

TOWARD A GENUINE PHILOSOPHY OF THE PERFORMING ARTS

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We philosophers must honestly confess that there is no distinctive "philosophy of the performing arts." Still less is there a distinct philosophical literature on the performance aspects of music, theater, or dance. This is not to say that much ink has not been spilled on the aesthetic aspects of objects that happen to be, for example, musical or are performable. (Most of the examples and issues I address in this essay will for convenience be musical, but are straightforwardly translatable into the other performing arts.) What is missing is a unified theory that addresses, for example:

- (a) The ontological issues relating an art work and a performance of it,
- (b) The phenomenological or epistemological issues relating an *experience* or *conceptualization* of an art work and of a performance of the work,
- (c) The intentional, and action-theoretic issues involved in the creation of, and experience of, arts works and performances.
- (d) The normative issues relating the *value* of an art work and the *value* of a performance of it.

It is true that there has been some work on the ontological issues in the Goodman tradition. There is also a hint of the intentional and action-theoretic richness of art in the works of Nicholas Wolterstorff.¹ But for reasons that will become clear, this work does little more than scratch the surface.²

As evidence of this philosophical omission, we can cite the following examples, all rather commonplace in artistic and popular discourse about performance, but about which all philosophical theories of art I know would have little or nothing to say.

(1) The proverbial man in the street easily makes a distinction between value in an art work, and value in a performance of it: we can have polished, earnest performances of works of little merit, and we can have dreadful performances of wonderful works. The latter is an especially frequent occurrence in our house, recognized even by my 4-year-old son, when I almost daily attack the helpless keyboard works of Bach and Brahms. The normative realm is so horribly neglected in modern aesthetics, and especially for performance works, that current philosophical theory cannot even begin to make sense of these remarks. (Try, for example, applying Beardsley's criteria to a *performance* in a way that distinguishes them from being used in evaluating the *work*.)

(2) Anyone remotely interested in music of the past (especially Baroque and pre-Baroque music—now extending to Classical and Romantic music, and with parallels in theater) has certainly gotten wind of the fierce polemic and hard battlelines being drawn on the issue of authenticity in performance: “perform works the way their creators intended them to be performed” is the battle cry. But why? What do we want out of performances, today? What is it that composers *intended*, and do the proponents of this view really mean “intended”? Isn't, say, a coveted “authentic” rendering on compact disk of the keyboard music of Bach a contradiction in terms? Would a live performance on a synthesizer from precisely sampled harpsichord sounds be less authentic? Notice I here also raise questions about the phenomenology of the experience of recorded music. Again, philosophers have been of little help—since analytic aestheticians have scarcely noticed the intentional and action-theoretic elements of art works, and their structuralist counterparts across the big water (for quite different reasons) have felt ill at ease with the notions of artists' intentions and meanings (mainly, I suspect, because it would allegedly deprive interpreters of the works of some freedom).

(3) Anyone who has tried their hand at musical or theatrical performance has experienced first-hand the gulf between technical skill and accuracy on the one hand, and performance “artistry” on the other. The distinction arises in learning, first playing, rehearsing, or judging performance works. The bungling of a single pitch (say, the root in a crucial cadence) can render a performance worthless, while sometimes extensive technical flaws will scarcely flaw the performance. I'll call this the “wrong note” puzzle: wrong notes alone are neither necessary nor sufficient for rendering a performance bad, yet are frequently treated as such. When do they lower the merit of a performance, and why? The wrong note puzzle of course actually pinpoints the lack of any articulated theory of value for performances.

A sound, distinctive philosophical theory of the performing arts ought to have something to say about these and other issues in performance, and current theories' lack of an ability or willingness to deal other than casually with them (e.g., in sloganeering with

"intentions don't matter"; "aesthetic value theory is uninteresting") suggests serious inadequacies, and perhaps even faulty goals and topics.

A notable exception to the modern tendency in aesthetics to avoid normative issues altogether can be seen in John Hospers, *Understanding the Arts*. Here we see not only discussions of evaluation and criticism, but also suggestive discussions of the interrelationship between ethics and aesthetics. There is also a thoughtful discussion of artists' intentions.

A THEORY OF ART

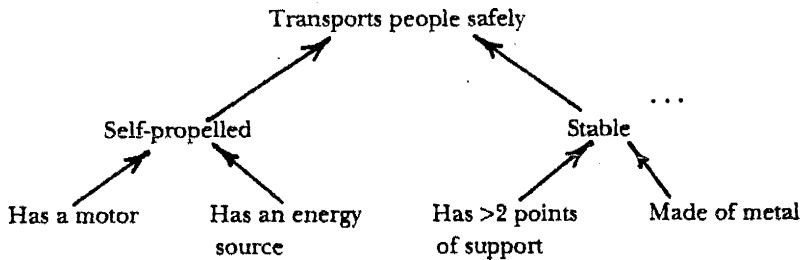
Before continuing, I should lay all of my cards on the table and say something—however dangerous this may be in exposing myself to criticism—about what I think art works really are, and how they are experienced. What is distinctive about my view is my drawing upon modern philosophy of mind and action theory.³ This maneuver sadly fits all too well into the tradition of desperately searching for good ideas to inject into aesthetics by looking elsewhere: aesthetics as metaphysics, as phenomenology, as psychology, as mathematics, as philosophy of language, as possible-worlds semantics, as semeiotics, and so on.

I distinguish sharply between art works and non-artistic aesthetic objects, and especially between our experience or conceptualization of each. A real philosophy of art would stake out a subset of the experiences of objects or events that the experiencer regards as being (causally) connected with the plans, deliberations, and ultimately intentions of another mind/agent. The experience of an object or event as art then demands an action-theoretic perspective, and the object or event, to the extent it is understood at all, is considered within the framework of the attributed "practical reasoning" of its maker. I use "practical reasoning" here in the Aristotelian sense to indicate a means-ends hierarchy of intentions endorsed by the agent. Not all artifacts are (considered as) works of art however, and thus art works must involve distinctively artistic "final ends" or some other characteristic property of the means-ends hierarchy.⁴

What I am of course already suggesting is that before we can have a distinct and satisfying theory of the performing arts, we need first a distinct and satisfying theory of art as artifact—as the product of planning, deliberation and intention of an agent. With no *act* of creation, there is no art work. With a different *act* of creation, the resultant work would have been different. From these pleasantries, we can begin crafting a philosophical theory of art that is at the same time attractive, and underdeveloped in the literature. We would need of course first a theory of the nature of actions and their individuation.⁵ An action requires an originating mind, because it requires an origin in planning, deliberation and a culminating intention. The cognitive contents of these mental activities are

intentional—and hence very sensitive to the way in which they are described. It is blatantly false, to say, for example, that Bach intended his works not to be played on the modern Steinway. He never had a concept of “a modern Steinway.” It is true, although of less worth than we might hope, to say: Bach did not intend his works to be played on the modern Steinway (since he had no thoughts whatever about “a modern Steinway”). But in this sense, he presumably also did not intend his works to be played in New York State, in the twentieth century, on a 300-year-old instrument (namely, what is now an authentic Baroque instrument), in Carnegie Hall, on the radio, and so on through other features we never worry about “violating.”⁶

The manifold properties of a complex art work or performance presumably mark numerous intentions, related hierarchically. Let us call the properties of an artifact that were planned, deliberated upon, and chosen, its *artifactual properties*. (In the case of art works, we would call them *artistic properties*, and minimally these properties must be causally traceable back to the artist’s consideration of them.) Now artifactual properties—at least of sanely created artifacts—can be arranged in a hierarchy of intentions connected by means-ends relations.⁷ That is, one artifactual property is believed by its maker to be a means for achieving another. So, for a car we might have:



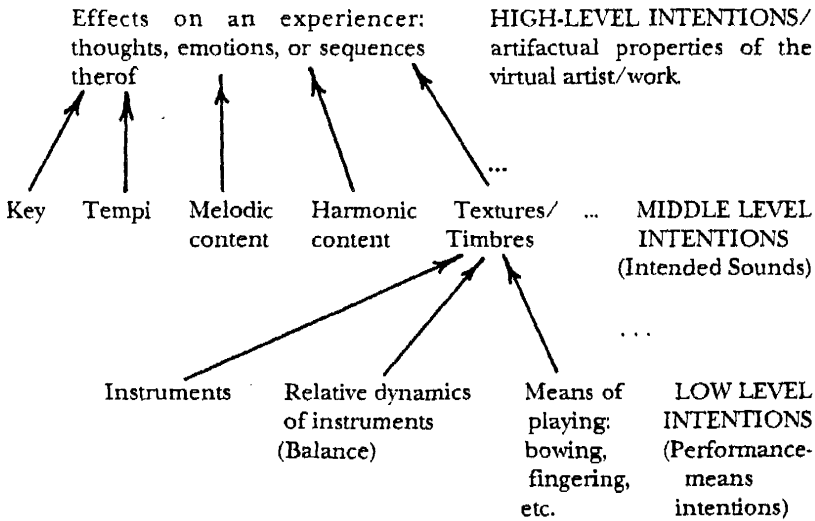
The arrows: $A \rightarrow B$ indicate that the agent believed A was a means of furthering the achievement of B . Such a display organizes the steps in planning, and ultimately creating, an artifact that we attribute to the artifact’s possibly idealized maker. Even where we, as a contemplator of an artifact, have little detailed conception of this hierarchy, we assume there is one—if the object is contemplated as an artifact at all. Our “understanding” of the artifact is complete to the extent that we recognize its actual artifactual properties as artifactual properties, and can place them in what was the maker’s hierarchy. Of particular interest is the “top-level” artifactual property, such that we do not actively contemplate it as a further means, but only as an end. We call such top-level properties—and there may be more than one—the *purpose* of the artifact.

Phenomenologically, my main thesis is that art works are species of artifacts, and that the experience or conceptualization of an object as art is therefore a species of the experience or conceptualization of an artifact. This means that understanding (or "interpreting," as artistic discourse typically has it) an art work consists in attributing certain plans, choices and intentions, arranged in a means-ends hierarchy, to a regarded creator. The language of artistic discussion, as well as the actual phenomenology of artistic experience, strongly supports such a theory, formalists be damned. By a "formalist" I here mean someone who believes we never do, or perhaps more prescriptively, never should, consider the thoughts and intentions of its creator when we experience or think about an "art" work. (For formalists, there is then typically no basic distinction between art works and other aesthetic objects.) The positive contribution of this fairly obviously overblown and underjustified formalist thesis is to place distance between the artist's actual intentions that are perhaps obtainable through sources other than thoughtful inspection of the works artistic properties, or that are now utterly unknowable, on the one hand, and legitimate possible "interpretations" of the work on the other. But one need not endorse the formalist thesis to accomplish this. We can distinguish between the actual artist's thoughts and intentions, and those that a thoughtful and sensitive interpretation of the work would attribute to such a work's maker. We could restrict this latter conception of the artist's intentions to those intentions plausibly derived by restricting ourselves to the work alone, or to this and other works known to be by the same artist, or to this work and others in the same period or style, or to the work and what can be known with certainty about the artists's intentions from non-artistic sources.

One conception of the agent "behind" an art work I have called the *historical artist*—whose known plans might be very thin, or even demean or trivialize our experience of the work; the other, I have called the "virtual" or "ideal" artist.⁸ I think once we realize that *our* goal in interpreting an art work is not just an historical interest in the artist's actual intentions, but also (or even primarily) a maximalization of possible artistic experience from this object—what it can do for *us*—then there is no need completely to tie our interpretation to the historical artist, and the wind is completely taken out of the formalist's sails, without throwing overboard all conception of the art work as artifact—that is, as the intentional product of an agent. In fact, the tension between historical facts and our virtual image of an artist explains some of the perplexity and richness in our experience of art works (e.g., the dramatist's conception of Mozart as court urchin, versus the conception of him that emerges from his later works).⁹

THE PERFORMANCE OF WORKS

Let us jump directly to the consideration of the means-ends hierarchy associated with a performance work, specifically a musical one:



Even quite a simple piece of music has its origins in a hierarchy much more detailed than the one above. Observe that I have delineated three layers of intentions: (I) High level intentions—the thoughts or emotions the composer wishes to cause in the experiencer, (II) the sounds the composer believed would cause these and with which he wished the experiencer to be presented, and (III) the instruments and means of playing them that he believed would produce these sounds. These layers are incomplete in several ways. First, a philosophically-sensitive composer might have intentions about the sound-sensations a listener was to have, that is, a layer between (I) and (II). The composer might also have intentions about the physical circumstances of experiencing the sound—hence categorizable as II—that are not strictly intentions he wished the experiencer to be presented, and (III) the instruments and means of playing them that he believed would produce these sounds. These layers are incomplete in several ways. First, a philosophically-sensitive composer might have intentions about the sound-sensations a listener was to have, that is, a layer between (I) and (II). The composer might also have intentions about the physical circumstances of experiencing the sound—hence categorizable as II—that are not strictly intentions

concerning sounds: the receptivity or education of the listener, performed in a church, performed by a "live" human being (e.g., a virtuosic work), and so on. Also, there may be means-ends hierarchies *within* some of these layers (especially in I).

A performance of a work is an action or series of actions in which it is the intention of an agent (the performer) to fulfill the intentions of another agent (the composer). Some of the performance properties of the work are thus traceable to the composer (through the intentions of the performer to fulfill the composer's intentions), and some may be traceable only to the intentions of the performer. For example, rubato in a passage may not be believed with certainty by the performer to be the composer's intention (although it cannot be the case that the performer knows the composer intended there at this place to be no rubato); the performer typically believes or assumes the rubato furthers some higher level intention of the composer—for example, that it heightens the intended emotional affect.

To experience an event as a performance of a work is to regard the event as the product of those who intend to fulfill (what we regard as) the composer's intentions. Whether they successfully do so, or whether they do so in a way that is readily recognizable as having such intentions raise different issues—how we come to regard the performers as having these intentions.

A composer in conceiving a work realizes that the means of producing sounds, the nature of the sounds, and the high-level effect will be causally mediated by another agent—the performer. He believes that this performer—who might be the composer at a later time—will intend to follow the composer's intentions. His practical task then is not to produce an event that conforms to the hierarchy, but to produce a guide to his intentions that capture the salient features of this hierarchy for a well-intentioned performer. His efforts are constrained by limits on his and the performer's time in indicating and comprehending detail, by the available notational system, by his intentions and assumptions regarding the score reader, and so on, all in his effort to leave indications that will bring the performer optimally to fulfill the above plan. In the performance arts, there are two artifacts ("artifactual events"). The primary artifact is an event that fulfills the artistic plan.¹⁰ Being an event, it is however transitory. The secondary artifact (a score or script) is the set of indications to an agent on how the primary artifact is to be produced.

Thus when we as performers, or as experiencers of a performance, see in a Bach manuscript, 'Für Clavier' Or more typically, 'A Clav'), this notation should bring us to the following thoughts:

- (1) This is an indication to performers of some element of the primary intention-hierarchy. In making this indication, Bach had certain beliefs or assumptions about the thoughts it would create in someone who sees the indication, and the actions he or she would then take.¹¹

- (2) Recognition that this is primarily a performance-means indication (a "low-level" intention), and contemplation of what precise such means Bach would have expected or intended a contemporary reader to grasp. "Clavier" happened to be, then and now, the vaguest indication of an instrument with one or more keyboard. Organ? With pedal? With what action? Harpsichord? How many manuals? With what stops and couplers? Clavichord? Early Piano-Forte? With what temperament? And so it goes.
- (3) Contemplation of why these performance means were intended. For what end, in terms of intended sounds, were the proposed performance means thought to contribute? In other words, what were the intended sounds? A "critical" question: does fulfilling the apparent performance-means intention in fact best fulfill the apparent sound intention?
- (4) Finally, contemplation of why these sounds—and ultimately, why the performance means—were proposed. For what artistic final end, in terms of an effect on a listener, were these sounds believed to contribute? In other words, what was the purpose or purposes of the work? A "critical" question: does fulfilling the apparent sound intentions in fact now best fulfill the apparent "final" intention?

With my two "critical" questions I do not necessarily mean to suggest that the composer when he conceived the work did not know what performance means best then achieved a desired sound, or what sounds best then achieved a desired effect. I rather mean to pose the dilemma of what we are to do today—*within* the framework of the slogan, "Follow the composer's intentions"—when, for example, an instrument not then existent, such as a synthesizer, could now better achieve the intended sound intention of, say, clarity of a dense contrapuntal texture, than could following the intended performance means. Observe that it is not true that Bach intended the work not to be played on a synthesizer. Our choice as performer is sometimes whether to fulfill as best we can a performance-means (low-level) intention, or a sound (middle-level) intention. We sometimes cannot optimally satisfy both. Compounding this dilemma is the fact that performance-means intentions are epistemologically more secure, whereas sound intentions, and especially, high-level intentions, are conjectural, having been inferred by a listener or performer from indications concerning low- and middle-level intentions.

More dramatically perhaps, a composer's beliefs about which sounds best produce a given effect in a listener are now sometimes false about a modern listener. The intervention of hundreds of years of musical history, new instruments, and vastly changed associations of instruments, changing tastes in techniques (vibrato, lack thereof), textures, or keys—think of the soporific, dusty effect of the sound of the organ in our secular age, or the association even the educated listener has today with the hunting horn—have altered what sounds would best produce a given effect. Admittedly, melodic, harmonic and rhythmic properties have been somewhat more stable in their

effect on listeners, at least since the Renaissance and the emergence of diatonicism. But these properties, because of the parallel evolution of a notational system that allows the score to indicate these with the lack of ambiguity Goodman glories in, are not the subject of "intentions"-wars.¹² It is rather with regard to the para-notational intentions that the battles rage—over precise performance means, such as instruments, technique, acoustical setting and forces, exact pitches, temperament, as well as concerning the "purposes" of works.

I would like to be able to say that many commentators on authenticity in performance practice have explicitly or implicitly acknowledged my hierarchical analysis of means and ends, and their relative importance. This is not generally the case. But occasionally one does see a glimmer of my view. Consider, for example, this description of the attitudes of the Stuttgart Bach-interpreter Hellmuth Rilling:

He does not believe in the "authentic performance" movement—or rather, he has his own competing concept. "There is authenticity of the spirit, authenticity of experience," he says. "It comes from confrontation with the content of the music and the texts. Of course we think about musical questions, about the phrasing and the correct way to interpret the notation." But if these questions are central, he suggests, the center is actually missed: "It is not the particular concept of sound that is important, but rather the strength of the message that comes through the sound."¹³

One pernicious tendency in the musicological performance-practice literature is a blurring of the exact propositional attitude a composer had to a property of a work or performance. Bach may well have *expected* his works to be performed by mediocre, male, Saxon string players, wearing wigs and playing instruments made from trees felled before 1750. He may also have expected that his works would never be performed in the New World. Yet it would be perverse to insist upon following as many as possible of these expectations—unless we are more interested in performing what Bach actually heard, as opposed to what he wanted to hear. What is missing is that insofar as the "following of intentions" is an element of performance, we should fulfill most seriously *intentions*—matters of deliberation and choice.¹⁴ Such a blase confusion of expectation (or some other "weak" attitude) with intention will of course reduce the playing of the best works in a period to the pedestrian, but documented, then-common standard of performance, as opposed to what the composer actually desired, or to what a sensitive modern performer, contemplating other aspects of the work, might find the best way to achieve the work's apparent high and middle-level intentions. This seems to be Lukus Foss' point, when he says:

To play Bach *a la* Baroque means to play him like all the Baroque

mediocre music. A genius doesn't fit into Baroque practice; genius falls out of it."¹⁵

The problem is again an epistemological one: it is easier to document what the "standard practice" in a period was, than to document what a composer desired, but had no reason to expect he would achieve in his time.

THE NORMATIVE ASPECTS OF PERFORMANCE

The criteria by which the merit of an art work are correctly judged (as *art work*) presumably resemble the criteria for judging any artifact. The merit of an art work is presumably a function of (1) how effectively the intended means do in fact contribute to the intended means (purpose) of the work, and (2) how worthwhile that purpose is. This of course reminds one of Goethe's formula for evaluation: (a) What was the artist trying to do? (b) Did he do it? (c) Was it worth doing?¹⁶

One might condescendingly say that Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique* is good, *for that sort of thing* (praise of 1, condemnation of 2). Or one might say that the Schumann's *Rhenish Symphony* is nobly conceived, even though its execution was bungled—e.g. in the development section of the first movement (praise of 2, condemnation of 1). One might also criticize a work for not having any clear purpose—but this seems implicitly to suppose that every artist intends to project a recognizable purpose, and that therefore the artist's means have failed to achieve this (failure of 1).

The criteria by which the merit of a performance are judged are presumably a consequence of our conception of the actions of the performers. Our conception of these actions is what we regard the performer as "intending" to do. To regard the work as a performance of, say, Bach's *Italian Concerto* at all, we must regard the performer as intending to comply with what we regard as the means-ends hierarchy for the work. For the non-professional musician, the conception of what this is might be very sketchy, and consequently, the criterion for what it is to perform the work is rather lax. For someone with a fuller understanding of the work, the standards are necessarily higher. There may even be an agreed-upon criteria for performance that cannot always be applied by an individual listener: what a "reasonable" person who knows the score would say. Observe that performance mistakes, even serious ones, will not render an event a non-performance, unless they bring the listener to regard the performer as not intending to follow what the listener believes constituted the composer's intentions. I use "regard" as a blanket attitude-term to cover: imagine, assumes, believes, believes strongly, and so on.

A more interesting case is posed by a situation in which a listener regards a performer as not intending to follow what the listener regards

as a composer's intention (even if the performance *largely* complies with the listener's conception). Does this render the event a non-performance? This is not an easy question, but whether it is indeed rendered a non-performance is a function of several factors:

- a) Whether the performer's action is believed to be willful (intending not to follow the composer's intention),
- b) The "stability" of this intention within the listener's conception of the total hierarchy, and
- c) The extent to which the intention is a means that is regarded as contributing to the achievement of other stable—especially high-level—intentions.

The worst such case is one in which the listener regards the performer as willfully intending to "perform" the work in a way that conflicts with the listener's conception of the work, that the violated intention is extremely stable or secure within this conception—meaning not subject to easy revision¹⁷—and that violating this intention would greatly hinder the achievement of what the listener regards as a stable, important intended effect of the work. I, for example, react with horror at Leonard Bernstein's suggestion (in *The Joy of Listening*) that the *St. Matthew Passion* is best seen as a "dramatic" work, and should be staged quasi-operatically. Bernstein is willfully going against what he must know are Bach's sacred intentions for the work, my own conception of this work includes essential Lutheran, pietistic elements, and insofar as we know the work's precise purpose, it is broadly religious.

Since however we so rarely denounce a purported performance of a work as in fact a non-performance—except in a moment of rhetorical excess, to convey a strongly negative value judgment—we should perhaps move on toward the more substantial issue of value in performance.¹⁸ Whether a performance is a "good" one is presumably a function of its success as an "intentional gesture": how well the performer succeeds at what we regard him or her as intending (or better: at what performers should intend). What then is it—other than following what *we* regard as the composer's intentions—that we regard a performer as intending?

As I have already suggested, the main goal of performance is the optimal fulfillment of the means-ends hierarchy attributed to the composer. But this is often fraught with difficulty. The composer may have had mistaken beliefs about how (then) best to achieve an end. The composer's proposed means may not now be the best way to achieve an intended end. There may be "dangling" intentions: apparent intentions that are neither plausible final ends nor means to any end that we can figure out. Finally, we might be unsure what *are* the most plausible and worthwhile low, middle, or high-level intentions to attribute to the composer.

This last difficulty, hierarchy incompleteness, can have two sources. (a) If we feel beholden to explicit indications by, and biographical information about the composer, a "slot" in the hierarchy about which the composer surely had some conception may be underdetermined by available evidence. (b) If the completion of our interpretation of the work is based upon a plausible "internal" reconstruction from more stable elements of the hierarchy (e.g., unequivocally notated properties), it may well be that there are plausible alternative reconstructions of an intention in a slot in the hierarchy. This incompleteness particularly infects high-level intentions, since little or no concrete evidence of the exact content of the work's purposes may exist (or have ever existed), outside of indicated lower-level intentions. Indeed, the purpose may be best or only representable to mortal man in strictly musical terms. As I have also noted, the attribution of higher-level intentions is typically inferential, being based upon plausible explanations of why the composer left us the lower- and middle-level indications he did. This inferential process is probabilistic or abductive, and laden with a high degree of incertitude.

My guess is that it is in part the task of the performers to complete this hierarchy as best they can, and to "project" it in performance—i.e. make it recognizable to a listener. This will mean "filling in" a plausible interpretation of the work. To the extent a performer does have such a fuller conception (even when not verbally communicable), the performer has an interpretation of the work, performs the work musically and sensitively, and is him—or herself also an "artist." Incidentally, one of the oddities of the narrowest form of the "follow the intentions" school of performance practice is that there seems no place for performance *artistry*: there are composers, there are musicologists, and then there are those who do what they're told, the "performers."

Our assessment of the merit of a performance will then be a function of at least four dimensions:

1. The extent to which the composer's regarded hierarchy is in fact fulfilled (as opposed merely to regarding the performer as *intending* to do so).
2. The extent of the recognizable completion of the means-ends hierarchy beyond the bare skeleton already shared by virtual composer, virtual performer, and listener.
3. The coherence of the completing elements of the hierarchy: the effective contribution of each apparent means that the performer has added to each apparent end, and
4. The intrinsic merit of the proposed final end(s)—that is, is it the most satisfying, worth experiencing or contemplating, plausible such purpose of the work?

Wrong notes are presumably a sin against (1). A "flat" performance, or one that just "follows the score" is a sin against (2), the artistic

mandate of the performer. Heavily ornamenting an austere work, deliberately not ornamenting a Rococo one, extreme rubato in a straightforward, classically-drawn work, deliberately avoiding rubato in a tender one, and so on, are presumably sins against (3)—and perhaps (1) as well. Staging Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* as a raucous, entertaining *Singspiel* is a violation of (4)—and probably more incidentally violates (1) and (3).

APPLYING THE PHILOSOPHICAL THEORY TO PERFORMANCES

Of the three commonly-discussed performance issues mentioned at the outset of this essay, we are in possession of the theoretical equipment to answer, or at least discuss, two of the three. The criteria of merit in the *work* are clearly independent of the criteria of merit in *performance*.¹⁹ Wrong notes detract from the merit of a performance to the extent that they reduce (1), the fulfillment of the composer's regarded hierarchy. But they can do this in two senses: they by definition fail to achieve an intended *sound* (a middle-level intention), but they may also significantly hinder the achievement of a high-level intention, such as a mistake in a resolution intended to be emotionally "wrenching." The error is "serious" only if it does the latter. A wrong note may also mar the recognizability of the performer's proposed completion of the hierarchy (2).

It is the issue of authenticity to which I want to return, however. First, we must review some observations. The stable, typically notated, elements of a means-ends hierarchy are largely low- and middle-level intentions, with at best some constraints on plausible high-level intentions. Yet these indicated intentions were contemplated by a composer only as *means* to middle- or high-level intentions; they are, to this extent, from the composer's own view "less important." But we come to attribute these higher-level ends to a composer primarily on the basis of these indicated means (Bach's largest composition of 1736 *could* have been—a bit out of character, perhaps, knowing Bach and as we do—an opera buffa. But the title *Passio secundum Matthaeum*, the scriptural paraphrases, and the nature of the proposed sounds all belie this.)

Furthermore, fulfilling a performance-means intention may no longer be the best way to fulfill—or may even hinder the fulfillment of—a plausible intended effect. That is, there may now no longer be a single clear way of optimally fulfilling the hierarchy (Factor 1 in the goals of performance). The lower-level intentions or expectations may have epistemological (or other) priority, while the conjectured higher-level intention has a natural hierarchical priority in view of its being the composer's end or goal, not merely a tool for reaching it.

Lurking in the vicinity of really serious performance issues, such as, say, whether to play Bach's non-organ keyboard works on a period harpsichord or on a piano, are fascinating and complex artistic, and ultimately philosophical, questions. The issues are not merely ones of fashion and taste, as our chattering performers and conductors would sometime have it.

Insofar as Bach had *expectations* concerning the *sounds* of these works, they were probably of harpsichord sounds. Yet even if it were a full-blown conscious intention for harpsichord sounds, the proper description of the content of this intention is relative to his then-available choices.³⁰ The content of this intention is carefully described as something like: not for a sound like that produced by an eighteenth century German clavichord, organ, or forte-piano, and "something like" that produced by a harpsichord. But in what respect *not* like an organ, and in what respect *like* a harpsichord? In having a rapid decay and highlighted attack (unlike the organ), in being loud enough to be heard in a small hall (unlike the clavichord), in sounding non-exotic (unlike the forte-piano of the day)? Bach certainly did not intend or expect the instrument to sound quaint, or "scholarly," or "as not the kind of sound with which popular songs of the day are accompanied"—all of which the harpsichord unavoidably does now. He surely wished or expected its sound to be familiar, unpretentious, and accessible (perhaps, as accessible and familiar as possible).

More importantly, we must ask what it is that Bach might have wished us to be able readily to *hear* in his works, and for which the harpsichord was then the best means. The harmonies? Lines of counterpoint? Cross relations? Dynamic contrasts between voices or sections (one function of couplers or the buff stop)? Timbre contrasts (another function of couplers or stops)? And still more importantly, what was to be the intended effect of these sounds, or the range of plausible, worthwhile intended effects: a vehicle for displaying the virtuosity of the performer, some intellectual-emotional affect, an awe of occasional earthly beauty, awe of human creativity, or of the work of God's creatures? We need to pose these questions for two reasons. First, if we blindly follow the performance-means indication, but do not wonder what sounds or effect this was believed to be a means for achieving, then we may fulfill only the lower-level intention. We might perform the work without switching manuals or registration, when this may have been the very reason Bach indicated the harpsichord. Second, and more controversially, we need to understand our permissible "degrees of freedom" if we are contemplating performance in an un-intended/expected way in order now better to fulfill a plausible purpose of the work.

If the purpose of a work was primarily to serve as a vehicle for the display of virtuosity, then the choice is clear. Let the work be played on the now more difficult instrument, at a grueling tempo.

But there are other dimensions to the dilemma. The standards of harpsichord playing will never be what they once were (in part because of the break in the tradition that occurred in the nineteenth century). The standards of piano-playing, and the number of sensitive performers *and listeners* is so much higher that one must have the suspicion that to demand that Bach be played on the harpsichord is to leave the interpretation of his work to other than the best performers and listeners. Baroque ears and minds, more than Baroque instruments and techniques, are gone forever. Insofar as we can guess what Bach would have expected or intended about the quality of the performers and listeners, no composer would be happy with the noble grimaces of well-intentioned performers and listeners, when he had a choice of the best performers of the day. Add to this the effects on a listener that a harpsichord unavoidably today has (quaintness, scholarliness, a performer's statement of his position on performance practice, etc.) but that Bach did not expect or want, and the inadequacy of the harpsichord in achieving some of important effects Bach probably wished (dynamic and phrasing subtlety, hinted at by the Bach family prejudice for private performance on the clavichord) when compared with instruments available today, such as piano or velocity-sensitive synthesizer—and one has a strong *prima facie* case against performance on the harpsichord, even within a framework dominated by “following Bach's intentions (expectations).” My argument for this claim relies on the assumption that one can intelligently treat these intentions only within an attributed means-ends hierarchy: a schema of the artist's practical reasoning.

But then again, the plausible purposes of a sublime work are so difficult clearly to describe or anticipate, that it is possible that the most worthwhile purpose we could ascribe to the work might best merge only in a performance that preserves the harpsichord-sound intention. This point has merit to the extent that our (or a performer's) attribution of a purpose is “unstable.” If we have a stable conception of “the” purpose of the work, such that the harpsichord hinders or does not especially further this purpose, then compliance with the harpsichord intention is not required in order optimally to fulfill the means-ends hierarchy. I myself doubt, however, whether attributed purposes are so clear and stable—or should be so stable—that they could completely loosen the grip of following the intended sounds. In a search for plausible, worthwhile artistic purposes to attribute to a composer in a work, following the indicated sounds or performance means provides the first and often, most valuable, available resource. This is hardly to counsel that all or most performances should do so, as the more missionary-spirited of the antiquarians would have it.

Observe that I have given a limited defense only of occasionally following expected para-notational sounds, and not of following intended or expected *performance means* (as contrasted with intended sounds). Unless a work's purpose is virtuosic—i.e., to be difficult to

play—or unless there is a technique (fingering, perhaps) that is required to play an instrument and when using this technique somehow independently furthers higher-level intentions in the hierarchy, then there is no additional need to fulfill the performance-means intention. In other words, if our conception of the intended *sound* is stable, and we know that the performance-means intention was nothing but a means for achieving this intended sound, then surely there is no reason for a performer to fulfill the performance-means intention, when there is any reason (convenience, expense) not to fulfill it. This *IS* to follow the composer's practical thinking—including what would be his sensible intentions about performance convenience.

A FINAL EXAMPLE OF THE AUTHENTICITY PROBLEM

Consider this performance problem: should an American church performance of a Bach cantata or chorale be in the original German, or in English—if we wish optimally to fulfill the composer's intentions? The problem was an actual one for me, a philosophical American-Lutheran church musician. I happened to have no practical problems. Every member of the choir as well as the organist had studied, and sung, German; two were native speakers, one had been a German major. (We could of course be still fussier than almost any American performance is: should eighteenth century grammar and pronunciation be preserved, that is "corrected" even in the *Bach Gesellschaft* edition: 'funden' instead of 'fanden', 'kömmt' instead of 'kommt', etc. We could also worry about capturing the strong Saxon, or even Leipzig, accent that Bach would have heard.)

The primary tension is this. On the one hand we have clear indications of a middle-level intention for the sound of spoken German. These intended sounds are woven together with musical ingredients to achieve some religious-emotional-intellectual effect. There are semantic implications and effect (e.g., tone painting, or the unmistakable reverence for "Luther-German") that are lost in a language other than German. We can of course *tell* listeners that the language is intended to sound like Luther's Biblical German, but Bach intended or expected a listener to hear it directly and without scholarly advice.

On the other hand, Bach was a self-conscious post-Reformation church musician. An *important* element of Luther's liturgical goals, and a heritage of the Reformation, very active still in Bach's day, was that all substantive religious texts *be in the native language of the audience*. There is a great deal of evidence that Bach was aware of, or even endorsed, this principle: his use of Latin is restricted to titles (intended for the musicians, not the congregation) and to texts setting parts of the Ordinary (the masses and fragments of them), or other well-known texts (the *Magnificat*). Bach was something of a collector of Latin church music; and he taught Latin in the Thomasschule.

Remember too that his choice of setting German over Latin texts was made in a context where Latin was probably better understood by educated and attentive members of the congregation than German is today even by our best-educated American musicologists.

We have here the most dramatic possible case of an instance where a middle-level intention (for spoken German sounds) does not now, in the US, further a high-level intention: the immediate integration of the text into one's native speech. The religious importance of endorsing the Reformation tradition, and perhaps more importantly, of making religious texts and ideas part of one's *everyday* life is hopelessly blocked by singing in German. German would become in America the new Church Latin. One's only regrets, then, about using an English translation would be twofold: (a) how much using English interferes with intended effects that require integrated musical and linguistic elements (e.g., syllabization), and (b) how seriously one sees "direct speaking of the text to the listener" as a main, plausible goal of Bach, and a "worthwhile" one for us now to fulfill. Given a certain sacred context, I suspect (b) approaches being a mandate, and (a) raises only negligible problems. Consequently, "fulfilling Bach's intentions" may require performance in English!

CONCLUSION

I cannot claim to have solved all of the philosophical and methodological issues involved in performance. The authenticity-controversy in particular raises substantive issues about the proper contribution of historical facts to our conception of an art work, as well as about the exact nature and reliability of the historical data, that I could not hope to address in a single essay. There are also interesting, closely-related issues that I have not discussed—such as colorization in the "presentations" of films, or the phenomenology of the experience of recorded performances. What I have sought to do is to show the fruitfulness—or even necessity—of injecting a serious element of action theory and the theory of practical reasoning into the development of a philosophical theory of the performing arts.

This paper is an outgrowth of my polemical "The Composer's Intentions: An Examination of their Relevance for Performance," *Musical Quarterly* April, 1980. The views are from a larger manuscript, *A Philosophy of Art: Art as Artifact*. Discussions of intention, planning, action theory and practical reasoning that I alluded to are being modeled in computers, and this research is supported by grants from the National Science Foundation and the SUNY Buffalo Graduate Research Initiative.

1. Especially in his *Works and Worlds of Art* (Oxford: 1982).
2. The broadly "symbolic" tradition that deals with the syntax, referents, meanings...of art works, from the works of S. Langer through that of Goodman and his followers,

to Jackendoff and Lehrdahl, and assorted semioticians, is of course very extensive. My difficulty with, say, analysis in the Goodman vein is that it begins with an idealized and artificial conception of a symbol, whereas I think that an individual's judgment of whether an entity is a symbol, what notational system it is probably "in", up through what the symbols refers to or means, is properly analyzed only within the framework of (what we believe are another persons's) intentions to communicate, to form in others thoughts and actions, and so on—in other words, philosophy of language is properly a branch of action/artifact theory—as hinted in the works of H. P. Grice and the speech-act theorists.

3. See my "Art, Artifacts, and Regarded Intentions," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 23 (1986): 401-408. In action theory, I am thinking especially of recent work by G. Harman, M. Bratman, H. N. Castaneda, and M. Brand.

4. In "Art, Artifacts, and Regarded Intentions," *op. cit.*, I attempt a characterization of the distinctive artistic final ends. The details are not here important. Observe that I speak of performances as "artifacts." This is a little odd, since they are typically series of actions or gestures. But because they are not single actions, and exhibit some of the layers of planning and intentions we see in artifacts, I prefer to treat them as "artifactual events" (as opposed to the more usual artifactual "objects").

5. Theories of action and events, and their individuation are slowly coming available through the works of D. Davidson and those mentioned in note 3. There is still very little discussion of artifacts that is here useful.

6. We could hold that a performance of a work is one that fulfills as many of the artist's intentions and expectations are now possible. This is a view suggested to me by J. Levinson in conversation. This view seems to me, however, to attach too much importance to mere expectations, and to fail to appreciate the relative importance of various intentions/expectations within the composer's plan.

7. Actually, the ordering is induced on intentions by the beliefs about the utility of the means-intention for achieving the ends-intention that we attribute to the artifact's maker (not their *actual* utility, or *our* beliefs about their utility).

8. See "Art, Artifacts, and Regarded Intentions" and several recent works by Alexander Nehemas.

9. The extent to which believed historical data does or should contribute to our conception of the hierarchy is extremely problematic. In "The Composer's Intention..." *op. cit.*, I rejected the view that historical data should serve as anything more than a source of possibly worthwhile intention-attributions. In "Art, Artifacts, and Regarded Intentions," *op. cit.*, I more temperately argue that an historical datum, in some people and insofar as they are aware of it, constrains the imaginable or plausible intentions they can attribute to an artifact. The implication is roughly that for the highly imaginative—one is tempted to say, "creative" or even "artistic"—interpreter, not even what is *known* for certain about the artist's intentions constrains what intentions he attributes to the (virtual) artist. For others, (only) ignorance is bliss—in giving them license to attribute satisfying intentions.

10. Metaphysically, these are actually artifact- and event-types respectively.

11. The appreciation of this or any indication in a notational system presumably follows an analysis like that proposed by H. P. Grice—i.e., inferences to intentions via "implicatures." It is not the simple "application" of a reference/meaning "system."

12. In a sense that Goodman makes a technical observation about the semantics of our musical notational system—namely its ability to indicate pitch-relations and rhythm univocally—certain features of the pitch/rhythm skeleton have become the "core" or essential properties in our traditional/Western conception of a work. An interesting question, of philosophically marginal interest perhaps, is whether the notational system grew in response to a need to notate these features that were already deemed "important," or whether they become important because the notational system enshrined them as at least univocally communicable. In my vocabulary, features of the pitch-rhythm skeleton are among the most "stable" in our conception of the work.

When compliance with this core is largely present in an event, we on this basis abductively come to attribute an intention to perform the work to the performers. (But see note 16.)

13. *New York Times* (April 12, 1987) II p. 18.

14. An expectation that is not an intention should *prima facie* be followed principally when we have reason to believe that the composer assumed fulfilling it contributed to a feature he did intend (i.e., deliberate about and choose). Otherwise, fulfilling the expectation is supererogatory.

15. *New York Times* Jan 3, 1988, p 32 H.

16. See John Hospers, *Understanding the Arts*, (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1982), p. 86.

17. The "stable" points in a hierarchy are analogous to similarly stable sentences in a conceptual scheme or in a scientific theory. Why they are stable is similarly complex: historical-psychological plausibility, a reinforced social conception of the work, strong evidential support, worthwhileness for us in so considering the work, and so on.

18. Usually, no single intention is so stable or essential a component of our conception of the work, and we rarely have solid evidence for our beliefs about what precisely a performer intends (vs. what a performer *says* he or she intends). Even my assessment of Bernstein's opinion requires taking his words at face value, as understanding an operatic-dramatic staging as necessarily precluding an introspective-religious one, and of reading "operatic" to mean "frivolous"—a reading weakly supported by gossip about Bernstein's personality, perhaps. In other words, it might be difficult for a performer to be able to convince us that his performance really does conflict with our interpretation of the work, when it seems largely to agree with our own interpretation (in, say, its middle-level relative-pitch and rhythm skeleton).

19. The model also provides for an assessment of merit in the listener's role: how extensively, and how plausibly, the listener attributes a means-ends hierarchy to the composer and to the performer on the basis of experienced physical properties.

20. This remark assumes a non-standard view about the description of the content of an intention (or belief). I assume that having an intention (i.e., intending) is an "historical" notion, requiring certain earlier processes to have taken place— notably, some planning, deliberation, and choice. These are three separate processes that themselves require an ability to contemplate a "thought-object" and to manipulate them in certain ways. I also assume that the proper description of what this choice was—i.e., of the content of the intention—is relative to these earlier processes: what was considered, as well as the collateral cognitive attitudes (e.g., means-ends beliefs) the agent applied in planning, deliberating, and choosing. The proper description of Bach's intention that a performance of a cantata be in German is relative to such factors as whether he was forced to so perform them by the pastor or city council as a condition of his job, or whether he himself took seriously Reformation-era mandates. The description is also relative to the range of options contemplated (did he ever think of going "all the way" with regard to the Christian-historical tradition and performing the works in Greek or Aramaic?).