is a work of music? In one sense the work of music has no identity: no *material* identity, that is. For the work is what we hear or are intended to hear *in* a sequence of sounds, when we hear them as music. And this—the intentional object of musical perception—can be identified only

through metaphors, which is to say, only through descriptions that are false. There is nothing in the material world of sound that *is* the work of music. But this should not prompt those metaphysical fantasies that lead philosophers to situate the work of music in another world, or another dimension, or another level of being.⁸ Rather, it reminds us that questions of numerical identity are sometimes of no importance.

Let us take a parallel case: painting. What is a painting, and when is painting *a* identical with painting *b*? We are on slightly firmer ground here, since the temptation is to say that paintings are ordinary physical objects, located in space, which can be identified and reidentified by our normal criterion, of spatio-temporal continuity. But such a criterion does not capture the *salient* feature of a painting, which is the aspect that we see in it, when we see with understanding. Suppose water cascades over Giorgione's *Sleeping Venus* and washes the image away: would this physical object still be Giorgione's *Sleeping Venus*? Surely, we should say that Giorgione's painting had been destroyed by this calamity, and that whatever remains is something else, not the painting. (It is like the case of an animal that dies: what remains, the dead body, is not old Fido the dog.)

Suppose, on the other hand, a device had been discovered that could read the image from a painting and exactly reproduce it, colours, textures, and all. And suppose, before the calamity, Giorgione's painting had been read by this device, and transferred to another canvas. Should we not be disposed to say that the painting had been *saved* from destruction? At least, we should think that nothing important had been lost, and if identity had been lost, then identity is not important.

This kind of thought might lead us to suppose that, when treating paintings as representations, we are really considering them as *types*, whose salient features reside in the coloured surface and all that pertains to it when we see its pictorial quality.⁹ All that interests us in a painting can be specified by describing the salient features that enable us exactly to reproduce what we see in it, when we see it as a painting. If we cannot quite rest with that suggestion, it is because it is indifferent to one of the most important aesthetic features of paintings: namely, that they are understood as the *unique* tokens of the type. What is appreciated in

⁸ See e.g. R. Ingarden, *The Work of Music and the Problem of its Identity* (1928), tr. A. Czerniawski, ed. J. G. Harrell (Berkeley & Los Angeles, 1986).

⁹ See the discussion in R. Wollheim, *Art and its Object*, sects. 3 5–7, and the important qualifications added in the appendix to the 2nd edn.

a painting is a design realised in a single instance.

But that suggests an equally straightforward answer to the question of identity. What we see *in* a painting, when we see it pictorially, is an intentional object of sight, defined by a description that is literally false. The content of the painting is no part of the material world, and as suspicious as a subject of identity-statements as any other member of the intentional realm. The painting itself is a uniquely exemplified design, defined by its salient features: those features that would enable us to reproduce precisely *this* pictorial experience. We could imagine a set of coordinates drawn across the surface of the picture, specifying all the colours and visual textures that occur on every point of it. This would be a complete specification of the design: and it would not mention what is seen in the picture by the one who sees with understanding. It would be a painterly equivalent of the musical score, and would identify the painting completely, as the painting that it is. This suggestion is quite compatible with the view that, if we were to reproduce this pattern again and again, and so convert the painting from a unique realization into a type, we should radically change its aesthetic character. (The *Mona Lisa* as dishcloth.) But there is no way in which identity conditions can be made to follow aesthetic character, in this case or in any other. For aesthetic character is part of the intentional, rather than the material, reality of the object. We cannot require, therefore, that a change in aesthetic character, is always and necessarily a change in the identity of the material object that possesses it.

Here then is an answer to our original question: to identify the work of music in the material world is to identify the sound pattern intended by the composer, which is realized in performance by producing sound events. This sound pattern defines the salient features of the musical work, and can be written down in the form of a score.

The puzzles that we encountered in the first section arise for a simple reason: namely, that some features are more salient than others. There is a prominent foreground in the musical sound type, which is given by relative pitch, duration, measure, and tempo, and any reproduction of those features will bring a forceful impression of «the same again». The reason for this is clear: when these features are determined, so too are rhythm, melody, and harmony—in so far as these intentional objects can be determined by material means. The salient features of a musical work, in other words, are those which contribute to its tonal organization: the organization that we hear, when we hear sounds as tones. This is why we distinguish *versions* of a work, without denying their

identity with the original. The piano reduction, orchestral arrangement, transposition, all coincide with the organizational foreground: and hence we describe them as versions of a single work, and assume that we do no violence to the composer's intention. It is precisely when a work is arranged so as to disrupt or reorder its rhythmic, melodic, or harmonic organization that we feel inclined to deny its identity with the original—as with Webern's orchestration of the six-part «Ricerca».

We could adopt a stricter criterion, and add colour and timbre to the specification of the relevant sound pattern. Nothing whatsoever hangs on the decision, since the concept of numerical identity is here entirely a matter of convenience. We should not worry that the versions of a work are qualitatively so different: for it is quality that interests us in any case, and the assignment of identities serves no purpose except that of distributing the credits. If we say that Chopin's C sharp minor Waltz is another work as it appears in the *Sylphides*, it is because we wish to draw attention either to the recomposition that has changed its aesthetic character, or to the changed artistic intention.

The question of the relation between work and performance is rather more difficult. A performance is an attempt to determine the intentional object of a musical experience, by realizing the salient features of a sound pattern. If performances vary it is partly because there are features of any performance that are not specified in the pattern, even though the musical experience depends upon them, and partly because the sound pattern underdetermines the intention which originally produced it. The performer therefore has an important part to play in the production of the aesthetic experience, completing the transition from the intended design to its realization, and in doing so completing the musical experience. What are the constraints that bind him, and how do we understand his contribution? To those questions see chapter «14. Performance» of my *The Aesthetics of Music*.

§4. Notation and Identity

It follows from what I have said, that a work of music can be fully identified through a system of notation: any notation which unambiguously identifies the salient features of the sound pattern will identify the work. Now not every notation *does* do this. For example, the figured bass which leaves out the inner parts leaves a freedom to the performer which must be filled by tradition, convention, and education if the pattern is to be realized as a musical event. Alternatively, we may wish to adopt a looser condition of identity here, and say

that it suffices to follow the chord patterns of the figured bass-line to achieve a «version» of the work. (Compare the many versions of a Bach cantata.) Opting for the stronger identity-condition is a way of saying that the performer is not as free as he might like to think, that tradition and convention are here all-important, and that there are ways of ruining the work that have not been ruled out by the score.

In aleatoric music the performer's freedom may be part of the point, although it is a freedom constrained by incomplete instructions which leave a residue to chance. In improvisation, the freedom of the performer is greater still—and here notation follows performance, rather than preceding it. In jazz the writing down of a piece may consist merely in the specification of a melody and an harmonic sequence. To follow the sequence, while improvising around the melody, is to give a «version» of the piece. Versions will be so different that very few listeners would wish to say that they are instances of a single composition. Indeed, composition and performance are inseparable. The work consists in what the performer *does*. The performance rules the work, and even if it is recorded or written down, so as to become familiar as a pattern, it is appreciated nevertheless as a single sound event. When performance and work are fused in this way, recording does not transfer our interest from the performance to the abstract structure. We are interested, not in an action-type, but in an individual action.

The history of classical music would be inconceivable without the invention of the notational system which has enabled the composer to specify the work before its performance. It is not surprising, therefore, that Nelson Goodman has looked to this notational system as providing the answer to questions of musical ontology.¹⁰ He proposes a strict criterion of identity, according to which the score uniquely identifies a work of music, so that any performance that exactly follows the score, and obeys all the instructions contained in it, is a performance of the individual work. No other performance «complies» with the work, which can be defined either intensionally, through the score, or extensionally, as the «compliance class» which that score determines.

Of course much that the performer does is not commanded by the score: but the performance complies with the score—i.e. it is a performance *of* the work—just so long as all the instructions in the score are followed. A performance with a mistake in it is therefore not a performance of the work, any more than one that takes Horowitz-like liberties.

¹⁰ *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols* (Oxford, 1969), chs. 4 and 5, esp. pp. 177–91.

Should we accept this stringent criterion? Commentators have waxed hot under the collar about it, especially about the counter-intuitive implication that an incorrect performance is really a correct performance of another work (although one that has yet to be written down). But Goodman can say that if he wishes: he neither misrepresents the facts in doing so, nor constrains our musical perception. It is up to us to determine which features of the sound token are features of the pattern. And after all, the score is designed precisely to settle that question; so why not allow to it the last word? If the result is counter-intuitive, it is only because we have failed to realize that numerical identity is at our behest, and that it is qualitative similarity that really concerns us. We wish to know how far two tokens can vary without violating our sense of the «same again». And that is not determined by a criterion of numerical identity ranging over «material» objects, not even if those objects are abstract particulars or items of notation. The «identity» that concerns us is an intentional identity—an identity in appearance, which translates into no material fact.

On the other hand, one might reasonably object to Goodman's priorities, and to the bias towards writing that his strict criterion betrays. Whole traditions of music-making have grown and perpetuated themselves without the benefit of scores; and even if it is true that here, as elsewhere, the habit of writing has greatly expanded the possibilities of learning from one's predecessors, writing is nevertheless no more than a device for recording what exists independently—the sound pattern—so facilitating the production of future instances. The musical work exists in the habit of its reproduction. While this habit is facilitated by notation, it would seem strange to allow notation to dictate the nature of the thing itself. Better perhaps to allow our concept of numerical identity to be shaped by the live tradition, by our sense of what matters in a true performance, and of the distinction between trivial and serious departures. It might be very important to us that we consider Schubert's «Death and the Maiden» Quartet and Mahler's arrangement to be versions of the same work, and attribute that work to the creative genius of Schubert. And it might be equally important to us that we distinguish Brahms's arrangement for piano left-hand of the Bach Chaconne in D minor from Bach's original, from Busoni's two-hand version, and from Schumann's little-known version for violin and piano. These three works are animated by three quite different artistic intentions. They are not versions of one work, but four works with a single source—albeit a source so great that it has filled four channels with its unbrookable creative energy. Those are the kinds of consideration that are likely to determine our choice of identity-conditions.

§5. Platonism

What I have said would be acceptable, with a few modifications, to many of those who have recently considered the question of musical ontology—notably to Nicholas Wolterstorff,¹¹ with his conception of works of music as «performance kinds». (Although John Bender, arguing along lines similar to those that I have followed, gives reasons for rejecting the idea that performances are *instances* of a work, rather than realizations of it.)¹²

Jerrold Levinson, however, does not share this point of view. For him a great danger lurks for all who would specify the identity of a musical work in abstract terms—as a «sound structure» or sound type.¹³ (His own use of ‘sound structure’ is of no significance in the present context, and I shall ignore his unwarranted desire to include the ‘performance means’ among the conditions of a work's identity.) The danger is this: if the work is an abstract object or a universal, then it is, like all such entities, eternal. It no more comes into being when the composer writes it down than did blueness come into being with the first blue thing. The best we can say is that the composer discovered it: but it might have been discovered by another composer at some other time, like a mathematical proof.

This result seems paradoxical to Levinson, for the reason that it seems to mislocate one of the most important of a work's aesthetic qualities: namely its originality. This is something that we appreciate in the Overture to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, for example, because we believe that Mendelssohn *created* the work, and created it at a certain time. It was hard to do that, a great achievement, something requiring genius, taste, and inspiration. It was not so hard for Weinberger to write the Polka in *Sˇvanda Dudák*, given the existence of Dvorˇák's *Slavonic Dances* (particular the A flat major dance from the First Book). Originality is something that we observe and appreciate in the music: an indispensable feature of music as an art.

In response to this worry, Levinson tries to build into the conditions for a work's identity a reference to the composer's activity: a work is a sound structure (and performance means) *as specified by* so-and-so at such a time. And he is

¹¹ Wolterstorff, «The Work of Making a Work of Music». In: P. Alperson (ed.), *What is Music?: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Music* (University Park, Pa., 1994).

¹² «Music and Metaphysics: Types and Patterns, Performances and Works», *Proceedings of the Ohio Philosophical Association* (Apr. 1991).

¹³ «What a Musical Work Is». In: *Music, Art and Metaphysics* (Ithaca, NY, (1990), pp. 63–88.

surely right to imply that the musical design is understood and appreciated as the outcome of an *action*. On the other hand, reference to this action does nothing to answer Levinson's difficulty. An abstract object does not become time-bound merely because we relate it to a particular person's encounter with it. It is still the case that this work, construed in just this way, exists timelessly, and did not come into being with the gesture that is incorporated into its definition.

There is indeed something strange in Levinson's worry, as in the extended defence of musical Platonism embarked on by Peter Kivy, who happily endorses the «conclusion» that works of music are discovered rather than made.¹⁴ For one thing we should recognize that the problem is not specific to music: works of literature too are designs, realized in their spoken and written instances. But they too are appreciated for their originality. As I have shown above, we might also be constrained to confer a similar kind of identity on a painting. So did Giorgione's *Sleeping Venus* precede his painting her?

Let us take another case. Every time I do something or say something, I have performed a particular action; I have also indicated a pattern. Somebody else could do or say the same thing, by producing another instance of the pattern. Does this mean that nothing that I say or do is my *doing*, but at best only my discovery? Surely, common sense tells us that there is such a thing as doing something *for the first time*, and that this is what we mean by originality, even if the thing done can be described (as is logically unavoidable) as the instance of a pattern? Moreover, things done are done in response to other things done. The first performance of an action is likely to be regarded as a peculiarly important instance: being a first instance of a pattern, or a model for a type, is the kind of feature that *must* spring to our attention, if we are to understand the world of human conduct.

Moreover, the argument—both Levinson's defence of his view and Kivy's attack on it—shows precisely what is wrong with a certain kind of Platonism. The sense in which types, kinds, structures, and patterns are eternal does not prevent them from having a history, any more than the kind: *tiger* is prevented by its status as a kind from having a history, from coming into existence and passing away. The history of a kind is the history of its instances. It would be small consolation to the ecologist to learn that the tiger exists eternally, so that nothing need be done to ensure its survival. The eternal nature of the type

¹⁴ «Platonism in Music: A Kind of Defense». In: *The Fine Art of Repetition: Essays in the Philosophy of Music* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 35–58.

consists merely in the fact that, considered as a *type*, temporal determinations do not apply to it; it does not imply that it *preceded* its first token, for it is only through its tokens that it can precede or succeed anything.

Often when writers notice that this or that feature of a work of art is an immovable part of its aesthetic character, they feel tempted to say that the feature must therefore belong to the identity-conditions of the work. (Thus Strawson in an early article, who defines the criterion of identity for a work of art as «the totality of the features relevant to an aesthetic appraisal».¹⁵ But if you take this line you will end by saying that every observable feature of a work belongs among its identity-conditions, since nothing observable can be discounted from the aesthetic effect. Once again you have run qualitative identity and numerical identity together.

There is another reason for resisting the temptation. The aesthetic character of a musical work does not reside in the sounds, but in the tones that we hear in them. It is reasonable to identify works of music as sound patterns, only because we thereby identify the vehicle of the musical experience. But that experience is sensitive to many things besides the salient features of the sound, and to attempt to build all those things into a criterion for the identity of the *sound* is to embark on a task that has no conclusion. Because we know that Mendelssohn composed his overture when he did, we hear it differently. The intentional object of musical perception is affected by this knowledge, just as it would be affected by the knowledge that we had all along been wrong, since the overture was written by Mendelssohn's sister Fanny. But the way I have chosen to express myself in that last sentence is surely the right one: I am supposing that this overture, this very same piece, might have been written by Fanny.

The Marxists think of the aesthetic experience as having «historicity»—it is a transient manifestation of human life, dependent upon those particular economic conditions that create the ideological interest in «mere appearances». Whether they are right is a matter to see chapter «15. Culture» of my *The Aesthetics of Music*. But the aesthetic experience is certainly *sensitive* to history: a sense of our historical position, however rudimentary, is contained within it, and leads us to endow works of music with indelible historical characters. No periodization is easier or more natural than that which comes to us with our experience of music. Our sense that a given piece just *must* have been composed exactly then and there, and by that composer, is one of the most vivid

¹⁵ «Aesthetic Appraisal and Works of Art». In: *Freedom and Resentment and Other Essays* (London, 1974), pp. 178–88.

historical experiences that we have. Why is that? The answer must be sought in the nature of musical perception. The acousmatic realm is structured by virtual actions and virtual intentions. We hear these with the same immediacy as we perceive the actions and motives of our fellows. A work of music directly acquaints us with a form of human life, and with the style and mannerisms of a period—just as do the expressions, and the forms of dress that we witness in an Elizabethan portrait. Hence we can hear the originality of a work, with the same immediacy as we hear its composer's style.

§6. Intentional Identity

Levinson's theory of musical works identifies them as sound «structures». He situates them unambiguously in the material world of sounds, as complex secondary objects, though somewhat eccentrically described. And there is in truth no useful concept of the identity of a musical work that does not operate in that way, as a specification of a structure or pattern that is realized in physical *sounds*.

Yet his qualms stem from the fact that the intentional character of the musical work is not fixed by the identity conditions of the sound-structure. To identify musical works in that way is to identify the things in which we hear music. It is comparable to the method I proposed for identifying a picture, through a graph which assigns coordinates to all the colours and textures of the painted surface, but which says nothing about the figure of Venus that we see in them. And, someone might suppose, the real question is about *her*: where and what is *she*?

Is there anything to be said in answer to this question? And is it a real question of ontology? We certainly use the concept of identity when describing the intentional objects of our mental states. It is perfectly coherent to say, for example, that I saw my mother in my dream last night—i.e. that the woman of whom I dreamed was my mother. There are even cases of pure 'intentional identity', as Geach has pointed out in a distinguished paper.¹⁶ (For example, «John thinks that the witch who blighted Harry's mare is the same as the one who, Dan believes, blighted his cow». The identity sign is here strung between terms in intentional contexts—contexts which, for Quine and many of his followers, must be understood as referentially opaque. And it is a queer kind of identity sign that lies between terms that do not refer!)

¹⁶ «Intentional Identity». In: *Logic Matters*, pp. 146–52.

In the case of music, the experience of «same again», which prompts us to speak of numerical identity, is associated with those strange quasi-individuals in the world of tones to which I referred in the preceding chapters: to melodies, phrases, gestures, and movements. In musical quotation, for example, these quasi-individuals appear to us, lifted from their context and shown in another light—as the opening phrase of *Tristan und Isolde* is mocked in Debussy's «Golliwog's Cake-Walk», or the Seventh Symphony of Shostakovich in Bartók's *Concerto for Orchestra*. Is this not a case of pure intentional identity? For certainly the sound patterns are here not the same, by any of the criteria that I have so far deferred to. The only sense we can make of these cases is this: that what we hear in the one work is numerically identical with what we hear in the other, but qualitatively different. The same theme in another context. And yet there is no way to spell out that identity in terms of the material properties of the sounds.

There is a parallel in the world of painting, when the person whom I see in one picture is seen as identical with the person whom I see in another, but transformed. But there is a difference: in the case of the paintings I am deploying a concept of identity—identity of persons—that derives from the material world, and which I learn by applying it to genuine individuals. It is not so clear that the individuals in the world of tones can be encountered elsewhere. Our sense of their individuality is primitive and irreducible.

But for that very reason, we should not expect a theory of musical ontology to give us an account of the intentional object of hearing. If it strays into the world where the musical individual is encountered, it is a world of metaphor—of things that do not and cannot exist. If it stays in the world of sound, then it can do no more than specify the sound patterns that make the musical experience available. There is no third possibility, which means that there is nothing further to be said.

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