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Paganini Does Not Repeat. Musical Improvisation and the Type/Token Ontology

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RESUMEN

Este artículo estudia la ontología de la improvisación musical (IM). La IM, como proceso en el cual las actividades de creación y de ejecución coinciden, se contrasta con el recurso más acreditado en las investigaciones sobre la ontología de la música de la tradición occidental: la dualidad *type*/*token* (DTt). La DTt, que es utilizada para explicar la relación entre obras musicales (OMs) y sus ejecuciones, no es adecuada para la IM. Sin embargo, la IM tiene alguna conexión ontológica con las OMs. Una OM puede derivar de una IM y una IM puede ser necesaria para ejecutar fielmente una OM. Como *performance* sobre una OM, la IM puede ofrecer versiones de una OM, manifestar una OM, y, sobre todo, utilizar a la OM como uno de sus ingredientes. Las grabaciones de la IM presentan un desafío especial y han dado lugar a un sorprendente revival ontológico.

PALABRAS CLAVE: *ontología de la improvisación, relación* type/token*, obra musical,* performance *musical, ontología de las grabaciones, filosofía de la música.*

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the ontology of musical improvisation (MI). MI, as process in which creative and performing activities are one and the same generative occurrence, is contrasted with the most widespread conceptual resource used in inquiries about music ontology of the Western tradition: the type/token duality (TtD). TtD, which is used for explaining the relationship between musical works (MWs) and performances, does not fit for MI. Nonetheless MI can be ontologically related to MWs. A MW can ensue from MI and MI can be required for performing a MW faithfully. As performance *on* a MW, MI can offer *versions* of a MW, *manifest* a MW, and, especially, use it as one of its '*ingredients*'. Recordings of MI present special challenges and an unexpected ontological revival.

KEYWORDS: *Ontology of Improvisation, Type/Token Duality, Musical Work, Musical Performance, Ontology of Recordings, Philosophy of Music*.

I

In musical improvisation (MI) creative and performing musical activities not only occur at the same time, but are the same generative occurrence. It is a process that unfolds while being created and attended to, an intentional production of sounds (and silences) "on the spur of the moment", that does not follow pre-established instructions for performance. At the time of its unfolding, the musical performance is – and is intended to be – an ephemeral and unrepeatable event [cf. Alperson (1984); Brown (1996, 2000a, 2000b); Sawyer (2000); Davies (2001), pp. 11-19; Sparti (2005); Santi (2010); Davies (2011), pp. 135-143, 149-160].

One must distinguish improvisation as process from its outcomes. The outcomes of the improvisational process can be stored in human memory, written down in transcriptions or canned in recordings, and can be repeated and/or corrected. The music invented by means of improvisation may be used as instruction for further performances.

These performances, however, won't be MIs anymore [Brown (2011a), p. 68].[1] For, as process, improvisation is tied to unique spatiotemporal conditions that are part of its identity. The improvisational process *per se* is *singular*, *unrepeatable* and *incorrigible*.

Moreover, MI is a *spontaneous* process, i.e. "une action spontanée où l'on agit de manière imprévue" [Levinson (2010), p. 213]. MI is spontaneous and unforeseen because musicians' decisions about *what* and *how* to play do not depend upon previously established instructions.

However, a lot of decisions about what and how to play *are* taken in advance, i.e. before the performance. Plans of action are at the disposal of improvisers. Improvisers draw on learned *riffs*, formulas, patterns, and aesthetic styles. They often play on tunes, on pre-established sets of chords. Even in free MIs like Jarrett's *Köln Concert* or Ornette Coleman's *Free Jazz*, where there is no tune and no pre-established set of chords on which to improvise, improvisers follow, more or less consciously, conventions and performing routines learned thanks to the exposure to the practice and/or they deliberatively preset performance constraints. Hence, not every decision about what and how to play is made *from scratch*, i.e. not every element of a MI is created 'ex nihilo' on the spot [Alperson (1984), pp. 21-2; Brown (1996); Pressing (1998); Young and Matheson (2000), pp. 127-9; Davies (2001), p. 12; Kania (2011), p. 396.].

Still, in MI (as process) many of the decisions as to how to fulfil an action plan are taken spontaneously in the course of performance [Brown (1996), p. 354]. Moreover, in certain musical traditions (like jazz or flamenco) great value is placed upon the way musicians *interact* with each

other, *respond* to the music just played, and are attentive to the *present* moment of the performance.

Therefore, following Kania (2011), p. 395, one can define improvisation as "a performance event guided by decisions about that event made by the performer shortly before the event takes place". Yet, how short is "shortly before"? It would seem odd to say that if the improviser, while soloing, plans to play a certain melody in the next chorus and, in so doing, establishes and prepares a performing routine, the performed melody is not improvised [cf. Brown (2011a), p. 66]. Firstly, there is no way for other people to know whether the performer has really established a performing routine and/or if she follows it in the right way, without deviation from the premeditated route. Secondly, improvisers *do* ideate some aspects of their performance *while* performing [see Berliner (1994), pp. 213-4)]. While playing a solo in a slow tempo, they may decide to speed up the phrasing in the *next* chorus. They can even choose the tones they will play in advance. Still, to claim that ideational processes in real-time prevent musicians from improvising seems to miss the point about the notion of MI as spontaneous invention on the spot, erroneously conceiving it as a completely non-cognitive event.[2]

A plausible way to explain the contribution of decisional skills to improvisational processes is to say that the more (conscious or 'automatic') decisions are taken *during* the performance, the more the performance is improvised. In this sense improvisation would be a matter of degree [see Kania (2011), p. 396; Brown (2011a), pp. 66-7].

Yet, if improvisation is a matter of degree, how can one discern improvisation from interpretation? Aiming to solve this puzzle, Young and Matheson (2000) distinguish between expressive/interpretive properties of a performance, like tempo, *rubato*, dynamics, and *vibrato*, and structural properties thereof, like melody, harmony, and length in bars. They 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" [Young and Matheson (2000), p. 127)]. Although they admit that the line between structural and expressive/interpretive properties is a "fuzzy one", they argue that "it must be drawn" in order to avoid the unwanted consequence that every performance is improvisational, as claimed by Gould and Keaton (2000).

This view has problems, though. As Kania (2011), p. 395, observes, it is not clear why the improvised performance of musical expressive properties could not be of central importance to MI. In certain traditions "simply varying the expressive properties of the work" [Young and Matheson (2000), p. 127] can be an important achievement of MI. Hence, if the improvisation of expressive properties is one of the possibilities of MI, then the distinction between expressive and structural properties of performance is not useful for severing improvisation from interpretation. Moreover, the distinction be-

tween MI's expressive and structural properties is not always clear and can vary depending upon the musical practice at issue [Brown (2011a), p. 66].

So, the puzzle regarding the distinction between improvisation and interpretation is still unresolved. To solve it, one may consider that interpretation can be both improvised and planned or studied, while MI can lead both to the invention on the spot of something new (that *may* be called "work") and to a new (or original, unexpected, surprising) way of reading a pre-existent musical work (MW).[3] In any case, although improvisation can also be to some extent prepared, it is constitutively performative. This means that it lives and dies in the course of the one single performance and is unrepeatable, while an interpretation can be studied and repeated [cf. Thom (1993)]. In this sense, while it is difficult to determine rigidly the difference between improvisation and interpretation, it is arguably possible to specify some 'symptoms' of improvisation, and three important ones are the following [cf. Brown (1996; 2000a); Sparti (2005); Berkovitz (2010)]:

1) The *feedback-loop* between performers' decisional processes during the performance and what occurs during the performance. What performers do affects subsequent decisions about how the performance proceeds. The effects of these decisions determine, in retrospect, the 'sense' of what was previously done.[4]

2) The *feedback-loop* between evaluation and production [see Berkovitz (2010); Bertinetto (2012)]. Real-time evaluations of the improvisational process, made and differently expressed by the performer, the co-performers and the audience, affect the performing process and may contribute to change or redirect it in real-time.

3) The high sense of *presence*. Improvisers respond on the spot to the inputs of the *present* situation, of what is happening *now*. The audience must be *present* at the moment of the performance in order to attend to that *specific* improvisation [cf. Brown (1996), pp. 356, 365].[5]

II

Given the features of MI just outlined, how can musical ontology explain improvised performances? The general problem of musical ontology is to explain the case of musical works (MWs) that can be multiply performed. MWs – like Beethoven's *Symphonies* and Chopin's *Nocturnes* – are performable works, or 'works for performances' [see Thom (1993); Davies (2001); Davies (2011)]. They are items accessible through performances: to be experienced and appreciated properly, they need to be performed. Usually,

MWs *can* be *multiply* performed and they are *intended* to be multiply performed.[6] Music ontology should explain what is a MW, considering that:

1) a MW has an intimate relationship with the performances through which it is appreciated, but it is not identifiable with them, because MWs and performances have different ontological and aesthetic properties;

2) MWs are repeatable, because they can be multiply instanced in their performances;

3) a MW's performances are repetitions of the same item, but can differ from each other considerably, because they have different ontological and aesthetic properties.

Ontological theories of MWs differ as to how they accommodate these claims [cf. Davies (2011), pp. 25-6]. Nowadays the most widespread theory of MWs is structuralism based upon the type/token duality (TtD). To the question: 'What sort of things can be repeatedly accessible through other things, while existing independently from them?', the answer is: MWs are *types* and their MWs' performances are *tokens* of the type. Moreover, MWs are types of a special kind: they are norm-types that admit both correct and incorrect examples [cf. Wolterstorff (1975)]. The conditions established by the type for being its token must be satisfied by correct tokens, that conform to the instructions for being a token of the type.

Although it is faced with difficulties,[7] the 'type/token theory' fits musical practices based on (written or not written) multiply performable works well. It explains elegantly the relationship between works-for-performances and performances-of-works-for-performances, clarifying in which sense a MW is repeatable without loss of identity through its performances and can have both correct and incorrect, both standard and non-standard performances.

However, when MI is considered, the focus of appreciation is the music invented by performers while playing it, the way this invention is accomplished, and, in the case of collective performances, the way musicians interplay with other performers 'on the spur of the moment'. In this case TtD seems to loose its explanatory power. For, improvised music implies special attention for the *present* situation. As we have seen, the conformity between instructions and actions, ontologically explained by TtD, seems to be less central to it.

III

Therefore, I will argue, TtD does not fit improvisation. My argument is straightforward. 1) The main merit of TtD is the way it succeeds in accommo-

dating the complex relationship between a MW and its performances. a) An identical MW can be multiply instanced in several performances; although the MW's performances can be very different from each other, the MW they instance is the same identical MW repeated in every one of its performances. b) TtD explains this relationship: a type is multiply instanceable, without loss of identity, in its tokens, that, though different from each other, instance the same type. c) Hence, the theory argues, a MW is a type, and performances thereof are the tokens of the type. 2) Yet MIs are not multiply instanceable and identifiable. a) For, as I have clarified (in I), improvised music is music simultaneously invented, performed, and attended to. b) Hence MIs cannot be multiply repeated and multiply instanced without losing their identity and undergoing radical ontological transformations. 3) It ensues that TtD does not fit improvisation.

TtD may explain the relation between a MW and its performances, but in MIs the distinction between a MW and the performances thereof collapses. A MI is neither a performed MW nor a MW's performance, even if 1) a MW can be *invented* (or discovered) by means of improvising 2) a MW may permit improvised parts to different degrees, and 3) improvisation can be a performance *on* a MW (see sections IV-VII).

TtD does not fit MI, because, if we claim that a MI is a type, we should admit the possibility of multiple occurrences of the type; but this is in conflict with the singularity and the unrepeatability of improvisation. Conversely, if we conceive a single MI as a token, it is not clear what type improvised music should be the token of. Possible different semantic descriptions that we may use to indicate the same single improvisational event (descriptions like: "free improvisation performed on January 24, 1975", "Jarrett's greatest performance", "a piano concert performed in Cologne in the 70s", etc.), while distinguishing it from other improvisational events ("Hancock's live in Berlin"), are not tokens that single out a type ("Jarrett's *Köln Concert*" is a further semantic description, not a type). Nonetheless, in the philosophical literature on MI different views of the matter have been defended and I will now discuss them at some length.

Firstly, I will take into consideration Alperson's proposal [Alperson (1984)]. In order to accommodate the singularity of improvisation with TtD, Alperson claims that a MI can be conceived as the *unique* token of a type, i.e. as a type having a single token (what scholars call a 'singleton'). In this sense, "[...] musical improvisation seems ontologically closer to the creation of a wood sculpture - the unique token instance of the type - rather than to a conventional musical performance" [Alperson (1984), p. 26], which must be conceived, by contrast, as one of the multiple tokens of a unique type.

Yet, this move is at odds with the most widespread ontological theory about types, according to which a type can be multiply tokened, and, in order to adjust to the singularity of MIs, achieves an unwanted result for TtD. If

MIs are singular tokens of singular types, it follows that every musical performance – not only MIs, but even performances of musical compositions – is a token with its own type 'attached', as it were, to it: the type "MW performed at time *t* in space *s* with players *pp*... etc." (MWTS), an only-once-tokened-type (a singleton) that is 'discovered' or 'created' (which of the two is not crucial here), while the music is being performed. But we may remember that TtD is adopted as an elegant way to accommodate the widespread intuition that an entity (the MW) can be multiply repeated in different occurrences (its performances) without loss of identity. TtD explains this relationship, by means of assigning the MW and the performances thereof intimately related, but different, ontological categories: types and tokens. Alperson's proposal modifies TtD in an intolerable way. On the one hand, TtD has it that the type 'composed MW' (MWT) is instanced in the tokens that are its performances (MWts); but, on the other hand, by claiming that MI is a single token of an only-once-tokened-type, Alperson conflates types and tokens. So he cannot avoid the unwanted implications that each singular performance-of-a-work MWt is the occurrence of *its* singular type (a singleton: MWTS) and that, consequently, MWT is the class of all the MWTSs. The result is an untenable kind of 'Platonist Nominalism'.

Aside from contrasting resoundingly with Occam's Razor ('no entity without necessity'), this is at odds with ordinary intuitions about MWs and performances and with the reason why TtD is adopted as an efficacious explanation of their relationship as that of identity-in-differences. Alperson's ontological view of improvisation obtains only iff musical ontology includes entities like MWTSs. As this seems not to be the case, Alperson's point is doomed to failure.[8]

The second explanation of MI based on TtD I want to discuss was offered in 1983 by Peter Kivy [Kivy (2004), pp. 99-101]. Unlike Wolterstorff (1975) Kivy thinks that the improvisational action is as such the composition of a MW, which, according to Kivy's Platonist view of MWs as eternal structures, is an act of discovery, rather than of creation. Kivy elucidates his argument with the famous case of J.S. Bach's *Musical Offering*, which had its origins in the improvisation on a three part *ricercare* for Frederick the Great. Kivy claims that this case shows that a MI is an act that discovers a MW (a type), while 'tokening' its structure for the first time. Therefore, improvisation would accomplish two things at once. The improviser not only composes, but also interprets, the MW. In an improvisation such accomplishments – composition and interpretation – occur at the same time. Still, they are different accomplishments. While improvising, the musician may, for example, add to the MW he is composing *and* performing a bit of *rubato*, that, according to his musical tradition is usually heard as part not of the composed MW, but of the interpretative performance. Later, in writing a score that matches the MW composed by improvisation, the transcriber *can* skip the indication of *rubato*, since this was

only an interpretative surplus and should not be intended as part of the conditions for a right performance of the MW.

Unfortunately, this is not the right way to understand the connection of MI and a MW. Following Paul Thom, we may notice that Kivy is wrong in not acknowledging that inventing music by means of improvisation and composing a MW are different things. To constitute something as a MW means to envisage future renditions of that MW and to issue directives to would-be performers of that MW as to how to perform it correctly. On the contrary, "to suppose that one is improvising is normally not to suppose that what one is doing will ever be done again" [Thom (1993), p. 63]. Moreover, MWs can be revised, because composers can reject or rework material initially included in them. This is impossible in the case of improvisations, for, *as improvisations*, they do not admit revisions.

In order to accept this point, one must not grant Thom's questionable idea that improvisations cannot be artworks, because improvisations are not enduring things:[9] in fact enduring is not a necessary condition for being an artwork, since MIs, like Keith Jarrett's *Köln Concert*, intentionally produce artefacts, that, though ephemeral and unrepeatable, may have artistic status and may be the object of aesthetic and critical attention [Davies (2011), pp. 142-3; Brown (2011a), p. 68)].[10]

Nonetheless, there are other compelling reasons for rejecting Kivy's point. According to him, remember, improvisations are compositions that discover eternal MWs and at the same time interpret them. But nothing can assure us that Bach did not make compositional mistakes while improvising and then corrected them while writing down the MW we know as the *Musical Offering*. The composed MW for performances results from the *transcription* of the improvisation; it is not the music played by means of an *improvised* performance [see Thom (1993), p. 67]. An improvised performance is, as such, a 'composition' only in the sense that it 'puts together' sounds and silences (composition derives from the Latin word 'con-ponere'). It is not a 'proper' composition, which is the construction of a set of instructions (the performable MW) that are prescriptions for further performances. The 'proper' composition, the preparation of set of instructions for further performances, can be corrected and arranged. It is a revisable product, which endures and can be multiply performed. Improvisations are simply not so.[11]

Kivy's distinction between a MW's composition and its interpretation in the one improvisational action shows a preference for MI as product over MI as process. However, in listening to improvised music (of course, to different degrees in the different musical practices and styles) the focus of appreciation is also and most of all the "performer's on-the-spot decisions and actions that *generate* the sonic trail" [Brown (2000b), p. 119], that is, the *action* of improvising music, not only its results. So, the distinction between

process and product that underlies Kivy's view of MI is a mistake: both an ontological and an aesthetic one [Brown (1996 and 2000a); Sawyer (2000)].

Hence, we can conclude, TtD (and especially its strongest version, Platonism) does not accommodate the ontology of MI as a real, irreversible, and singular *process*. In the standard case, the principal focus of appreciation of an improvised performance is not the way a performance instances an identical MW, by complying with the MW's instructions for performances, but a particular piece of music as it is being performatively invented. Nonetheless, the inadequacy of TtD for the ontology of MI notwithstanding, MI displays interesting relationships with musical practices based on TtD. I will argue for this in the next sections.

IV

First of all, as already mentioned, MWs can ensue from transcriptions (and recordings) of MIs. A transcription describing a former improvised performance can become a prescription for further performances [see Davies (2001), p. 15]. Precisely Kivy's example, Bach's *Musical Offering*, is the case in point: it is a MW composed by means of transcribing by memory the music played in improvisation, choosing the elements of MI that should be taken as constitutive of the MW, and using the notation obtained in this way as a set of instructions for further performances. Independently of the possibility of altering the outcomes of the MI in the composition that ensues from it, in this way the MI is transformed in a MW that is performable in compliance with performing instructions [cf. Brown (2000b), p. 121].[12] So transformed, the music improvised is no longer a MI, but rather an effect of a MI, i.e. a musical item (more or less) robustly causally related to a previous musical improvisational event.[13]

Yet, a still more interesting question is whether a performance can be a MI *and*, at the same time, a performance of a MW. I will now explore some possible ways to solve this puzzle.

V

Certain MWs are 'thin', instead of 'thick',[14] and leave substantive freedom to performers. a) In Western 'classical' music this happens for example in the practice of the figured bass and of the free cadenza or in the 'open' or 'undetermined' MWs of avant-garde music: in such cases composers (like John Cage) explicitly invite or allow performers to improvise. b) In folk, pop, rock and jazz, songs, tunes, standards and numbers are often little more than sets of chords plus a basic melody and, maybe, a text. While performing them, one can

not avoid 'thickening' them. Are the performances of these 'thin' works improvisations? Are the improvised performances still performances of a MW? Here I will discuss a). Later (in VI) I will turn to b).

In a) I consider musical compositions in which composers prescribe performers to fill the gaps left open in the compositions, by means of becoming improvisers to various degrees and at various lengths. But Davies (2001), p. 16, claims that what performers do in such cases is not to improvise, in the proper sense. They are simply doing what the MW requires to "come to life". They are faithful to the MW's instructions; they are not deciding on the spot what direction the performance should take: "Even if the work is indeterminate in some respects, the way of continuing it is usually known" [Davies (2001), p. 17]. Davies is wrong in radically denying that in at least some of such cases the performance can be the right instance of a MW *and* be improvised, and, consequently, that performers are not only executants of instructions, but also improvisers that take decisions 'on the spot'. Nothing, aside from the cultural constraints placed upon a musical practice, prevents MWs from prescribing or allowing MI for correctly performing some of their parts, without ceasing to be, for this reason, MWs that can be multiply instanced. Analogously, nothing but the cultural constraints placed upon a musical practice prevents a MW's performance from being improvised, while being at the same time a correct performance of the MW. If MI is required by the MW's instructions, then it is a necessary condition for the correct performance of the MW, and is still an improvisation.

It could be objected that in the case at issue performers do not decide to improvise, so they do not improvise. When composers allow or prescribe performers to improvise at a certain point of the composition, the performers' decision to improvise is not autonomous and spontaneous as it is supposed to be in MIs. A dictated MI is no longer a MI, if MI is to be understood as a *free* way to produce music. However, this is a red herring. Performers could refuse to follow the composer's prescriptions and simply not play the MW. If they accept and decide to perform the MW, then they must take real-time decisions on the music to play. In other words, they improvise.

In the case at issue the practice can allow for MWs being (partly) performed by means of MI, even if musicians' real-time performing decisions are often guided by prescriptions that correspondingly limit their creativity. For in this case an improvised performance is undertaken with the explicit aim to carry out instructions for performing (parts of) a MW. It is intended to be the faithful rendition of the MW. So, if it does not follow the prescribed MW's instructions, it is an incorrect performance of the MW. For instance, if the composer prescribes 12 bars of MI and the performers improvise 14 bars, then there is something wrong in the performance and the MW is incorrectly instanced. Moreover, due to the 'thinness' of this kind of MW, performances of such MWs may sound *so* different from each other, that, even if they are

all correct performances of the MW, sometimes it is impossible to understand only by means of listening that they are performances of the same MW. Nonetheless, in this case the relation between the MW and its performances, which contain MI, can still be conceived in terms of TtD: granted that TtD really succeeds in explaining the connection between MWs and their performances, an improvised performance can correctly or incorrectly token a MW conceived as a type, if it is intentionally undertaken for this aim within the constraints of certain musical and social conventions.

VI

A still more intriguing puzzle arises in the cases indicated above under b). In order to perform some 'thin' MWs (or 'thin' versions of 'thick' MWs) performers are compelled to 'thicken' them, by means of expanding, elaborating, developing, or enriching their 'thin' structures. In some musical practices, this 'thickening' process occurs by means of improvisation, jazz being the obvious example. Hence, some musical practices require improvisation *on* MWs [Davies (2011), pp. 155-7, calls this improvisation 'improvisation on a theme']. The MWs upon which musicians improvise can be (i) adjusted, adapted, arranged for the performance-by-improvisation (for example: John Coltrane's versions of the standard *My Favorite Things*) or (ii) they can be composed *ad hoc* (like Miles Davis' tune *So What*, originally included in the album *Kind of Blue*, 1959). In (i) the performance-by-improvisation is not a *necessary* condition,[15] in both (i) and (ii) it is a *sufficient* condition, for the instantiation of the MW.

In general, this case is different from the one discussed in section V. There we had a clear distinction between composers and performers: performers improvise because composers prescribe them to do it – at least in certain parts of the performance – to the degree allowed and prescribed by the composition. Instead, here the composed MW is at the service of the improvised performance. In other words, performers do not wait for the composer's permission or prescription before becoming improvisers. They freely decide to improvise, taking advantage of the composer's work for *their* performing aims. They do not intentionally follow instructions for correctly and faithfully performing MWs; they rather use MWs for their improvisations, without aiming to be faithful to them [see Goehr (1992), p. 255]. Although, unfaithfulness to the 'letter' of the MW may turn out to be a means of being faithful to its 'spirit', at least in the context of the relevant musical culture.

However, the question is how one can make sense of the relationship between the improvised performance and the MW on which performers improvise. Davies (2001), pp. 16-7, and Kania (2011), p. 394, argue that, due to the musical practices that regulate them, in MIs based on songs MWs are used only

as springboards for improvisation. The tune inspires the improvised performances, but these are "autonomous". So, although somehow connected, two improvised performances called "Sophisticated Lady" cannot be understood as performances of a "preconceived" MW, because this sort of relationship is of little importance in jazz (and in similar musical practices). To put Davies' and Katia's arguments in a nutshell, in jazz the *Werktreue* ideal does not do any work: since performers can do (more or less) what they want with the MWs on which they improvise, the concept of a MW is here misplaced. Moreover, since for Kania an improvisation, as ephemeral event, cannot be an artwork (see above, section III), in jazz, he argues, there are only performances, no MWs.

However, some kinds of MWs still play a role in musical traditions starkly fuelled by improvisation. In jazz one speaks of MWs, regarding tunes, albums, single improvisations on the spot and recorded improvisations. In particular, *pace* Davies and Kania, MI on a tune could still be regarded as performance of a MW, even though the aesthetic ideal of faithfulness to the work has no relevance in the practice at issue. Indeed, it is not clear to me what precisely it means that in the practice of improvising on a tune "the work is of interest only because it provides the occasion for the performers to exercise their skills" [Davies's (2001), p. 16]. I agree with Davies that "the whole that is created can be regarded as new and unique" (*Ibid.*) and I grant that the musician may choose to play a certain tune mainly because it provides him with a good basis for his creations on the spot. Still, as Davies admits, this seems to imply that "the improvisation is inspired by the tune" (*Ibid.*). Now, music, like everything else, can be 'inspired' by simply too many things. How can one make clear what does it means for an improvisation to be 'inspired by' the MW it is based on?

Brown (2011b), pp. 177-8; (2011c), is right in observing that, although the performance "*is* the music's primary focus of critical attention", it seems "bizarre" to think that the song upon which the jazz musicians improvise does not matter (aside from the fact that even in jazz there are compositions that leave no room for improvisation, like some of Duke Ellington's tunes). Instead of simply removing the notion of MW from the practice of improvising on a tune, and arguing that there is no interesting relationship between the performance and the MW on which it improvises, it is more promising to try to answer the following questions: how can performances that differ strongly from each other be of the same song? More precisely, as Brown puts it, how is possible "to articulate a criterion of performance-identification that avoids (1) performances of presumably different works turning out to be of the same work, and (2) performances ostensibly of the same work turning out to be of different works"? [Brown (2011b), p. 177]. I will briefly discuss both cases.

(1) Two improvised performances – say Eric Dolphy's bass clarinet rendition and Jimmy Ponder's up-tempo version of Billie Holiday's "God Bless the child"[16] – are almost unrecognizable versions of the same MW

(Billy Holiday's standard). But it is not clear in which sense Billy Holiday's standard is instanced in the two performances. Perhaps the intention of performing that tune, the title used to refer to the performances, and some other elements of the performances (expressive qualities, dynamics, etc.) that are (rather weakly) connected with the composition are the criteria one should take into account for solving the puzzle.

(2) Two different MWs – for instance Miles Davis' composition 'Donna Lee' and '(Back home again in) Indiana', a standard composed in 1917 by Ballard MacDonald and James F. Hanley – are instanced in improvised performances that can hardly be distinguished as individuating different MWs. For 'Donna Lee' is a 'contrafact' that overlays a new melody over the existing harmonic structure of 'Indiana' [see Brown (2011b), p. 176; (2011c), p. 430]. Hence, it might seem, when performers improvise on 'Donna Lee', they are also improvising on 'Indiana'. In playing upon the harmony of one song, performers are indeed playing upon the harmony of the other as well. Still, the tunes are different MWs. Their identity is not established by harmonic structures but by other factors. Aside from the fact that their authorship is different, in the case at issue the different melodies of the themes individuate two different MWs (other individuating elements can be dynamics, tone colour, instrumentation, expressive feature, etc.). Otherwise, every *blues* would be the same blues; and I think it is not a correct view of the matter. Hence, since different themes (may, or should) inspire different MIs, the improvised performance of the one tune is not the improvised performance of the other, even though improvisers can intentionally confound listeners, for example by quoting the melody of 'Indiana' while playing 'Donna Lee': after all 'Indiana' was a *very* important source of inspiration for 'Donna Lee' and to remind the listener of this during the performance of 'Donna' might be appropriate.

As (1) and (2) make clear it seems wrong to conceive the connection between the performance and the MW on which it improvises in terms of a performance that instances the MW, the same way TtD tries to accommodate the practice of faithfully performing a MW in the Western classical tradition. Still, it also seems wrong to get rid of all kind of relationship between the performance and the MW on or after which musicians improvise. Therefore, I will discuss three possible ways to explain the relationship between a MW and the MI on it.

VII

One can conceive MIs as x) *versions* and as y) *manifestations* of a MW and z) MWs as *ingredients* of MIs. Let's discuss each of these cases.

x) MIs as *versions*. One could conceive improvised performances on MWs (standards, tunes, and well-known popular melodies, etc.) as *versions* of MWs. In improvising on 'God bless the child' musicians can alter the theme, changing the rhythm and the tempo, as well as the harmony of the piece. In so doing they produce a version of the piece. Like an arranged version of a MW, the improvised performance on a MW has a relationship with the MW at issue, while intentionally deviating from the original MW in some aspects. So, MIs on a MW are not tokens in which the MW is repeated without loss of identity. MIs on MWs, like versions, maintain a link with the MW on which they are played. Still, this relation is not a proper instantiation or an occurrence of the MW, because they do not follow pre-established instructions for a correct or faithful instantiation of the MW. In some cases thematic motives are so altered, that is difficult to understand, while listening, that a particular tune is being played.

Like versions, MIs on a MW may be unfaithful to the 'letter' of the original MW, yet faithful to its 'spirit'. However, the improvised performance on a tune is a special kind of version. It is a version in which process and product, invention and execution coincide to a great degree, and that, at least at the time of the performance, is not intended as a set of instructions for further performances. Hence, improvised performances differ from versions because, although they have a (loose) relationship with the MWs they improvise on, they are not something that can be, and/or are intended to be, repeated, like proper versions of MWs, that *can* in principle be used as repeatable MWs for performance ensuing from the MWs they are the versions of. For this reason one may be tempted to choose alternative solutions to our puzzle. An attractive way of doing the job may be provided by the notion of *manifestation*.

y) *Manifestation.* With this concept Kania (2006) explains the link between a 'track' (that according to him is the proper MW in *rock*) and the 'song' to which the track is causally connected, but not by means of performing it. A rock work, he maintains, is a "studio *construction*", a 'thick' work that "does *not* authentically instance the ['thin'] song for performance, but rather *manifests* it. The concept of *manifesting* a work […] is supposed to be intermediate between that of *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 necessarily being an instance of it" [Kania (2006), pp. 404-5)].

Leaving aside the question of whether rock works really are tracks, I think that the notion of manifestation can fit the link between a MI and the MW performed by means of that MI, although MIs-on-a-MW *are* ways to perform the MW, which, however, are not instances of the MW. Although Kania uses the notion of manifestation in order to explain a kind of relation, which is not the relation between a MW and its performances, the notion can

explain ways to perform MWs in which the main focus of appreciation is rather the improvised performance than the MW itself on which musicians improvise (at least in some musical practices).

The MI, in these cases, does not (intend to) faithfully and authentically instance the MW. For a MI can authentically instance a MW only in the cases in which MI is explicitly prescribed by composers, like in the cases of the figured bass, of the cadenza and of the avant-garde 'open' compositions we have considered above under a) (in section V). Now we are discussing MIs that *use* MWs, and are not at their service. Yet, here also there is a relationship between the improvised music and the MW upon which the music is improvised: the improvised music displays, although loosely and in a more or less closed or distanced way, some structural and expressive features of the performed MW, that it takes at its service. It manifests the MW, because it is a perceivable indication of the MW, a materialization of the MW. This materialization is achieved, however, not by following instructions for a faithful performance, but in virtue of a (de)constructive interpretation of the letter and of the spirit of the MW, that is taken at the service of improvisational creativity.

Surely, improvised performances of the 'same' MW differ from each other because of the features of the MWs they display. In such practices, the MW has no power to prescribe which features should be instanced in the performance for its identity to be respected, because the main focus of appreciation is the performance, not the MW that the performance indicates. Hence, the improvised music *manifests* the MW on which performers are playing – and for this reason during the concert the speaker announces that Eric Dolphy will play *God bless the child* –, but without properly instancing it, due to the free way in which musicians creatively perform on the MW by inventing, mostly on the spot, a great part of the music they play.

MIs can manifest MWs by explicitly or implicitly referring to the MWs.[17] However, it is important to notice that the relation of *manifestation* is looser and larger than the relation between a type and a token. It is not a case of repetition of the identical original, but a case of making perceptively accessible an original, while changing it on the spot, in different and unexpected ways.

However, the notion of *manifestation* explains the relationship between improvisation and a MW only partially, and the risk is high that one misconceives the situation by placing more value on what is manifested (the MW) than on what manifests (the improvised performance). But in the practice under discussion the focus of appreciation is the performance, not the MW, no matter how important and inspiring this is for the performance. Hence, we may finally consider another intriguing hypothesis, recently suggested by Davies (2011), pp. 108-119, 136-8, 147-8.

z) A MW as *ingredient* of the improvised performance. The notion of *ingredient* was originally proposed by Hamilton (2007) in connection with the ontology of theatre. According to Hamilton, in some cases of contemporary theatre the performance is not the instantiation of a well-prepared work, but the result of a constructive interpretational production, in which elements of the original literary work can be modified, transformed, integrated, reduced, rejected, etc. So, the literary dramatic work enters its productions (i.e. its renditions), instanced in the various theatrical representations, as an ingredient that may be variously modified, transformed, integrated, etc. by the production.

Analogously, in the case of MI on tunes, the MW can be conceived as an ingredient used by the MI in its creative development. This idea accounts very well for the fact that in improvisational musical practices MWs are at the service of the performance, and the performance is free regarding the MW's prescriptions for faithful renditions. Now, if the MW at the service of the improvised performance is an artwork in its own right, the ingredient-hypothesis implies that an (enduring) artwork can be used as ingredient of a performance that can be itself considered as an (ephemeral) artwork. So, it seems, a set of instructions, a repeatable recipe, can be used as an ingredient for a dish to be served and enjoyed only once.

VIII

Only once? As a kind of conclusion I will briefly discuss what happens when MIs are recorded.

Recordings allow us to taste the dish repeatedly. By means of recording, the improvisation is, as it were, frozen. During the playback the frozen improvisation is temporarily defrosted. Yet, whereas there is no essential difference between defrosted and fresh food, the defrosted dish we enjoy through a recording during the playback is no longer an improvisation, as the process of inventing and performing music 'on the spot', in which process and product coincide, but only the *result* of the improvisational activity, which is detached from the particular process of making it. For the improvisational process is over, has vanished and cannot be retrieved. Hence, properly speaking, not the improvisation *per se*, but only the *result* of an improvisation can be frozen, defrosted and tasted repeatedly.

In other words, sound and audio-video recordings have a paradoxical relationship with MI. Recordings transmit MIs, making possible a kind of re-presentation of a vanished moment and, in so doing, perpetuate the fleeting moment.[18] Still, it is only a 'kind of re-presentation'. On the one hand, recording is hardly a transparent medium and post-production manipulations of the recorded material are the rule, rather than the exception. On the other

hand, independently of the opacity of the medium and the manipulations it makes possible, a recorded MI is not *the* 'real living thing' anymore (although it is *another* 'real thing'). Recordings document, manifest, represent improvisation; yet, they also show the absence of improvisation. Since recordings allow repeated hearings, recordings of improvisations repeat the unrepeatable.

Of course, recordings make the transcription,[19] the study and the critical analysis of improvisations as well as *ex-post* re-elaborations of improvisations easier. However, as Brown observed [(2000b), p. 117], they negatively affect the "spontaneous dimension of musical performances", because, "with the repetition that phonography makes possible, we can clearly anticipate the choices a performer is [or better: was] going to make". Nonetheless, they have positive effects, since they can make available details that "can increase our understanding and appreciation of the living thing" [Brown (2000b), p. 124] and, in this sense, they really can put us in contact with the vanished moment of the MI.

Still more radically, recordings make possible the ontological transformation of MIs (not only MIs on MWs, but even free MIs, like Keith Jarrett's *Köln Concert*) into MWs that are multiply performable by means of *playback*.[20] Sometimes we hear and enjoy recorded MIs in just this way: as repeatable MWs we are eager to listen to repeatedly. Hence, independently of the special cases (discussed in section IV) of MIs transformed into MWs for performance, in ideal technological conditions this radical ontological transformation (from live improvisation to recorded improvisation) converts the unrepeatable music played into an item (ideally) repeatable without loss of identity in multiple performances, which are (tendentially) all identical or aurally very similar.[21]

We are faced with a surprising return of the repressed. Playbacks of recordings of improvised music can be conceived as performances that are perfectly faithful to a MW. This MW is a special one, because it becomes what it is, a MW, just by virtue of its performances (the playbacks) that instance it, ideally without loss of identity.[22] If repeated by means of playing *back* the recording, an unrepeatable music, played and playable only *once*, becomes (paradoxically?) the perfect realization of the *Werktreue* ideal and the most adequate exemplification of the TtD! An unexpected ontological revival, indeed.

However, the music that we are listening to in the recording is not the improvisation, but its sonic image, that attests to its unrecoverable vanishing. This confirms the reciprocal incompatibility of MI and TtD. The first is essentially in conflict (in practice) with what the second tries ideally to explain (in theory): the repetition of the identical.

IX

Since Paganini couldn't leave behind any recordings of his performances, we cannot listen to his virtuosic improvisations. But let's imagine that we could. Even in this case it would be a misunderstanding to think that, while repeatedly listening to the same improvisation by Paganini, we would hear Paganini improvising, repeatedly, the same music. By definition one cannot capture the fleeting moment. To think that one could by repeating it thanks to recordings and playbacks is doubly illusory. What is repeated in recordings and playbacks are the outcomes of past actions, which are now perceived separately from the actions that produced them. The immediate living coincidence of process and product occurs only once, in the fleeting moment of improvising, and then vanishes forever. While listening to a recording, I do not hear someone improvising, but the tracks left behind by a musician that *had* improvised in a past fleeting moment that, by definition, cannot come back. Hence, what is played *back* is not the improvisation, but its recorded outcomes.

The lesson that we learn from this is that the ontology of MI must remain faithful to the singularity and unrepeatability of improvisation. Indeed, it is well known that 'Paganini non ripete'.[23]

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NOTES

[1] The (aesthetically questionable) performances on YouTube, that use Keith Jarrett's famous freely improvised *Köln Concert* as a set of prescriptions for further performances, are a case in point [see Davies (2011), pp 135-43, 154-6].

[2] However, improvisers' real-time decisions are not always *consciously* premeditated. Decisional routines are often procedurally embodied thanks to repeated training and become automatic [Berkowitz (2010].

[3] This way of speaking is inaccurate. A distinction should be made among the following views: a) improvisation is the spontaneous production of a work, b) improvisation becomes a work, once recorded or transcribed, c) improvisation is or leads to the interpretation of a work. I will discuss those possibilities in the following parts of the paper. See also Davies (2011), pp. 148-64.

[4] This explains how what one might otherwise consider as a 'mistake' can be 'saved' and 'integrated' in the performance. See Gioia (1988); Berliner (1994); Brown (1996); (2000a); Sparti (2005).

[5] Interactive evaluations in real-time and the sense of presence may take effect also in straight performances of MWs-for-performances, but to a minor degree. Indeed, if their contribution to the performance is great, the performance would probably assume an improvisational tone.

[6] 'In the standard case' because there may be MWs not *intended* to be performed multiply (even if they are multiply performed *de facto*) and MWs that practically *cannot* be multiply performed (because, say, all scores are destroyed and the memory of them is irrecoverably lost).

[7] For lack of space I cannot deal here with the problems of TtD and of its concurrent theories. Davies (2001), Kania (2007) and Davies (2011) offer good introductions to the topic.

[8] However, Alperson's (1984) seminal paper is an invaluable benchmark for philosophical investigations on MI.

[9] This view is also defended by Kania (2011), pp. 397-8; see also Brown (2011b), p. 177.

[10] Davies' argument is convincing: "While we *could* stipulatively restrict the term 'artwork' to things that endure, this stipulation doesn't seem to be grounded in anything bearing essentially on the ways in which artworks work" [Davies (2011), p. 143].

[11] Still, 'proper' compositions can ensue from improvisation. I will discuss this case in section IV. See Nettl (1998) and Brown (2011a) for a discussion of the link between improvisation and composition.

[12] One of the examples given by Brown (2000b), p. 121, is particularly clear: "Adelaide Hall's extemporaneous vocalization of a secondary line above the main one in "Creole Love Call" did eventually became part of a performable work". Transformations of this kind can turn out to be artistic evolutions or involutions, but they may also be aesthetically neutral compared with the original improvisation.

[13] Davies (2011), pp 158-60, speculates about the possibility of arguing in favour of a proper 'improvisational composition'. In certain practices, he claims, there could be conventions at work, according to which what performers do by means of improvisation counts *per se* as a prescription for instances of MWs and performers could recognize the validity of such conventions. Davies (2011), p. 160, rightly observes that it "is highly questionable whether these two conditions are met in jazz improvisation" and I suspect that this is true in many other musical practices. This is not to say that improvisation could not be used as a tool for composition [cf. Bertinetto (2011)].

[14] Cf. Davies (2001), p. 3: "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".

[15] I am not sure that in (ii) the performance-by-improvisation is a necessary condition for the instantiation of the MW. It seems to be a necessary condition in the musical practice in which the MW is composed, but other musical practices can appropriate the MW originally conceived as a work-for-performance-by-improvisation and allow or prescribe non-improvised performances. Obviously, it is not the same

case as MWs ensued from improvisations. In the present case MWs-for-improvised-performances are transformed into MWs-for-non-improvised performances.

[15] The first was performed in 1961 (The video is available at the URL: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cYJ_4vSruog). The second has been released on the album *What's New*, 2005.

[16] Conversely MWs may too manifest improvisations, if they are based on, or refer to, past improvised performances, say by quoting them. Moreover, also media like transcriptions and recordings can manifest improvisation (see section VIII).

[17] It might be suggested that recordings are responsible for the possibility of enjoying an improvisation as an artwork [see Brown (2011a), p. 68]. This is only partly true, because, as suggested before (in section III), to endure is not a necessary condition for being an artwork.

[18] Like recordings, transcriptions are not improvisations anymore, although, like recordings, they are tools for studying past improvisations and for learning how to improvise (in a determined style or manner).

[19] Kania (2011), p. 399, rejects this view as odd, because, he argues, it implies that every recorded performance of a 'classical' MW could be analogously conceived as a MW. For reason of space, I only observe that that technology transforms artistic and aesthetic practices is not a surprising discovery.

[20] Brown (2000b) and (2011c), pp. 431-3, Davies (2001), pp. 295-340, and Davies (2011) pp. 160-4, discuss in detail the transformations introduced by recordings into the aesthetics and the ontology of composed and improvised music.

[21] The loss of identity can ensue from a deterioration of the material support of the recording: LP, CD, MP3, etc.

[22] This paper is not an improvisation. It took a lot of preparation and needed a lot of revision. A previous version was presented at the workshop *L'ontologia dell'opera d'arte musicale* (Gorizia, April 18, 2012). I thank all the participants and particularly Alessandro Arbo and Angelo Orcalli for useful comments and criticisms. I am especially grateful to an anonymous referee, Brunello and Hero Lotti, Davide Sparti and Lee B. Brown for pressing me on several points and giving me precious bibliographical information and invaluable suggestions to improve the research. The mistakes in this paper are obviously mine, not theirs. I also thank the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation (research project FFI2011-23362) and the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation for providing generous financial support for my research.

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