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Autor: Ruta, Marcello

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Marcello Ruta

Staring at an Absolute Beauty

Why Musical Scores Are Not Mere Performing Instructions and What Literature Can Teach Us about Them

Die in diesem Essay erarbeitete Fragestellung fusst auf einem musikontologischen Problem: Welche Art von Gegenstand ist ein Musikwerk? Eine wichtige Aufgabe der Ontologie der Musik ist es, die Konsequenzen der Einführung der Notation in eine musikalische Praxis zu bewerten. Zur Klärung muss unter anderem die *Rolle verstanden werden,* die der Partitur zugeschrieben wird. Mit diesem Essay möchte ich auf das, was ich als *ernsthaftes Missverständnis* der Rolle der Partitur betrachte, insbesondere in Bezug auf die klassische Musik, hinweisen. Das Verständnis der Partitur als *Spielanleitung*, wie es in den letzten Jahrzehnten sowohl in der musikwissenschaftlichen als auch in der musikontologischen Literatur zu finden war, gilt es zu hinterfragen. In diesem Beitrag werde ich nach einem einleitenden Abschnitt zunächst sechs Argumente gegen die Vorstellung der Partitur als Spielanweisung formulieren; es folgen Kommentare zu einigen Passagen von Robert Schumann, Hermann Hesse und Peter Shaffer, um im weiteren Verlauf einen aktuellen Diskussionsbeitrag über die Rolle der Partitur in der klassischen Musik zu liefern.

In spite of relating both to music and literature, the argument I intend to develop in this essay is not driven mainly by a musicological or literary question, but rather by a musical-ontological one, namely: what kind of entity is a musical work[1]? Without expounding on the details, the approach I adopt in my investigations on this subject is praxis-oriented, as I do not think it is possible to answer the question of the ontological nature of MWs independently from the practices in which such works are composed, performed and consumed. One important task of a praxis-oriented ontology of music is to evaluate the consequences of the introduction of *notation* in a musical practice, and in order to do this one has to understand, among other things, the *role* played by the musical score[2] in it. In this essay I would like to call into question what I consider to be a *serious misunderstanding* about this role, specifically in relation to the praxis of classical music.[3] This misinterpreta-

1 Musical work(s): henceforth abbreviated as MW(s).

2 Musical score(s): henceforth abbreviated as MS(s).

3 This expression is evidently vague and can be easily criticized. However, in this context it can be adopted with no risk of damaging the argument I intend to develop. With the expression "classical music", I refer to that musical praxis, dominant within cultivated music at least from Beethoven (Lydia Goehr talks in this respect of a *Beethoven-Paradigm*) up until contemporary times, and characterized in relevant aspects

tion, which in recent decades has gained significant popularity both in the musicological and in the musical-ontological literature, consists in regarding the MS as *performing instructions*, or more precisely as "coded instructions that, when properly carried out, will enable performers not only to make sounds in a specific combination, called musical work, but also to repeat that combination as many times as they desire".[4]

This article accordingly divides into four main sections:

1. In the first section, I intend on the one hand to show how the notion of a MS as performing instructions can support musical-ontological positions, which reduce (in different ways, as we will see) MWs to their performances; on the other hand, to show that criticism of that notion of a MS *does not entail* any criticism of such ontological positions.
2. In the second section, I formulate six arguments *against* the notion of the MS as performing instructions. Some of these arguments may indeed appear banal, as I will say many things which will sound obvious. But this is, in my view, a point against the thesis I am going to criticize.
3. In the third and fourth sections I briefly comment on some passages from Robert Schumann, Hermann Hesse and Peter Shaffer, in order to provide further arguments for my criticism, together with some hints about a plausible formulation of the role of the MS in the praxis of classical music. In these last two sections I will make use of some literature in order to argue for my thesis; nevertheless, I think that the points stressed in those passages are valid independently from the fact that they are highlighted there, as I believe that those passages sound convincing because the points they make are plausible (and not the other way around).

Introduction: the musical score and the performative turn

As a point of departure, I take the following considerations by Lawrence Kramer:

> The musical score is iconic in classical music. Only with the score can fully composed music, musical works, be transmitted intact for realization in multiple performances. The score, one would think, is a wonderful invention. But in recent years the score has lost a good measure of the authority and prestige that once seemed to accrue to it automatically.[5]

on the one hand by the use of an *increasingly detailed notation*, and on the other by the more or less strict identification between *Werktreue* und *Texttreue*. See Lydia Goehr. *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works*. 2nd edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. P. 83, 121, 231.

4 Christopher Small. *Musicking*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1998. P. 112.

5 Lawrence Kramer. *The Thought of Music*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016. P. 173.

The situation described by Kramer does not seem to constitute a problem *per se*. The history of musical performance is replete with examples of musicians who can be legitimately regarded as great interpreters of MWs, in spite of the fact that their interpretations often do not strictly follow the corresponding MSs.

This situation, however, becomes problematic when this *loss of authority* assumes a particular form, which in my view is a *grotesque distortion* of what the MS in fact is. We can see the extended passage from Christopher Small, partially quoted below, as an eloquent formulation of this distortion:

> A score, of course, is not a musical work. It is not even the representation of it. It is a set of coded instructions that, when properly carried out, will enable performers not only to make sounds in a specific combination, called musical work, but also to repeat that combination as many times as they desire. Players and listeners learn to recognize that combination as a unity and to give it a name, which may be Symphony no. 5 in C minor or *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini* or *Scheherazade,* but the fact that this title appears on the cover of the score does not mean that the musical work resides in its pages. We find there only a set of instructions for performing.[6]

Without reducing the previous passage to a corollary of the musical performative turn, it can easily be seen how such a view is *functional* to the main claim made by Small, which indeed expresses the main claim of the performative turn (this being the aesthetic paradigm which imposed itself after and in opposition to hermeneutics) in the musical domain: namely, that the central element of musical activity is not the MW (as hermeneutically inspired music theories have argued), but rather the performance. Nevertheless, within this general claim some important distinctions can and should be made.

I propose to draw a rough distinction between a *moderate* and a *radical* performative turn in the musical domain. In the first case, the performative turn would amount to *restating the centrality of performance* in the musicological domain. Such a restatement is necessary because, as correctly stressed

6 Small. Musicking (as note 4). P. 112. As can be seen, Small in his work explicitly refers to the classical repertoire in order to illustrate his thesis about the role of the musical score as a simple performing instruction. In any case, *classical music* (see note 3 above) is often implicitly taken as a paradigmatic musical praxis also by those musical ontologies (some of which will be treated below) which have the ambition of characterizing the ontological status of MWs in general, and thus independently from the different musical contexts. See on this point: Goehr. The Imaginary Museum (as note 3). P. 83). So my arguments, whether or not they convince, cannot be invalidated as referring to a specific (and possibly exceptional) musical praxis, since examples from this same musical praxis are often used in order to demonstrate the thesis that I intend to criticize here.

by Nicholas Cook, musicology has for decades been dominated by a reductive idea of performance, according to which its function was only to be true to the work as identified by the MS:

> Traditional musicology is like literary studies: it sees meaning, of whatever kind, as embodied in musical notation, from which it follows that performance is in essence a matter of communicating that meaning from the page to the stage. The performer's work becomes a supplement to the composer's.[7]

Such a move does not entail *per se* any notion of the MS as mere performing tool. The author just quoted, in another text, differentiates very clearly between tablatures, which *are* actually performing instructions, and MSs, which *are not*:

> Right at the beginning we need to distinguish two different types of notation, or more precisely, two ways in which notations can work: by representing sounds, and by representing things that performers have to do in order to make sounds. Although musical notations often combine them, these are quite different principles. The standard Western staff notation [...] basically works by representing sounds.[8]

So we can already draw a first conclusion: there is at least one understanding of the performative turn in the musical domain which does not entail a notion of the MS purely as performing instructions. Still, not all performative turns are moderate.

I use the phrase *radical* musical performative turn to refer to a specific ontological position which not only stresses the centrality of performance, but seeks primarily to *reduce MWs to their performances*. This, in other words, means saying that an MW is *nothing more than the totality of its performances*, or, in the case of musical stage theory, that *every performance is a different MW* (work-as-performance) – even though we can and do group some of them, according to different criteria, so as to construct a new entity (work-as-construct) which corresponds to the implicit *denotatum* of our everyday notion of MWs. Caterina Moruzzi illustrates this in the following passage:

> According to Musical Stage Theory musical works *are* performances. Every performance is thus a different work, even if, as I will explain, the act of grouping performances together according to a certain relationship also plays a role in our everyday notion of musical works [...]. The only entities which populate

7 Nicholas Cook. *Beyond the Score: Music as Performance.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. P. 10.

8 Nicholas Cook. *Music – A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998. P. 56.

> the ontology of musical works are works-as-performances. The work-as-construct is a collection of information and notions we have in respect to the work which allows us to have a certain level of knowledge about it. Yet, I do not consider it as an entity which deserves the ontological characterisation as work [...]. Barring cases in which an act of composition consists in a full-fledged performance, a composition is merely a set of instructions necessary to performers in order to transform it into sounds [...]. For this reason, unperformed musical compositions, if not works-as-performance, can be considered as part of the work-as-construct. They, or more specifically the set of instructions which is the only objective element which can be accessed, provide the audience with certain knowledge about the composition and can thus be included among the totality of elements which make up the general concept of work-as-construct.[9]

It seems *prima facie* that the very idea of *reducing* MWs to performances entails the notion of the MS as performing instructions. To put it briefly (and simply): if, strictly speaking, in the musical ontological domain there are only performances, MSs can only be performing instructions. But in fact such an argument is belied by the reality in two respects: first, the notion of MS as performing instructions has also been formulated by authors (like Peter Kivy, as we will see, and Nicholas Wolterstorff) who adopt Platonist ontologies of MWs, and thus reside at the exact opposite ontological pole, we could say, to musical stage theory. Second, and even more importantly, the first formulation (at least in the domain of analytical philosophy) of a nominalist ontology of MWs, namely Nelson Goodman's *Languages of Art*, according to which MWs are reduced to the totality of their performances (so a position quite different from musical stage theory, but nevertheless reducing MWs to their performances) quietly cohabitates with a notion of the MS, on which it is not at all conceived as a mere performing tool:

> A score is commonly regarded as a mere tool, no more intrinsic to the finished work than is the sculptor's hammer or the painter's easel. For the score is dispensable after the performance; and music can be composed and learned and played "by ear", without any score and even by people who cannot read or write any notation. But to take notation as therefore nothing but a practical aid to production is to miss its fundamental theoretical role. A score, whether or not ever used as a guide for a performance, has as a primary function the authoritative identification of a work from performance to performance. Often scores and notations – and pseudo-scores and pseudo-notations – have such other more exciting functions as facilitating transposition, comprehension, or even composition; but every score, as a score, has the logically prior office of identifying a work. From this derive all the requisite theoretic properties of scores

9 Caterina Moruzzi. "An Alternative Account of the Ontology of Musical Works: Defending Musical Stage Theory". *Proceedings of the European Society of Aesthetics* 8 (2016): p. 321, 328-331, 333.

> and of the notational systems in which they are written. [...] A score, as I conceive it, is a character in a notational language, the compliants of a score are typically performances and the compliance-class is a work.[10]

It seems that we can already draw out the following three considerations and a first conclusion, which should be read as the theoretical result of this first section:

1. The notion of the MS as performing instructions is *functional* to a radical (reductionist) version of the performative turn, but is not *per se* entailed by any theory of MWs (like Nicholas Cook's) which highlights the centrality of performance.
2. In some cases, the notion of MS as performing instructions has been formulated within Platonist musical ontologies, according to which MWs exist independently from their performances (thus there can be unperformed MWs).
3. In some other cases, a notion of MWs reduced to its performances can cohabitate with a notion of MS, which does not confine it to the role of mere performing instructions.

It seems, therefore, that criticism of the notion of MS as performing instructions does not necessarily entail criticism of the performative turn *per se*, neither in its moderate nor in its radical form. This is the first conclusion to be drawn.

The musical score as performing instructions: six criticisms

In this section I develop several criticisms of the notion of the MS as performing instructions. My ambition is neither to offer an *exhaustive* list, since other criticisms may well be developed in the (even near) future, nor to provide a *definitive* criticism of this notion – since everyone of them can be possibly evaded by appeal to some argument or another. The ambition of this section is only to provide a significant list of criticisms, drawing on very basic considerations. Some of them, as I have already anticipated, will sound obvious, and this is in my view a point against the thesis I am going to criticize.

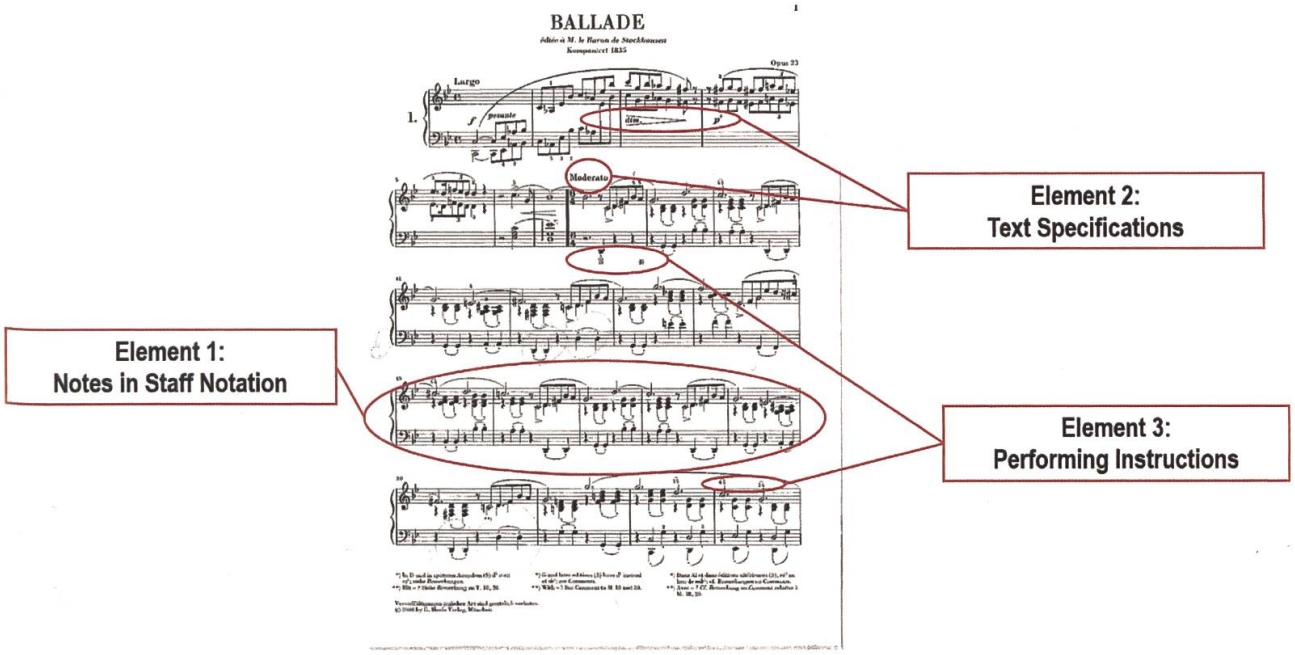
Before starting, I would like to offer some considerations about the nature of the MS. As can be seen in Figure 1, a MS is not at all a *simple object*. It is constituted of at least three different elements (some other information contained in the MS, like authorship or date of composition, will not be taken

10 Nelson Goodman. *Languages of Art*. 2nd edition. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1976. P. 127-128, 173.

into consideration, as it is not relevant for the argument to be developed here):

1. The notes in staff notation.
2. Certain *specifications* related either to single notes or to phrases, or even to the whole MS: *largo*, *pesante*, *forte*, *legato* and so on.
3. Additional *performing instructions* related to the actions to be done in order to play the notes according to those specifications: fingerings, pedal, and others.

Fig. 1



These three elements, as is evident even from a cursory glance, are not simply equivalent. That there is a sort of *hierarchy* between them can be understood by a thought experiment. We can imagine the score in *Figure 1* with only the notes in staff notation, and without any specifications or performing instructions. This would be a rather parsimonious, yet still playable MS.[11] *On the contrary, if I eliminate Element 1 of the score, Elements 2 and 3 alone would make no sense at all. Without notes, it makes no sense to talk about legato, forte,* pedal, fingerings and so on. All these are *specifications* of the notes to be played (how they should sound) and *instructions* about how to play those notes (how they should be performed). These considerations bring us to the first thesis: *the notes written in the staff notation constitute the essential part*

11 Just to take an example: the Bärenreiter Edition of *Das Wohltemperierte Klavier* by Johann Sebastian Bach has no specifications or performing instructions (it does not even have fingerings). Still and all, it can obviously be played. More on this in the following pages.

of the MS, i. e. the part without which a MS (at least in the musical praxis we are considering) cannot subsist. In my view, this thought experiment simply explicates something that is already implicit in our normal understanding of the MS, which can be formulated in a second thesis: *the essential role of a MS is to tell us by which notes a MW is constituted rather than to provide instructions to performers.* But in order to derive this second thesis from the first one, I have first to show that what is written in the staff notation are *notes* rather than *performing instructions*. The remaining part of this section (developed in six points) together with the next two sections seek to provide several arguments in order to support this second thesis.

An initial criticism about the notion of the MS as performing instructions can be developed by taking seriously some of the metaphors, which are often used in order to illustrate it. I take as examples two passages from Peter Kivy and Caterina Moruzzi:

> The score is the master instruction, so to speak, from which all the other instructions are derived. It is like a recipe for a complicated dish from which the chef extracts a recipe for roasting the meat, a recipe for sautéing the truffles, a recipe for preparing the sauce, and then assigns them to his associates.[12]
> Reading the leaflet with the instructions to assemble a table may well be essential for giving the scattered pieces the shape and functionality of a table, yet we would not sit around the leaflet to have dinner with our friends. The same holds true for musical works: a musical work is a sum of sounds performed by respecting the instructions provided by the composer, it is not the composition itself.[13]

We can of course look for and find other metaphors. But it is interesting that both these metaphors share a common feature: in both cases, one can (and normally does) differentiate between the instructions and a picture of the final product (the cake, the piece of furniture). What we understand as *instruction* is not a *picture of the product*, but rather a description (in the case of a cooking recipe) or illustration (in the case of the IKEA leaflets) of the *actions which must be undertaken in order to make it*. The question we have to pose is the following: do we have a similar duplicity of denoted objects in the MS? Can we say that there are two distinct denoted objects, the action of the performer and the final product? Yes we can, and this is exactly the difference between Element 1 and Element 3 of a MS. But if this is so, we have to conclude, in accordance with our provisional statement, that the essential element of a MS is not that one related to the instructions, but rather that related to the final product: the staff notation seems to play the same role as

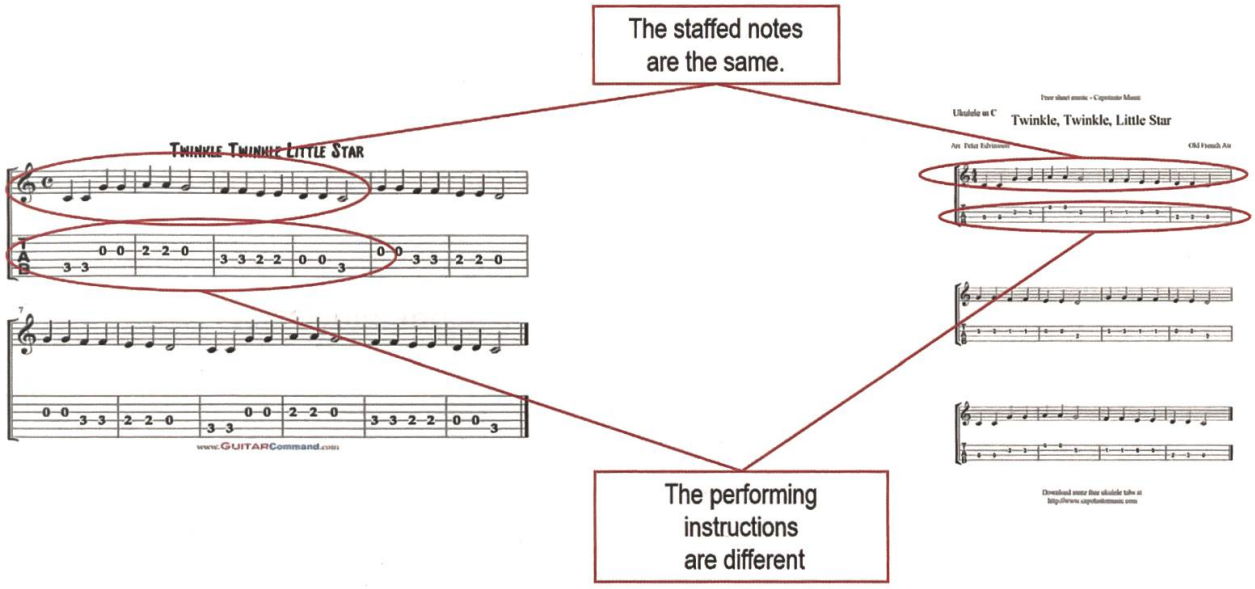
12 Peter Kivy. *Introduction to a Philosophy of Music.* Gloucestershire: Clarendon Press, 2002. P. 205.

13 Moruzzi. An Alternative Account (as note 9). P. 331.

the picture of the furniture in an IKEA leaflet, i. e. to provide an *image of the final product.*

This difference between the notes to be played and the actions to be taken in order to play them is clearly shown in *Figure 2*, which constitutes an illustration of my second criticism. Here we have the same note sequence (*Twinkle twinkle little star* in C major), which can be played with a guitar (figure left) or with a ukulele in C. As you can see, the two tablatures (which, as correctly stated by Cook in note 8 above, are indeed *performing instructions*) are totally different, while the corresponding notes in staff notation are the same. Were MSs performing instructions, the notes in staff notation should also be different.

Fig. 2



For this same reason, and this is the third criticism, it is possible to play (to take a typical example of *Hausmusik*) a Bach Fugue for four voices with a string quartet (many other examples can be found or imagined). Were MSs performing instructions, a violinist or a cellist would have to read the keyboard instructions and, so to speak, *mentally translate* it, in order to make it work for a violin. The point is the following: in order to read one of the voices of a Bach fugue for piano, a violinist does not need to have any knowledge about pianos or keyboards at all, nor how a C or an A should be played on a piano. As trivial as it can sound, in order to play a piano score (or part of it) on a violin, a violinist just has *to read the notes.* There is no *instrumental translation* to be done. Conversely, a Bach violin partita can be played on a keyboard by a person who hasn't any idea about how to produce those notes on a violin.

This last point is even more evident in the case of a MS written for no instruments (the classical example being Bach's *The Art of Fugue*). One can of course say that these are exceptions, but the point here is rather something else, and constitutes my fourth criticism: musical scores for no instruments can be composed any time, and such scores are playable and make sense. It is quite curious to notice, in fact, that the question of including or excluding the instrumentation in the identity conditions of an MW is, at least since Jerrold Levinson's article "What a Musical Work Is"[14], one of the most discussed topics in the ontology of music. Were MSs performing instructions, the question from the outset would make no sense at all. If such a question could arise and survive in the ontology of music of the last forty years, it is because, *nolens volens*, there is an implicit understanding of the MS as something which denotes not *actions* to be performed on an instrument, but rather *sounds*, or sounds-schemas (this point should be left open).

This is evident also by the fact (the fifth criticism) that different performers playing the same MS on the same instrument (or kind of instrument), often *perform very different actions*. Different pianists use different fingerings, having different hand sizes, while some pedal indications written for the *Hammerklavier* of the early 19th century cannot be followed on a modern grand piano, etc. The same violin score can be performed in different positions, and this is a choice for the performer. In all these cases, when for example (referring to *Figure 1*) we have different pianists performing Chopin's first *Ballade* using different pedals and different fingerings, yet using the same MS, we are not saying that they are playing two different MWs. We are saying that they are *playing the same MW differently*. They are performing different actions in order to realize the same product, as denoted by the notes in the staff notation.

The sixth and final criticism consists in noticing that notes in staff notation stand in harmonic, rhythmic and melodic relations. The discipline of musical analysis investigates such relations, among other things. As far as I know, I have never seen an *action* that was in C-minor, or an *action* which ought to be *cantabile*, or have some other character. Of course one can reply that "No, actually this is only a daily, pre-theoretical way of naming things. What is in C minor is not the object denoted by the MS, but rather the effect produced by the actions performed following the instructions

14 Jerrold Levinson. "What a Musical Work Is". *Journal of Philosophy* 77 (1980): p. 5-28. See also Jerrold Levinson. "Authentic Performance and Performance Means". *Music, Art and Metaphysics.* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990. P. 393-408. A peculiar position on this issue is the so-called *timbral sonicism,* as recently formulated in Julian Dodd. *Works of Music.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

there denoted". And then, possibly, an endless, very complicated discussion can start, or maybe it cannot. My simple response is that such a statement ignores the fact that a musician reading a MS does not need to imagine something else (the effect produced by the denoted actions) in order to detect many qualities of the MW. Any student taking courses on music analysis, for example, has to work out from the very first measures if an MW is, say, in C major or A minor. And he has to do that (in any case he *can do that*) by looking at the notes written in the score, not by imagining what would have been the effect of performing certain actions. Even a person who had never played a musical instrument, and had no knowledge of any of them, could detect such qualities. He could detect the Key of a MW simply by analysing the score.

The fact that we can *read* a MS is indeed not only the final criticism I develop in this section, but also the consideration which allows me to pass to the next section, in which I intend to show how several passages from literature speak for a notion of a MS as something very different from performing instructions.

Reading a musical score: three lessons from literature for ontologists of music

The first example from literature I take is the first article written by Robert Schumann (who was also one of the first music critics), published in the *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung* on December 7, 1831, and where Florestan, Eusebius, and Master Raro – imaginary characters representing different aspects of Schumann's personality – make their first appearance. This article is a review of Frederic Chopin's Variations on "Là ci darem la mano" by Mozart. The passage I am interested in is the following:

> Eusebius dropped by one evening, not long ago. He entered quietly, his pale features brightened by that enigmatic smile with which he likes to excite curiosity. Florestan and I were seated at the piano. He, as you know, is one of those rare musical persons who seem to anticipate everything that is new, of the future and extraordinary. This time, however, there was a surprise in store even for him. With the words, 'Hats off, gentlemen, a genius!' Eusebius spread out before us a piece of music. We were not allowed to see the title. I turned the pages idly; there is something magical about this secret enjoyment of music unheard. It seems to me, moreover, that every composer has *his own musical handwriting* [*seine eigentümlichen Notengestaltungen für das Auge*]. Beethoven looks different on paper from Mozart, just as Jean Paul's prose differs from Goethe's. Here, however, it was as if I were being stared at oddly by strange eyes-eyes of flowers, basilisks, peacocks, maidens. In certain places it became clearer – I thought I could discern Mozart's 'Là ci darem la mano' being woven

through a hundred chords, Leporello winking at me, and Don Giovanni hurrying by in a white cloak.[15]

The last lines of this passage describe two operations that every person who is able to read a MS can execute by simply *looking* at it (see *Figure 3*):

a. We can *recognize quotations of themes*, melodies, or even rhythmic and harmonic patterns, even if they have to be executed by two different instruments, such that totally different actions are needed in order to play them.
b. We can even recognize on paper some stylistic features of individual composers, what Schumann in the above quoted text describes as *Notengestaltungen* (more literally translated: *note configurations*). Now, one does not have to blindly trust Schumann, even if he is probably better acquainted with music than 99% of musical ontologists, including myself. People frequently have a wrong understanding of their own activities, and that is why philosophers feel entitled to tell them *what they are really doing*. But here the question is plausible independently from the authoritative voice which pronounces it. The musical style of a composer is, briefly (and simply) expressed[16], a *particular way his compositions sound*, *e. g.* a particular predilection for some harmonic sequences, for some instrumental textures, for some rhythmic patterns and so on. What you recognize in the MS is the *graphical translation of these sonic patterns on paper*, the staff notation being a sort of graphical mimesis of the relations between the sounds. Corresponding to an ascending melodic line you see in the staff notation a series of notes which form an ascending graphical line, and so on. And again, such a recognition of *note configurations* can be, even if not always[17], independent from the instrument on which they should be played. So, to take a very simple example, the so-called "Bachian scale", *i. e.* a descending melodic minor scale (so with the 7th and 6th grades raised by a semitone) is recognizable independently from the fact that it is to be performed on a bassoon or a violin. But the actions needed to perform it on those two instruments are totally different.

15 Henry Pleasants (ed.). *Schumann on Music: A Selection from the Writings.* New York: Dover Publications, 1988. P. 15.

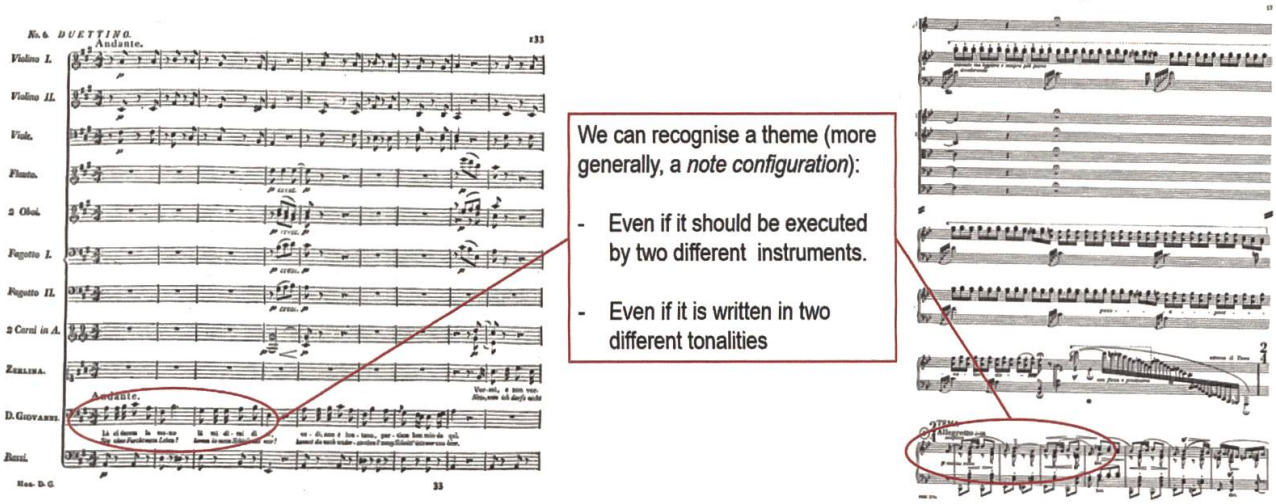
16 Here we cannot even start a preliminary analysis of the notion of style in the musical domain. As before with the notion of classical music, we will assume a vague, pre-theoretical notion of style, without risk of damaging our argument.

17 The issue is that sometimes the style reflects a *particular way of dealing with some instruments*, a particular texture for strings in the orchestra and so on. But there are also stylistic features which are independent from the instrumentation, and this is the point I want to make here.

Fig. 3

Mozart's Duet
'La ci darem la mano'

Chopin's Variations
Op. 2



Still one can argue that Schumann, in the above passage, could only make those considerations because he knew how to play the piano, so he mentally *translated the instructions into sounds*. However, as already mentioned before, one can easily detect several harmonic, melodic and rhythmic patterns in a MW without having played the musical instrument for which that MW was written, or even without having played any musical instrument at all. In order to reinforce this last point, let's give the floor to Hermann Hesse, who in *The Glass Bead Game* develops an argument which constitutes an implicit answer to such objection:

> One who knows music only from the extracts which the Glass Bead Game distills from it may well be a good Glass Bead Game player, but he is far from being a musician, and presumably he is no historian either. Music does not consist only in those purely intellectual oscillations and figurations which we have abstracted from it. All through the ages its pleasure has primarily consisted in its sensuous character, in the outpouring of breath, in the beating of time, in the colorations, frictions, and stimuli which arise from the blending of voices in the concord of instruments [...]. We make music with our hands and fingers, with our mouths and lungs, not with our brains alone, and someone who can read notes but has no command of any instrument should not join in the dialogue of music.[18]

We can see here what every musician knows: even a person who has never played an instrument can *read* a MS. Not only that: he can also *sing* melodies written for instruments he never played or never saw. This is really the

18 Hermann Hesse. *The Glass Bead Game*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1971. P. 90.

symmetric situation for that of a MS written for no instruments (see previous section). Were MSs performing instructions, such a *reading performance* would not be possible. This seems to me quite a plausible inference. That is why a pianist who never played a lute *can* read a MS of a violin partita by Bach, but *cannot* read lute tablatures (which are performing instructions for lute) of the 16th century, even if related to less complex MWs.

We can pass to the next question: What is a person reading (or singing) from a MS if it is not performing instructions? I suggest that he is reading *the notes which should be played* by the performers (or in any case the series of notes which should constitute the basis for the performer in order to perform the MW). And this answer, as trivial as it might sound, is instructive also in order to understand our third literature example, where the question is not about reading or singing a MS, but rather of *producing a MS under dictation*:

> SALIERI: Come. Let's begin. (He takes his pen.) SALIERI: Confutatis Maledictis. MOZART: We ended in F Major? SALIERI: Yes. MOZART: So now – A minor. Suddenly. (Salieri writes the key signature.) MOZART: The Fire. SALIERI: What time? MOZART: Common time. (Salieri writes this, and continues now to write as swiftly and urgently as he can, at Mozart's dictation. He is obviously highly expert at doing this and hardly hesitates. His speed, however, can never be too fast for Mozart's impatient mind.) MOZART: Start with the voices. Basses first. Second beat of the first measure – A. (singing the note) Con-fu-ta-tis. (speaking) Second measure, second beat. (singing) Ma-le-dic-tis. (speaking) G-sharp, of course. SALIERI: Yes. MOZART: Third measure, second beat starting on E. (singing) Flam-mis a-cri-bus ad-dic-tis. (speaking) And fourth measure, fourth beat – D. (singing) Ma-le-dic-tis, flam-mis a-cri-bus ad-dic-tis. (speaking) Do you have that? SALIERI: I think so. MOZART: Sing it back.[19]

This passage is one of the most touching scenes of Peter Shaffer's movie script of *Amadeus*. It can be criticized in various respects, starting from its truthfulness; and the romantic notion of Genius surely plays a very important role in the picture, which can be seen as a romantic and therefore inadequate reading of the figure of Mozart. But this is not really relevant for the discourse I am developing here (and, as a matter of fact, I find such criticisms not so relevant in other respects as well). The point is that what is here described is, again, a very *plausible* scene. It is possible to dictate to a person by singing the notes they are to write in a music notebook, and we all expect that something similar to the above scene can be done in reality, with not much difficulty.

19 Peter Shaffer. *Amadeus,* movie script based on the play by Peter Shaffer, 1984. URL: http://www.dailyscript.com/scripts/amadeus.html. I put into brackets the non-dialogue text.

In fact, what is happening there is a very sophisticated form of *melodic dictation*, which is something that most students are required to learn in order to receive a music theory diploma. A melodic dictation consists in *guessing which notes the teacher has played* (normally at a piano). To do so, one writes down in one's manuscript book the notes played, together with the tonality and the rhythm, without having to specify any instrument. *You hear the notes, and you write them down*. And this, substantially, is what is happening in the scene described above. Salieri can write the score, since he recognizes the notes Mozart is singing. He recognizes the notes, and he writes them down. As confirmation, we see that for the beginning of each musical phrase Mozart states the first note: "Start with the voices. Basses first. Second beat of the first measure – A". "A" is not an *instruction*, but a *note*; and in fact it is the note which should be sung by the Basses. But he does not say what the Basses should *do* in order to sing it (which would be something like a performing instruction for singers). He says *which note* is the first note of the first *Confutatis*: "A", and the rest of the phrase Salieri has to guess by Mozart's singing.

Experiencing a musical score: how musical scores can trigger emotions

In the last section I tried to show how MSs can be, so to say, *deciphered* independently from the performing actions necessary in order to play on specific instruments the notes *written* within them. In fact, we can read MSs, comparing them with other MSs written for other instruments, recognizing common configurations of notes, we can even read a MS for an instrument we have never played, and we can write MSs under dictation by listening to someone singing, or also by listening to someone playing some notes on an instrument we have never played.

With my fourth and last literary example, again taken from *Amadeus*, I would like to provide a further argument for my thesis (that is: MSs are not instructions for playing MWs on instruments, but are, essentially, the graphical representation of the notes constituting those MWs), by showing how MSs can not only be *read* and *understood,* but also, so to say, *experienced*. By looking and reading a MS we can have not only a cognitive, but also an emotional experience. We can be *moved* by it:

> (A pause. He puts out his hand and takes up the portfolio from the table. He opens it. He looks at the music. He is puzzled.) SALIERI: These are originals? CONSTANZE: Yes, sir. He doesn't make copies. (CUT TO INT. OLD SALIERI'S HOSPITAL ROOM – NIGHT – 1823. The old man faces the Priest.). OLD SALIERI: Astounding! It was actually beyond belief. These

> were first and only drafts of music yet they showed no corrections of any kind. Not one. Do you realize what that meant? He'd simply put down music already finished in his head. Page after page of it, as if he was just taking dictation. And music finished as no music is ever finished. Displace one note and there would be diminishment. Displace one phrase, and the structure would fall. It was clear to me. That sound I had heard in the Archbishop's palace had been no accident. Here again was the very voice of God! I was staring through the cage of those meticulous ink-strokes at an absolute, inimitable beauty.[20]

F. Murray Abraham (the actor playing Salieri), by pronouncing the last words of this excerpt, almost bursts into tears: he is evidently deeply moved by the beauty he *saw* in the MS. However, the way this scene was realized by Milos Forman seems, in the first instance, to count *against* the argument I want to make: Salieri, in the corresponding scene, in fact *imagines* the sounds while reading Mozart's scores. So again, we can assume that as an experienced musician he knows how the different instruments should have been played and in fact he translates the performing instructions in his mind. So, it seems, Salieri is not really moved by the experience of looking at a MS, but rather by the experience of imagining the sounds of the MW relating to that MS. And all this is totally compatible with the idea of MS as performing instruction.

But when we read the final lines of the quoted passage, we see that the point is much more subtle. The *absolute beauty* that Salieri recognizes in Mozart's scores has to do with the notion of *perfection*: Mozart's composition shows a structure in which every element is necessary and there is no redundancy. They are in this sense *perfectly finished*, with only the necessary notes in place.[21] The point is that such *formal qualities* are much more *visible* than *audible*. The structural perfection of a Bach fugue can be appreciated much more by looking at the score than by listening to it. And in the case of very complex orchestral scores, the quality mentioned by Salieri is almost impossible (in any case very difficult) to discern by listening. And this visual appreciation can, in a second moment, have a deep impact on our auditory experience: we recognize the formal perfection in the sounds we listen to by recalling that visual experience, and we listen therefore *with different ears*, as only by *looking* at the score we come to realize that every element of it is strictly necessary. These elements are not *actions*, but *notes* and *phrases* that, as correctly stated by Salieri, are the very elements constituting the musical text:

20 Peter Shaffer. Amadeus (as note 19).

21 Salieri, in this very passage, falsifies the famous criticism of Count Orsini-Rosenberg, reiterated by Emperor Joseph II in an important scene of the movie: "Too many notes!" Mozart's answer in that scene is an equivalent formulation of Salieri's considerations: "There are just as many notes, Majesty, as are required. Neither more nor less."

"Displace one note and there would be diminishment. Displace one phrase, and the structure would fall."

It is true that such emotions triggered by MSs cannot be compared to the emotions we can have by listening to their performances. But this does not mean that scores are therefore something *other than* music, that they are a simple practical tool. In fact, when we read a score, we do not necessarily have to imagine something (as remarked before, we can just look at it) in order to appreciate some specific formal qualities, and we may even feel strong emotions in the very exercise of such appreciation. Still, if and when we imagine something by reading a MS, we normally are not moved by the *imagined actions* (when for example a musician reads a MS and imagines how to play it); rather, we are moved by the *imagined sounds*. I would therefore like to finish this article in the same way I started it, namely with another passage from Lawrence Kramer:

> Although it is true that most listeners are not musicians, and that not all musicians read or work from scores, it is also true that for those who do "read music," as the saying goes, the score is considerably more than a mere surrogate. It "is" the music no less than an individual performance is. The music exists not only as sound but as the sonorous image in the mind's ear, and as the visual image on the page for those who know how to see the notation as a means of hearing. Scores are visual maps of acoustic possibility. The performer neither humbly "follows" the score nor proudly appropriates it. The performer *imagines* the score. What makes this different from any other act of imaginative response is its medium. The performer imagines the score in sound.[22]

22 Lawrence Kramer. The Thought of Music (as note 5). P. 176.