

Musical, linguistic, and other practices: minor variations on several major themes

Práticas musicais, linguísticas e outras: variações menores sobre diversos temas maiores

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Abstract: One major theme of this paper is a pragmatist approach to human practices, another is the way specific practices provide invaluable resources for framing such an approach, and yet another is the way musical practices are especially illuminating in this regard. The emphasis of such an approach to practices falls decisively on performance, rather than an antecedently established score, script, or interpretation. In other words, human practices are from the pragmatist perspective variable contexts in which improvisational or extemporaneous performances are the rule rather than the exception. They are moreover incalculable resources upon which improvisational actors can draw, including the resource of exemplary or paradigmatic performances. In one of the dominant traditions of Western music, however, the *Werktreuer* would seem to offer a stumbling block to such a pragmatist approach to musical practices. Part of the argument here is to follow the lead of such theorists as Richard Taruskin, Lydia Goehr, and Christopher Small. This means interpreting, say, the musical score as a codified distillation of an ideal performance, but in turn this means conceiving the score as a resource for a performance (not the performance as simply an imperfect approximation of a timeless form). The temporal and historical dimensions of what Small calls musicking need to be given their due. This drives us to appreciate how every aspect of any human practice is an irreducibly temporal and historical feature of what is, after all, always evolved and evolving affair. This includes even seemingly timeless or atemporal matters such as musical scores.

Keywords: Art. Language. Literature. Modernity. Music and musicking. Performance and text. Practice. Pragmatism.

Resumo: *O principal tema deste artigo é uma abordagem pragmatista para as práticas humanas. Outro é o modo como práticas específicas fornecem recursos inestimáveis para estruturar tal abordagem e, ainda, outro é o modo como as práticas musicais são especialmente luminosas a esse respeito. A ênfase de tal abordagem às práticas incide decisivamente na performance, em vez de uma partitura, roteiro ou interpretação. Em outras palavras, as práticas humanas são, a partir da perspectiva pragmatista, contextos variáveis nas quais as performances improvisadas ou extemporâneas são a regra em vez da exceção. Além disso, elas são recursos incalculáveis*

sobre as quais atores de improviso podem elaborar, inclusive o recurso de performances exemplares ou paradigmáticas. Entretanto, em uma das tradições dominantes da música ocidental, o *Werktreuer* pareceria oferecer um obstáculo para tal abordagem pragmatista às práticas musicais. Parte do argumento aqui é seguir a conduta de teóricos como Richard Taruskin, Lydia Goehr e Christopher Small. Isto significa, digo, interpretar a partitura musical como uma destilação codificada de uma performance ideal. Mas, em vez disso, isto significa conceber a partitura como um recurso para uma performance (não a performance como simplesmente uma aproximação imperfeita de uma forma intemporal). As dimensões temporal e histórica daquilo que Small chama de *musicking* precisam ser dadas devidamente. Isso nos leva a apreciar como cada aspecto de qualquer prática humana é uma característica temporal e histórica irredutível do que é, afinal, sempre um assunto evoluído e evolutivo. Isso inclui, aparentemente, questões intemporais ou atemporais tais como as partituras musicais.

Palavras-chave: Arte. Linguagem. Literatura. Modernidade. Música e *musicking*. Performance e texto. Prática. Pragmatismo.

Introduction

Partly as a response to Roger Scruton and other analytic philosophers of music, I initially imagined writing a paper on *musical* understanding.¹ My inaugural hope was to cast into bold relief the defining features of musical understanding by contrasting them with *linguistic* understanding. But Ivo Assad Ibri expressed deep misgivings about my choice of this topic, not least of all my terms of identification, insisting that the word *understanding* misleads us from the outset. It would be as though I were setting out heading in the opposite direction of my desired destination, condemning myself by each step to move farther away from my goal. While I am disposed to disagree with Prof. Ibri on this point, his opposition gave me pause. Whenever competent persons disagree, doubt is—or ought to be—present.² And he brings to the topic of music far more passion, experience, and indeed *understanding* than I do, so I became paralyzed by doubt.

This state however provided an especially opportune occasion for an initially rejected suitor to claim my authorial affection. So, on this occasion, I have turned from musical understanding to musical *practice*. As it turns out, however, I *will* have a word or two to say about musical understanding in conjunction with what I will call practical understanding, but this will be hardly more than an aside. For a pragmatist such as myself, understanding takes shape in the context of practice. Moreover, our shared practices are in turn reshaped by the evolving understanding taking shape in these historical matrices. Finally, these shared practices are, as a consequence of the points just noted, hardly blind affairs: they are patchworks of (to borrow an expression from Paul de Man) blindness and insight.

- 1 I conceived and wrote this paper for the 2015 international congress held in São Paulo and sponsored by the Centro de Estudos de Pragmatismo. That is, I wrote it on the invitation of Prof. Ibri.
- 2 “What competent men disagree about is not,” as C. S. Peirce notes, “certain.” (W 2:187, 1868).

Hence, much is to be learned about understanding by focusing on practices, just as much is to be learned about human practices generally by focusing specifically on musical practices (and musical practices are in their own right, quite apart from the light they throw on other endeavors, worthy of careful attention!). In the end, however, and indeed at various points along this circuitous path, musical practices invite comparison with various other shared practices, not least of all our linguistic practices and the implicit, inchoate community constituted by those who share an effective means of symbolic communication (in a word, those who share a *language*). So I will accept this invitation and underscore some of the ways our linguistic practices provide a paradigm for understanding other ones, including musical practices.³

1 Musical and other practices

Even so, the specific topic of *musical* practices, in all of their historical variability, *is* in the foreground of this paper. Indeed, the historical variability of our musical practices is connected to my main concerns.⁴ The far more general topic of human practices, in their irreducible heterogeneity, is, however, in the background, but just slightly to. Indeed, I will in the course of our inquiry sketch, in broad, quick strokes, an outline of a theory of practice, a theory derived in no small measure from an investigation of what might appear to be a very narrow range of practices⁵ (those concerning with what one theorist calls *musicking*).⁶ But my interest in music is here far from being merely illustrative or propaedeutic. To repeat, music is, *in itself*, not only inherently fascinating. Music is also deeply illuminating about human striving, struggle, forbearance, frustration, and defeat, but no less about triumph, exaltation, exhilaration, breakthrough, and transcendence (cf. LANGER, 1953, also 1957). In terms of C. S. Peirce's categories, then, music *in its firstness* is in the foreground of our consideration, while music in its secondness and thirdness are slightly in the background. As it turns out, however, all three categories are crucial for understanding music in its firstness. It may even be the case that the firstness of both secondness and thirdness is nowhere more fully exhibited than in the *quali-*, *sin-*, and *legisigns* of a musical performance (see CUMMING, 2001). We need to be critically aware of the relevant qualities, oppositions, and mediations (transitions, connections, isomorphisms, and much else falls under mediation here). Indeed, brute opposition and unfolding intelligibility are as integral to music as is qualitative

3 While the paradigm of language provides a resource for understanding music, it is both limited and dangerous (dangerous in part because it is limiting, in part because it disposes us to overlook much of what is distinctive about music).

4 Cultural variability no less than historical variability is, of course, noteworthy here.

5 In fact, this theory has been framed by a wide consideration of various practices and, moreover, a review of some of the most influential theories of human practices (e.g., those of Karl Marx, John Dewey, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Pierre Bourdieu, Alasdair MacIntyre, Charles Taylor, and Theodore Schatzki). But practices of *musicking* have been especially helping in opening certain routes of inquiry.

6 In the adoption of this word and indeed much else, I have been deeply influenced by Christopher Small, especially *Musicking* and *Music of the Common Tongue*.

immediacy (COLAPIETRO, 2013). The quality of this sound in itself is integral to music, but equally *this* singularly sensuous quality one in its dramatic juxtaposition to that *sound*; but also the way continua of rhythm, melody, and harmony are, in some forms of musicking at least, interwoven to form a continuum not reducible to these distinct and, in some measure, separable strands. As an artistic practice, then, music is above all an instance of thirdness, though it is one in which immediacy, opposition, and intelligibility are variably predominant. But even when opposition or intelligibility is predominant here, it is the firstness of these (the *feel* of conflict or the *feel* of coming-to-recognize what has up until had defied understanding) that is pivotal (cf. RANDELL, 1980). Arguably, the firstness of thirdness is made nowhere more absorbing or available than the experience of music. Musical understanding tends to be affective understanding: one generally must possess a *feel* for the music in order to “get it.” The hallmarks of “getting” a performance tend to be emotional responses,⁷ so much so that musical understanding itself tends to be, at once, an *affectively* charged and *intellectually* intricate task. It is one in which emotional interpretants play an especially prominent role and, moreover, one in which the energetic interpretants principally assume the form of acts of attention and query (the experience of listening rivets our attention on certain perceptible features of the experiential flux but also prompts certain questions).

Friedrich Nietzsche famously asserted, without music, life would be a mistake. Without music, it would also be far more opaque and flat, lacking a sense of nuance and intricacy as well as luminosity and depth. In suggesting this, I am guided by one of the pragmatists. William James in a letter wrote to his younger brother Henry James: “I envy ye the world of Art. Away from it, as we live, we sink into a flatter, blanker kind of consciousness, and indulge in an ostrich-like forgetfulness of all our rich potentialities – and they [these potentialities] startle us now and then when by accident some rich human product, pictorial, literary or architectural, slaps us with its tail” (PERRY, 1935, p. 254). Artistic performances and productions are vivid and arresting reminders of our rich potentialities; beyond this, they are nothing less than revelations of possibilities not yet imagined or identified. Of course, musical performances and productions need themselves to be added to this list of rich human products. Apart from such performances and productions, then, we would indeed sink into a flatter, blanker kind of consciousness, one woefully devoid of an enriching sense of more or less grounded possibilities, not least of all elusive possibilities of the most nuanced feeling.

As convinced as I am of these points, there is, at the center of my inquiry, a question. And please note that this presentation is an inquiry, a process in which not only we are pressing fundamental questions regarding a specific range of human

7 In his Lectures on Pragmatism, Peirce, after stressing the concern at the moment was “esthetic enjoyment,” disclosed: “ignorant as I am of Art, I have a fair share of capacity for esthetic enjoyment; and it seems to me that while in esthetic enjoyment we attend to the totality of Feeling—and especially to the total resultant Quality of Feeling presented in the work of art we are contemplating—yet it is a sort of *intellectual* sympathy, a sense that here is a Feeling that one can comprehend, a reasonable feeling” (CP 5.113; *emphasis added*). If logically elaborated thought “is a thread of melody running through the succession of our sensations” (CP 5.395), immediately felt pleasures are all the more so.

practices but also allowing ourselves to be called into question. The question at the heart of our inquiry is this: How are we to conceive the relationship between a *practice* such as music or, better, *musicking*, and an *exemplar* of that practice, that is, an exemplary or definitive work such as Bach's *Brandenburg Concerto*, Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony*, or Mahler's *Ninth Symphony*?⁸ In musicology and the philosophy of music, the *Werktreue* becomes institutionalized as the pivot around which virtually everything else turns (see, e.g., GOEHR, 2007; also TARUSKIN, 1995). It is not my purpose to leave unchallenged the *Werktreue*; quite the contrary, my aim is to subordinate the allegedly timeless work to inescapably historical performances. The *Werk, treue* or otherwise, is in my judgment a formalization of imaginable performances and, moreover, a resource for actual ones. At its best, its value is to goad and guide performers to and indeed beyond the limits of their present understanding, competence, and sensibility. Consider this analogy. Dictionaries do in time come into being and they function normatively. Their authority is not inherent but derived; it is derived from the evolving competencies of effective speakers. While dictionaries might inform and guide such speakers in their choice of words, it is usage that is ultimately authoritative. The dictionary is principally a distillation and formalization of the diverse usages of competent speakers. If it seems to dictate from on high to such speakers, this is for the most part an illusion. The various members of a linguistic community are, in consulting a dictionary, trying to ascertain what usage is to date (to this point). The authority of such usages is, at bottom, their own. Here as in ethics, the ideal of the self-legislative subject unwilling to bend to an external sovereign is the most relevant one.

Consequently, the accent falls on performance rather than *Werk*, even if we have to struggle to wrest our understanding of a musical performance from the paradigm of the legislative work. As a crucial step in this direction, allow me to explain the meaning of a word I have already used (one indispensable for this inquiry). So, do allow me a word about this word *musicking* and, then, an elaboration of our pivotal question. In resolute opposition to the widespread idea that "musical meaning resides uniquely in musical objects" (SMALL, 1987, p. 5), Christopher Small proposes to construe music as a verb (*to music*), with *musicking* "the present participle, or gerund, of the verb to music" (Idem, p. 9). While this verb actually *has* an obscure lexical existence (i.e., there is historical precedent for Small's linguistic innovation), its disruptive power has gone largely unexploited (ibid.). Part of my objective is to join Small and others to exploit just this power. He offers this definition of this verb: "*To music is to take part, in any capacity, in a*

8 This question can be made to sound ethnocentric. In a sense, it is. Richard Rorty is not entirely wrong when he insists that each one of us is, to some extent, ethnocentric. But the point of my undertaking is not to privilege the categories of the West but to destabilize them, to work from within an inherited framework of musical understanding but to turn this framework inside out. Works such as Bach's *Brandenburg Concerto*, Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony*, or Mahler's *Ninth Symphony* are privileged in one of the dominant traditions of musical theory (if *not* the dominant tradition). My point is to suggest how the scores and composers of these works need to be subordinated to evolving traditions of musical performance. The pragmatically oriented theorist celebrates most of all the historical performance rather than the allegedly timeless score. From the pragmatist perspective, the score has its *raison d'être* as a prompt for performance.

musical performance, whether by performing, listening, by rehearsing or practicing, by providing material for performances (what is called composing), or by dancing.” (Idem, p. 9, *emphasis added*).

The focus dramatically shifts from the score and composer to the performance and performers. The “composer” is indeed to be counted among the performers, but that figure is not elevated to the status of a divinity. The composer is one performer among others, often the most important one, but not always.

For those of you who are familiar with musicology and the philosophy of music, I am self-consciously carrying out this inquiry in the wake of Lydia Goehr’s *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works* (2007) and, to an even greater extent, Christopher Small’s *Musicking* (1987a), *Music of the Common Tongue* (1987b), and other writings by him. For those of you who are not familiar with this literature, the critical details no less than the main points of these musicological and philosophical controversies can be rendered immediately intelligible. No background knowledge or, more exactly, little prior familiarity of these intricate debates is assumed here.

But, as I have already indicated, one of my hypotheses is that what is true of music is also true, *mutatis mutandis*, of virtually every other practice. Indeed, I will be considering musical practices, but not infrequently taking sidelong glances at other historically evolved and evolving practices (including science, philosophy, and literature, but especially language). If we turn for a moment from music to literature and, more narrowly, to the distinctively modern genre of literature called the novel, I can clearly anticipate my main point. The novel came into being in the course of history, but it did so in such a way as to serve as a pivot around which that history turned.⁹ Traditionally, historians of literature identify Miguel de Cervantes as being the originator of the novel (see, e.g., WATT, 1957; also KUNDERA, 2004). Of course, the form of narrative encountered in Don Quixote is, in large measure, intelligible to readers because this form is so deeply rooted in traditional modes of story telling (most of all, the richly embroidered curtain of chivalric romances being rent by the tender irony of this literary innovator).¹⁰ But this literary work dramatically marks a break with these inherited forms. The Age of the Author was inaugurated along with the genre of the novel (cf. FOUCAULT, 1988).

Bearing this example in mind, then, it seems reasonable to suggest that definitive works tend to be redefinitive ones. Their significance is bound up with the manner in which they *redefine* a practice. The work is a performance and, in other cultures, it may even be the case that exemplary or redefinitive works are either

9 “It is possible,” John Dewey notes, “to study a multitude of histories, the record of the transitions and transformations of human activities or practices, to escape us. Taking history in separate doses of this country or that, we take it as a succession of isolated finalities. [...] We thus miss the fact of history and also its lesson: the diversity of institutional forms and customs which the same human nature may produce and employ” (MW 14, p. 78-79).

10 The metaphor of the rent curtain is borrowed from Milan Kundera. Modern literature rents the curtain of the pre-interpreted world and, thus, it thrusts readers back on their own interpretive resources and ingenuity to make sense of their experience of the world. Indeed, literature becomes novel when it rents this curtain. This signals one of the main reasons why Cervantes is accorded the status traditionally given to him.

not central or perhaps even not present. Even so, exemplary performances tend to be integral to any human practice. The very *ethos* of a practice is, indeed, typically transformed by the appearance of such works. Think here of Michel de Montaigne's *Essais* or René Descartes' *Meditations*; William Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads* or William Blake's *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*; Louis Armstrong's "West End Blues" or Charlie Parker's "Koko"; Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* or James Joyce's *Ulysses*; Ezra Pound's *Cantos* or Eliot's *Wasteland*. Part of what makes it so difficult to appreciate such transformations is that they are, at once, the frequently startling outcome of an immanent dialectic *and* an integral part of historical developments unfolding far beyond the confines of a single practice.

As the very title of the novelist David Lodge's book on this genre (*Consciousness and the Novel*) suggests, the novel is nothing less than a form of consciousness. But it is a historically emergent form of dramatic consciousness, one in which the very drama in which agents are enmeshed is driving toward more explicit and adequate articulation. It is, moreover, one in which the failures of, and obstacles to, self-understanding are exhibited with incomparable subtlety and candor. As such, the novel as a genre is always to some extent a self-dramatizing – at least a self-differentiating – form¹¹ of literary practice.

Let us turn back to music. Is it merely incidental that the revolutionary spirit of an emerging class and Beethoven's vaulting compositions, especially his Ninth Symphony, are contemporaneous? Is not Theodor Adorno correct when he suggests the following?

If we listen to Beethoven and do not hear anything of the revolutionary bourgeoisie—not the echo of its slogans, the need to realize them, the cry for that totality in which reason and freedom are to have their warrant—we understand Beethoven no better than does one who cannot follow the purely musical content of his pieces, the inner history that happens to their themes. If so many dismiss that specifically social element as a mere additive of sociological interpretation, if they see the thing itself in the actual notes alone, this is not due to the music but to a neutralized consciousness. The musical experience has been insulated from the experience of the reality in which it finds itself [better: *forges* itself]—however polemically—and to which it responds. (ADORNO, 1973, p. 62).

If Adorno is right here (and I judge him to be right in this regard), *musical* understanding and *historical* understanding are inseparable: to understand the music as music requires hearing the historical struggles, conflicts, triumphs, and impasses articulated *in* the music itself. Many forms of historical judgment are far removed from aesthetic judgment. This however fosters the illusion that, in concrete circumstances, especially when confronted with an artistic innovation, the historical

11 In form, material, focus, and much else the novelist is showing, "This is not an epic, however numerous the affinities between the more ancient genre and this novel; this is not simply a medieval romance, again, no matter how multiple the similarities between such romances and this novel."

and the aesthetic are separable. They are not. Just as many instances of moral judgments fall within a distinctive genre of historical judgments, so also do many instances of aesthetic judgments.

Let me now turn back even more fully to music, shifting the focus from judgment to experience. The quality and aptness of our judgments here as elsewhere are ultimately dependent upon the range and depth of our *experience*. Just as literature encompasses as much our practices of *reading* as those of writing (see, e.g., BARTHES, 1977; also ECO, 1979), music encompasses as much our practices of *listening* as those of composing, performing, staging, and propagating what at some juncture, for some group, happens to count as music (again, SMALL, 1987). It concerns somatic propriety no less than perceptual acuity (cf. ADORNO, 1973).¹² What the poet Walt Whitman said of great poets is, at least, equally true of great composers or musicians more generally: to have great poets, there must be great audiences – that is, great *readers*. But part of the greatness of poets or composers is that their work calls new audiences into being. Listeners pull themselves up by their bootstraps by their efforts to hear the new music in all of its disconcerting depth and complexity (at least, in its unfamiliarity). Just as much was integral to the experience of listeners that disposed them to be captured by the new musicking, much was central to the efforts of composers that prompted them to break with traditional forms. But nothing in the experience of listeners adequately prepared them for their encounter with, say, Beethoven's *Fifth*, Louis Armstrong's *West End Blues*, or Charlie Parker's *Koko* the first time it was performed. Indeed, for the most part, the audience for such music simply did not exist: to repeat, it had to be called into being. And that is partly what defines exemplary or redefinitive works such as those under consideration here.

Such considerations are however essentially historical. Musicology and the philosophy of music have tended to be fixated on the *ontology of the work* (see, e.g., ZIFF), not *processes of musicking* (hence, not the history of such processes). "The work," Robert Schumann insisted, "speaks for itself, even without the name of the composer" (1965, p. 125; quoted by GOEHR, 2007, p. 267; cf. TARUSKIN, 1995). The composer, conductor, and teacher Nadia Boulanger went so far as to claim: "the greatest objective is when the composer disappears, the performer disappears, and there remains only the work" (A. Kendall's *The Tender Tyrant: Nadia Boulanger*, p. 115; quoted by GOEHR, 2007, p. 267).¹³ In music, especially from 1800 forward, the work-concept (*Werktreuer*) has attained the status of a regulative concept. "A regulative concept ... is," as Richard Taruskin notes, "one that controls action

12 The fact that "jazz" was music to which one danced was taken by Theodor Adorno as evidence that it was not a serious or important form of music. (The referent of this word in his writings is far from clear.) One must sit still and listen intensely to the music, as an object of contemplation. The discipline required for such listening is partly somatic.

13 As it turns out, however, she concedes that "that you can only do with great masterpieces. They stand by themselves, only by themselves." A historicist such as myself would counter that such masterpieces crystallize in the ongoing course of an irreducibly complex history and their power can be appreciated only in the context of that history. In other words, they decidedly do not stand by themselves, however much they might stand above other achievements.

because it confers value and contributes to the definition of a practice” (“Foreword” to the Revised Edition of Lydia Goehr’s *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works*, p. vii). It entails, in Goehr’s own words, “a specific crystallization of ideas about the nature, purpose, and relationship between [sic.] composers, scores, and performers” (GOEHR, 2007, p. 253). In turn, this crystallization of ideas entails delegitimizing and even erasing whole traditions of musicking, also making historical accounts seem to be completely beside the point, and finally allowing abstract formalism to beat, without an argument, thick historicism.

Formalism appears to take the work or performance on its own terms, considering painstaking the features inherent in the work or performance. In contrast, historicism seems to lose the very thing it would illuminate (the text dissolves into the context, the aesthetically experienced performance into apparently adventitious features of external circumstances). One can so focus on the context in which a practice transforms itself, on the “external” factors fueling an historical transfiguration (e.g., the economic conflicts between German princes and the Roman *ecclesia* fueling Martin Luther’s religious reformation), that the transfiguration, on its own terms, gets lost. Indeed, a predominantly externalist account of such transformations tends to neglect the degree and ways in which such works emerge from an *immanent* dialectic in which certain practitioners seem, for diverse reasons, to be especially entangled. In contrast, a largely internalist account tends to obscure the intrinsic connection between any identifiable practice and the encompassing form of historical life in and through which the practice alone has any actuality. These transformations are the result of neither the pressures of purely external forces nor the drive of a purely immanent dialectic. While both internalist and externalist modes of explanation are needed, those that start from the work as a work—a working out, on, from, through, beyond inherited modes of figuration and sensuous materials of presentation—(those forms of explanation that start from the work, in this sense), deserve to be given pride of place.

2 Toward a pragmatist description of our shared practices

My interest is, however, not to ascend to the level of theoretical accounts of the historical transformations of one or another of our shared practices, but to descend to the ground of the competent practitioner. In this I take myself to be adhering to Wittgenstein’s injunction, “Back to the rough-ground,” for indeed the rough-ground designates the messy terrain of our largely unformalized practices (cf. Scheman). What is specifically true of musical practices is generally true of virtually all of our practiced practices, though certain features will tend to be more prominent in some genres of practices than in others (also at certain times in the ongoing history of a shared practice than at other times). Much is paradoxical here, generating the illusion of contradiction. For instance, nothing could be more historical than language. But hardly anything is more contemporary than the ability of speakers to draw on the resources of their language to communicate. Competent speakers possess a present capacity and their self-conscious appreciation of the historicity of their language may be very slight. In light of a phenomenological investigation of human practices, with special attention to musicking, literature, and philosophizing, I have derived a number of features worthy to be considered as defining features

of virtually any human practice. I take this to be also a pragmatist account of our shared practices. Please note that a pragmatist account of practices or anything else is perforce a phenomenologically grounded account. We must begin by painstakingly attending to the phenomena, allowing them to reveal themselves to the questioning not patient observer (the inquirer who resolutely refuses to follow the impulse identified by John Keats in a famous letter—the impulse to reach *irritably* “after fact & reason”¹⁴). What, then, does a phenomenological description of our shared practices reveal as their defining features? And how do these features provide the basis for a truly pragmatic account of human practices? While I can only gesture very quickly at answers to these questions, such gestures might serve effectively to orient us in our inquiry.

So allow me to push this inquiry by submitting this account for your consideration. A pragmatist description of our shared practices, musical and otherwise, should highlight at least these features:

Contemporaneity or Sufficiency: what I have in mind here is what Wittgenstein claims regarding ordinary language: Language is, in a sense, adequate, as it is, here and now. The recurrent attempts to replace ordinary language with an ideal one are fundamentally misguided. Whatever light innovations and improvements might be wrought are, almost entirely, ones to be made by competent users of ordinary language by means of this language. What is present is, in a sense, sufficient to the task at hand, whatever this task might be. Or, if it is not, it can be rendered more adequate by immanent innovation or alteration (pitting one part of our inheritance against another so that something truly novel comes into being). The growth of symbols, not least of all by the eruption of metaphors, is integral to the life of language (SHORT, 1988). It wells up from the depths of language and bursts upon the scene, often unexpectedly (speakers or writers are not infrequently surprised by the metaphors they hit upon in their efforts to use language appropriate for some occasion). The impulse to scrap the whole thing (be it language or philosophy, a system of education or one of governance) is often understandable, but it is almost always futile. It is the characteristic impulse of the modern epoch; indeed, it might be called the Cartesian impulse. It is no accident that Peirce, Wittgenstein, and Heidegger are united in their opposition to this impulse; their anti-Cartesianism is in no small measure defined by this opposition. There is no place outside of our practices. As they stand, here and now, they are sufficient, since they provide the resources within themselves of their renovation. Radical skeptics imagine possessing the capacity to extricate themselves from these shared practices. The very word “doubt” dissolves into a nonsensical vocable when it is completely torn from the effective usages of our quotidian speech. What is true of language is true of our

14 The point is *not* to dispense with the endeavor of ascertaining the facts or reasons aiding us in rendering phenomena intelligible, but it is to tarry patiently and humbly with the phenomena. What is objectionable is the impatient and indeed “*irritable* reaching after fact and reason” [*N.A.: emphasis added*], not the reaching after them. We must however, as Hegel advises, first immerse ourselves in the subject being investigated and, only after doing so for a protracted time, are we in the position to begin to do justice to the subject. Even then, we have to be mindful of our tendency to impose upon a subject our preconceived ideas. The task of phenomenology is as much as anything else undertaken to deconstruct (or destructure) our “prejudices” and preconceptions.

other practices. But reflective practitioners come to see that contemporary usage bears silent witness to an extensive history. Words mean what we can effectively communicate with them at this time. But they mean what they do, for us here and now, because they have come to mean this.

Historicity: consider for a moment linguistic meaning, Words mean what they have come to mean but also what they might yet come to mean. We are not imprisoned in the present: the present, for us at least, is the site wherein the actuality of the past confronts the possibilities of the future. So, despite their contemporary adequacy for countless purposes, our practices are historically evolved and evolving affairs. The development of any practice points toward the felt inadequacies animating implicated practitioners to improvise and innovate. It is impossible either to arrest the evolution of language or to direct the course of this evolution from a position outside of it. Words mean just what they do for competent speakers and the question of competence is course an essentially contested concept (Gallie; Wallace). But competence stretches to self-critical reflection on one's linguistic inheritance. Such reflection quickly enables users of language to appreciate that words mean what they have come to mean and, in numerous instances, they will ineluctably come to mean something more or at least different from what they presently do. In short, they will rapidly come to an appreciation of the historicity of language. Such historicity concerns the fate of not only inheritance (the fate of having been handed a language from the past) but also the adventure of an open-ended future. In other words, the historicity of our practices embraces the past, present, and future in their complex functional unity. Despite the contested nature of so much about our linguistic inheritance, ranging from the most rudimentary level (e.g., the choice of the right word to describe a hat) to the meta-theoretical level (the use of language to formulate a theory of language), we deploy it effectively and often effortlessly. Competence here as everywhere else is, however, obtained by an initiation into the practice in which errors of every imaginable kind abound. But, in time, we get the knack of using language effectively. This however points to something equally fundamental. The apt metaphor stands in contrast to the strained and unsuitable one, effective strategies of communication practically distinguish themselves from ineffective ones, and the *mot juste* exposes the inadequacies of seemingly unobjectionable but practically flawed diction. In brief, a sense good and bad, better and worse, proper and improper, effective and ineffective is woven into the very fabric of linguistic (or any other form) of competency.

Normativity: this implies that practices are ineluctably normative, even (perhaps especially) when they profess to be purely descriptive or otherwise not at normative. Consider that the concept of description is itself more than merely descriptive. Something might be described so badly that the result hardly counts as a description. In general, we might describe anything more or less well, for some purpose. But there are criteria built into the very concept of description by which anything to which it is applied is appropriated appraised. We learn what a description is by being exposed to paradigms or exemplars. Exemplars define not only what counts as good work but also what simply is recognizable as an instance of a practice (Are those sounds actually music!?).

Not only are there such inherent criteria but there are also internal goods (goods internal to a practice) that must be recognized, if we are to give human

practices in their irreducible heterogeneity their full weight. Here, of course, I am drawing upon the innovative work of a contemporary theorists, according to whom, some goods are *internal* to this or that practice. As Alasdair MacIntyre so memorably claimed in a ground-breaking book, a *practice* is

[...] any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity *through which goods internal to that form of activity* are realised in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partly definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended. (MacINTYRE, 2007, p. 175; *emphasis added*).

If we follow Peirce regarding this topic (and I would argue that there a very strong reasons to do so), we need to appreciate that “the word ‘ought’ has no meaning except relatively to *end*. That ought to be done which is conducive to a certain end” (CP 5.594). Peirce’s teleology avoids entirely what is objectionable about most forms of teleology, above all, the uncritical positing of an antecedently fixed and inherently immutable end. His is indeed a developmental teleology (CP 6.156), one in which the very ends governing processes and practices emerge in the course of the development of these processes and practices. Development teleology in the Peircean sense allows not only form radical emergence but also the continual transformation of authoritative ends.

Teleology: while practices seem to be by definition teleological, their ends or goals are typically focal topics of an ongoing dispute, arguably an unresolvable disagreements (see Gallie’s “Essentially Contested Concepts”). Moreover, they are the primary sites of what Peirce identifies as “developmental teleology,” historical developments in which novel ends emerge. The emergence of such ends shifts the focus from antecedently fixed goals to historically emergent ones.

Aristotle identified the final cause as the cause *par excellence* since it alone offers an adequate explanation. It was, in his judgment, the cause of causes. For our purpose, it is instructive to recall this simply because the invocation of ends by such theorists as Aristotle, Kant, Hegel, and Peirce, albeit in often dramatically different ways, was made in behalf of intelligibility. If we deny ourselves consideration of ends, then we severely limit the scope of intelligibility. What Descartes, Bacon, Spinoza, and others in early modernity banished, Kant, Hegel, and Peirce reclaimed. They did so, as Aristotle had done centuries before, in behalf of intelligibility. Our very efforts to make sense of our experience make no sense except insofar the purposes or ends animating and directing these efforts are acknowledged and evaluated. In brief, intelligibility and teleology are bound together. Our practices are intelligible in large part because they are in effect driving in a direction, although one not readily and fully discernible by the individuals who shape themselves in and through their participation in these practices. The expanding array of purposive conduct provides practitioners the indispensable resources of rendering themselves intelligible.

Intelligibility: our shared practices are the principal means by which we render ourselves intelligible to one another. If a practitioner is in principle intelligible only

to himself, then that practitioner is simply (or unqualifiedly) unintelligible.¹⁵ We come to understand more fully and finely what we are doing. However much such understanding appears to be not only punctuated by moments of insight (or *intuition*) but also ultimately validated by the disclosures of these insights, it is in fact historical. It takes time to come to know what we are doing and the most appropriate form of such self-understanding (the understanding acquired by implicated practitioners of their practical identities, e.g., that acquired by the composer or painter regarding the activity of composing or painting, respectively), is an instance of what I am disposed to call *articulation*. From Socrates, Plato, Aristotle forward to our own time (see, e.g., MacINTYRE, 2007; and TAYLOR, 2016), to have a more or less articulate sense of what we are doing can assist us in the doing (or activity) to which we have committed ourselves and, in all likelihood, by which we have defined ourselves. This is indeed problematic, since a poet's theory of poetry might come to ruin that individual's "instinctive" ingenuity for poetic utterance. This is a danger not to be downplayed. Even so, a more or less articulate sense of what one is doing is, on balance, generally (if not universally) better than a completely unreflective knack. Carpenters have ways of talking about tools and wood that have grown up in the practice of carpentry. They moreover have ways of differentially handling tools and materials. This differential treatment is, in my judgment, one extremely important form of practical articulation (i.e., articulation unfolding in and for the practice out of which it grows). The carpenter feels the grain of wood or discerns the bias of the board and the way this wood feels or this board bends is, quite apart from words, an instance of articulation. A differential, practical sense is guiding the execution of a task, the task typically being only a part of an encompassing project.

This sense is itself an instance of what I am disposed to call *articulation*. Moreover, it very frequently calls for an account in a medium other than the one in which this sense is originally and practically articulated (e.g., the language of gestures might become the focus of a theoretical account of these crucial forms of human expression or a genre of musicking, say, jazz or the blues, might give rise to discursive theories). I will immediately turn to articulation, but I will eventually consider the rival forms of theoretical explanation vying for our heuristic allegiance (cf. TAYLOR, "Social Theory as Practice").

Articulation and Discursivity: practices are themselves modes of articulation, though for the most part not exclusively or even primarily instances of *linguistic* articulation. Even so, it is more often the case than not that a practice develops a *discourse* integral to itself. For example, the words and expressions developed by musicians or connoisseurs to distinguish various perceptible features, especially elusive, subtle ones, function as instruments of perception. Our articulations, even

15 "What determines our judgment, our concepts and reactions, is," Wittgenstein properly notes, "not what *one* man is doing *now*, an individual action, but the whole hurly-burly of human actions, the back ground against which we see any action" (*Zettel*, §567). What determines it must be general: it must be generalizable, indefinitely, from this person to that and from this moment to countless other ones. "Seeing life as a weave, this pattern [...] is," he adds "not always complete and is varied in a multiplicity of ways. But we, in our conceptual world, keep on seeing the same, recurring with variations. That is how our concepts take it. For concepts are not for use on a single occasion" (§568)—or by a completely solitary and isolated agent.

when they aim at self-understanding, are more often than not put forth in the context of others. These others are very frequently not individuals from whom we are originally separated but ones with whom we are intimately associated. [Dewey] Human beings are social animals and our sociality is primordial. The assumption that we existed originally as individuals separate from one another and, accordingly, had to enter voluntarily into union with others is a modernist myth beside which the creation stories of various religious traditions are hardly fantastic. We are always already with others to such a degree of intimacy that they are parts of our very selves (Peirce). Our shared practices are just that—*communal* affairs.

Community: a practice is necessarily shared or communal, even paradoxically when it is solitary in origin. Our shared practices are in effect intergenerational communities in which personal identities are forged in large measure by affectively charged identifications. Think here of someone *identifying* themselves as a musician or scientist or writer. There is nothing in the least ethereal about the forms of community in and through which we define and redefine ourselves. From a pragmatist perspective especially, these forms need to be understood not in abstraction from the thick, entangled historical associations apart from which we would not be intelligible to ourselves but precisely in terms of such associations. Pragmatic clarification drives in the direction of thick descriptions and concrete specifications. Human practices are indeed irreducibly concrete affairs and, accordingly, our understanding of them must quickly become impatient with thin abstractions and turn to pragmatic concreteness. James goes so far as to insist: “The whole originality of pragmatism, the whole point in it, is its use of the concrete way of seeing. It begins with concreteness, and returns and ends with it” (JAMES, 1985, p. 281-282). With respect to practices, part of what this means is that we must attend carefully to how concepts *function* in the context of historical (i.e., actual) communities. Connected to this, we must likewise attend to how they become concretely embodied in the habits and artifacts of naturally located and historically situated beings such as human and other animals unquestionably are.

Concreteness or Embodiment: a Pragmatic Clarification of the Peircean Ideal of Concrete Reasonableness. “The level of action fixed by *embodied* intelligence is,” as Dewey notes, “always the important thing” (2012, p. 155). “Capacities are,” he quickly adds, “limited by the objects and tools at hand” (ibid.). Put positively, our abilities and skills are (when we are not overwhelmed by such a circumstance) enhanced, amplified, and refined by expanding the range of objects and the power of the tools with which we as practitioners are familiar. To an even greater extent than the limits imposed by the objects and tools available to practitioners, capacities are functions of “the prevailing habits of attention and interest which are set by tradition and institutional customs” (2012, p. 155-156). Often even sympathetic readers of Peirce are embarrassed by his advocacy of the ideal of concrete reasonableness, seeming to think that this ideal designates something fantastic or even paradoxically something excessively ethereal! But what he means might be ready very modestly and, indeed, concretely: he means much the same as Dewey does when the latter stresses the *concrete embodiment* of experimental intelligence. As the sentences from *The Public and Its Problems* indicate, intelligence is embodied first and foremost in habits and, derivatively, in the objects and artifacts, especially tools, upon which the operation of habits so intimately and massively depends. At any rate, human practices are

among the most concrete affairs imaginable, since they involve the actual habits of human agents in the various contexts of practical engagement.¹⁶

These are, for a pragmatist such as myself at least, some of the more salient features of our shared practices. They are not put forth here as an exhaustive list of such features, only as the barest hints of what is most characteristic of our more developed practices. Eventually, I will return to one of these features, namely, exemplarity). For the moment, however, let these hints suffice to orient us in our exploration.

3 Formalism vs. Historicism: Historicism thin and thick

Let us now however turn from these salient features of our practices to contrasting forms of explanation. In doing so, we will in effect be picking up the thread of one of these features (the intelligibility of our practices) and exploring some of the ways in which we try to explain our practices. Also, I will be taking up what I promised to consider (rival forms of theoretical accounts of our shared practices).

Both historical and cultural variability of course pose problems of understanding and appraisal. On this occasion, however, I want to focus primarily on the inescapable fact of historical variability.¹⁷ It is hard—I would argue it is *impossible*—to deny that what counts as music and, even more clearly, what counts as an exemplary musical work might significantly vary from one historical epoch to another (COETZEE, 2002).

It is, however, extremely instructive to see how a theorist interested in the practice in question, whatever it might be (e.g., music, philosophy, or education), greets this observation. To put the matter very crudely, a theorist may struggle to identify something outside of the flux of history and, then, struggle desperately to defuse the explosive force of this historical observation (witness Husserl in *The Crisis of European Sciences*). Or a theorist may not recoil from history, but rather embrace it in some fashion. No one is likely to deny that what counts regarding our practices “is relative to historical circumstance,” always to some extent “a matter of transient consensus” (RORTY, 1989, p. 189). “Yet at times like that of Auschwitz, when history is in upheaval and [when] traditional institutions and patterns are collapsing, we want [most likely, *desperately* want],” Rorty astutely observes, “something which stands beyond history and institutions” (*ibid.*). “What [however] can there be except human solidarity [...]?” (*Ibid.*). The quest for certainty is a human, all too human, search for an unshakable foundation, a timeless support, for our historical practices. But what if historically evolved and evolving forms of human solidarity are all we ever have to go on? Some philosophical temperaments will accept this (and in some instances accept

16 Practical engagement should be given a narrow meaning. Indeed, it should be granted as wide and elastic a meaning as the expression can bear without being emptied of meaning. In particular, the distinctive work of the strictly theoretical inquirer needs to be seen as falling in the scope of such engagement. Such an inquirer is, in the sense intended, a practitioner, ordinarily a self-committed participant in an historically evolved and evolving practice.

17 For the sake of simplicity, I will focus exclusively on historical variability. This should not be taken to mean that I suppose cultural variability among human practices is less important.

this gladly and unhesitantly) as the condition of our lives, others will pronounce it utterly inadequate for our practices and purposes (cf. JAMES, 1985).

Of course, almost everything depends on how history is conceived, how it is championed, also on how solidarity is envisioned. For my purpose, two distinctions are critical. We must distinguish between thin and thick historicism. But, even before doing so, there is the distinction between historicism and its opposite. What history itself reveals is a deep divide between *formalists* and *historicists*. That is, intellectual history encompasses “the [ongoing] battle between [to quote Rorty] those who, like Frege and Husserl, want philosophy to be an autonomous, ahistorical [or transcendental] discipline that discerns ineluctable formal structures of reality, experience or language, and those who, like Heidegger and Dewey, think that cutting philosophy loose from history will produce only sterile scholasticism” (TAYLOR, 1995, p. 32).

What would a pragmatist approach to our shared practices, musical and otherwise, be? Of course, this is not the occasion to formulate in detail such an approach. It is however the place where such an approach must be sketched, in however broad, crude strokes time allows. That is, it is a question too large and complex to address adequately here, but also one too salient and significant to skirt on this occasion.

However these practices arise, they tend in the course of their development to crystalize around exemplary or paradigmatic works. These works in effect define what the practice is and they do so by defining both the minimal requirements and maximal achievement (to date, at least) of that identifiable practice. In other words, they define what it means to be a minimally competent and an incontestably exemplary practitioner. These works however often have a rather paradoxical relationship to the subsequent phases of an ongoing history. They can define a practice without necessarily be models to be imitated, especially in any slavish or unimaginative manner. Consider, for example, Plato’s *Dialogues*. These dialogues, as much as any other writings in the history of philosophy, define the discipline. But very few philosophers write dialogues, at least, very few compose formal dialogues. I would argue that virtually all philosophy is, at bottom, dialogical, whatever its outward form is.

To some extent modeled on the genre of a scientific article, the genre of the philosophical essay is, especially in the analytic tradition, at least tacitly judged to be the most appropriate form of philosophical articulation. In Continental European traditions, however, works of much vaster scope and fuller length have, in a qualified sense, come to define the discipline. Think here of *Experience and Judgment*, *Being and Time*, *Being and Nothingness*, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, *Totality and Infinity*, or *Difference and Repetition*. Each one of these works is like a comet, with more or less long tails of commentary and criticism trailing a luminous head. It is hardly ever the case that philosophers in this tradition set out to write a work rivaling, say, *Being and Time*; rather they for the most part engage in an *immanent critique* of a master work, often animated by a radical motive (e.g., Jacques Derrida’s *Voice and Phenomena* as such a critique of Husserl’s phenomenology).

A task can be executed so poorly or badly that it simply does not count as the execution of the task in question. For example, an argument in the logical sense might be so weak as hardly to count as an argument at all, if indeed it is even

accorded this status. Behind such considerations, however, there are exemplary performances, ones going a great distance to define what a recognizable task or work in this or that practice *is*.

Reprise: Exemplarity. Human practices evolve *from* about also *into* exemplary performances. Exemplary performances and productions are complexly related to *following rules* (see WITTGENSTEIN, 1970; also TAYLOR, 1995). They are never simply a matter of following rules. But they are hardly possible apart from a background of rules. But many of the rules set in place are distillations from what William James identifies as “the master strokes” of human genius. As Kant suggests in his third *Critique*, the accomplishments of such geniuses do not follow but rather establish rules. Practices are simultaneously perfected and arrested by these strokes of genius. In some instances, it is virtually impossible for successors to imagine how to transcend the exemplary performance of some remarkably singular practitioner. They seem condemned to by more or less imaginative imitators of an unsurpassable ideal, but one concretely realized in an exemplary performance (the example is held aloft as for all to follow). But genius is irrepressible and its irrepressibility is nowhere more evident than in refusals to do the done thing, no matter no singularly radiant and stunning are the exemplars sanctioning the perpetuation of a practice along tracks already set down. But in music and elsewhere singular works do secure for themselves an exemplary and, hence, authoritative status. This authoritative status is not infrequently defended by authoritarian individuals, ones who insist this and this alone is the way to carry out the practice. This is manifest in the instance of what is identified as the *Werktreue*.

4 Music, art, and practice

Especially since 1800, our understanding of music in the West has become increasingly organized around the *Werktreue* (in literal translation, the true work; more often translated as the work-concept). It is one thing for us to imagine the work to be a fully realized project, quite another to be an invincibly incomplete undertaking. An entrenched sense of the *inviolable integrity* of a definitive work entails a prohibition on taking liberties with the work. But, to cut to the capture (not just to the chase), let us recall Max Raphael’s crucial distinction (one anticipated by John Dewey in *Art as Experience* [1934]). The *work as an object* can arguably be explained in terms of the conditions of its production and reception (both immediate and eventual); but the explanation of the work precisely *as a work* has to be sought in the process of production itself. For example, the power of musicking resides in musicking, that is, in the inclusive process in which heterogeneous practitioners contribute to a singular achievement. “Art and the study of art,” Raphael hence suggests, “lead from the work to *the process of creation*” (quoted by BERGER, 2001, p. 433, *emphasis added*). Put otherwise, they lead *from* the work as a realized production *to* the work as an ongoing process, one in which the generation of interpretants is integral to the significance of any work of any complexity. The interpreters are not curators in an imaginary museum, but rather co-creators in an actual endeavor.

Some historical achievements seem to transcend historical conditions.¹⁸ And they do so in (at least) a twofold way. For they seem to transport *us* out of the flux of time, locating us in nothing less than an intense experience of the eternal now. The capacity of such works to accomplish this strongly disposes many individuals to imagine that *these works themselves* transcend the vagaries and ephemerality of time—the seemingly unavoidable fate of “perpetual perishing” (Whitehead adapted from Locke). Who can deny such experience? In any event, *I* am not disposed to discredit or dismiss such experience. I am however driven to interrogate the significance and implications of our experience of transcendence, especially in reference to our musical and philosophical practices. Again, Max Raphael proves here to be an especially trustworthy guide: “The work of art holds man’s [humanity’s] creative powers in a crystalline suspension from which they can again be transformed into living energies” (quoted by BERGER, 2001, p. 433). It holds them in suspension above the inexorable flow of historical time. Such suspension is however itself historical: it is a “moment” of indefinite duration in the stream of onrushing time. That is, this crystalline suspension “occurs in history” and thus is “subject to its conditions”; but, “at another level [this suspension] defies those conditions” and, in doing so, opens the possibility for redefining those conditions.

Here and now, we experience, however paradoxical this might sound on first hearing, the pastness of the present and the presence of the past (TARUSKIN, 1995). Defining features of the historical present are belated; more than this, they are always already obsolete. The living energies of a musical work gather and focus our own inchoate and disparate energies, providing us with an experience in which our energies are absorbed by them and these energies by ours, so that the work is truly an irreducibly complex process, not least of all, a working out, a working through (including a working through irrevocable loss), and inevitably to some extent an acting out. The irrepressible rebellion of the human animal, even in its most disciplined guises and roles, is after all heartening to witness—and what is any instance of acting out but an instance of such rebellion?

“Art is,” to quote Raphael once again, “an interplay [...] of three factors—the artist, the world, and the means of figuration” (p. 233; quoted by BERGER, 2001, p. 433). In the case of musicking, however, it would be better to say the performers (including the listeners), the world (both the auditory world and the historical one in which the auditory world is so deeply and intricately implicated [see, e.g., ADORNO; also BALLANTINE]), and the means of figuration. In other words, art confronts us as an irreducibly triadic *process* in which the constituents of this process are always, to some extent, translatable into integral phases in an ongoing history.

The pragmatist orientation drives us to ask, “Just how does this or that work actually *work* (how has worked thus far and how it might work otherwise?)?” (TARUSKIN, 1995). Works, widely recognized and especially institutionally sponsored productions, inevitably, understandably, and to a great extent *justifiably* come to define work. Beethoven’s *Ninth*, Hegel’s *Phenomenology*, etc. They come to define what is to be done, including of course *how* any recognizable work is to be

18 As Max Raphael notes, Marx raises this question but does not adequately answer it. Along with Italo Calvino, J. M. Coetzee, Salman Rushdie, and Milan Kundera, Raphael offers indispensable guidance for how to address this thorny question.

done or carried out. But work needs to be saved from such works, at the same time that we have no inkling of what a competent practitioner or even a human practice is apart from such exemplary works. As we practitioners, we are who we are in no small measure as a result of how these works have made us over into their likeness. As individuals who are worthy of the practice into which we have been initiated, however, we must aspire to the role of performers in our own right. Using the word *text* to designate what I have been identifying as *the work as a work*, Roland Barthes insists: “The Text [...] decants the work [...] from its consumption and gathers it up as play, activity, production, practice.” This involves play, playing with the text, more fundamentally playing the text as the musician might play a piece of music. Indeed, “[p]laying must be understood here in all its polysemy: the text itself *plays* (like a door, like a machine with ‘play’), and the reader must play twice over, playing the Text as one plays a game, looking for a practice which re-produces it, but [...] also playing the Text in the musical sense of the term” (i.e., the sense in which a musician plays or performs a piece) (p. 162). What Barthes goes on to say is especially relevant to our topic and, indeed, deserves to be quoted at length:

The history of music (as a practice, not as an ‘art’) does indeed parallel that of the Text fairly closely: there was a period when practising amateurs were numerous (at least in the confines of certain classes) and ‘playing’ and ‘listening’ formed a scarcely differentiated activity; then two roles appeared in succession, first that of the performer, the interpreter to whom the bourgeois public (though still itself able to play a little—the whole history of the piano) delegated its playing, then that of the passive amateur, who listens to music without being able to play (the gramophone record takes the place of the piano). We know today that post-serial music has radically altered the role of the ‘interpreter,’ who is called on to be [...] the co-author of the score, completing it rather than giving ‘expression.’ The Text is very much a score of this new kind: it asks of the reader a practical coloration. (BARTHES, 1977, p. 162-163)

Such practical collaboration has however been an integral part of virtually all of our shared practices. In the culture of bourgeois consumption, the disfigurement of human practices is unavoidable. Passive consumption, even when hidden from itself by an impressive array of aesthetic erudition, usurps practical collaboration. The institution of a tyrannically legislative museum of imaginary works displaces an initiation into the imaginative work of a shared undertaking in which definitive works are just that (*definitive* or exemplary works for a certain historical community), but never sacred texts.

The practical question, arising with recurrent urgency in diverse circumstances, is how to make the work of Bach, Beethoven, or Mahler—or that of Aristotle, Hegel, or Peirce—*available* to those in different historical and cultural circumstances (cf. CAVELL, 2002). Fantasies of time-travel need here to be replaced by possibilities of historical transfiguration (cf. TARUSKIN, 1995).

For practitioners immersed in their work, work and play become indistinguishable. Nothing can be more frustrating and even disheartening, nothing

more exhilarating and indeed enlivening than the immersing oneself in processes of creation. The responsibilities of the playful practitioner are arguably even more exacting than those of the most dutiful curators. In any event, the truly conscientious practitioner does not aspire to be a curator in an imaginary museum, but a contributor to an ongoing endeavor.¹⁹ More often than not, a severe apprenticeship is required of anyone aspiring to be a playful practitioner. The listener who has never yet heard what s/he desires to hear insinuates herself in the process of creation, driving the composer, as one performer among others, to create something unique (even if this unique “work” happens to be an instance of a familiar or traditional form). As Dewey noted, aesthetic perception is integral to artful performance or production. Chefs must taste the food and modify the dish in accord with that their educated palates instruct or at least intimate. Musicians must listen to what they are playing modify their efforts in response to how they are *sounding*.

The living energies held in crystalline suspension above the historical flux allow for no safe refuge from the onrushing current of lived time. What Raphael and Berger say of painting and other visual arts might be said of *musicking*: first Raphael, “the process of creation can become an existent [or actuality, i.e., an instance of Secondness] only because it is embedded in some concrete material” (quoted by BERGER, 2001, p. 433). Now Berger himself, “wood, pigment, canvas and so on. When this material has been worked by the artist it becomes like no other existing material”; it even “acquires a certain immaterial [or “spiritual”] character” (ibid.; cf. HEGEL, 1993). It is because these materials absorb and preserve the living energies of an irrepressible creativity, one having its locus not simply in the genius of this or that individual (COLAPIETRO, 2003), works of art come themselves to possess “incomparable energy.” The physical object exists in one sense, the art *work* in quite another. For *works* of art “exist in the same sense in that a current exists: it cannot exist without substances and yet it is not in itself a simple substance.” Rather it is a dynamic current perceptible in its traces and recoverable in its impetus.

There is no question that our *experience* of reading Plato can be one in which we encounter him as though he were our contemporary. His utterances, arguments, dramas, characters, and tropes speak to us, here and now. But, in their power to do so, they do not so much transcend time as they relativize the present (perhaps even allow us to glimpse the specific respects in which the pastness of the present is a disfigurement of not only our moment but also our very selves.

The inherent power of, say, Beethoven’s *Ninth* is its capacity to absorb the energies of its time within itself, to hold them together despite their centrifugal force, and thereby to hold them in crystalline suspension above any actual present. The inevitable danger of such an exemplary accomplishment is that an instance of such vaulting self-transcendence might become a means of enforcing obsequious self-effacement. Not all self-effacement is obsequious.

19 The concluding sentence of Lydia Goehr’s groundbreaking work deserves to be cited here: “The imaginary museum of musical works may well remain imaginary, as it continues to display the art of music in the plastic terms of works of fine art, but it will never achieve complete transcendence and purity while it allows human beings to enter through its doors” (2007, p. 286).

The paradox here is that we must allow our practices to speak for themselves, but they can do so only when practitioners are performers, when these practitioners take up with neither misplaced humility nor adolescent arrogance the demanding responsibilities of a shared undertaking. The metaphor of the rainbow fits here as well as elsewhere: practices speak in and through practitioners, thereby disclosing both their own generality and the singularity of the practitioners. Our practices are at bottom traditions and, in turn, “our traditions are, “as Peirce noted, “precious treasures, while iconoclastic inventions [or innovations] are always cheap and often nasty” (CP 4.71). But not all innovations are iconoclastic. Some are forged in the crucible of the unresolved problems of an ongoing tradition. As such, they can be themselves precious and, moreover, ways of honoring those from whose exemplars they deviate.

Conclusion

A pragmatist account of human practices must take seriously such observations on musicking and our other practices. It is greatly aided in this by considering carefully the actual history of our musical practices, paying especially close attention to the way the *Werktreue* has come to dominant those practices. This is however a historical contingency. With Michel Foucault, then, we are entitled to say hope resides in the realization that “so many things can be changed, fragile as they are, bound up more with circumstances [and thus contingencies] than [with] necessities, more arbitrary than self-evident, more a matter of complex, but temporary, historical circumstances than with inevitable anthropological constants” (FOUCAULT, 1988, p. 156). They might not be changed easily; indeed, many things might resist even the most focused, imaginative, and persistent effort to alter them. But the history of our practices reveals much, not least of all the historical alterability of even our most enduring ones—if only practitioners prove worthy of their inheritances. Among other things, this means taking up the definitive works of the exemplary practitioners as living energies to be released and, in some measure, redirected, toward ends not yet in view. Ends not yet imaginable become imaginable for the most part because artists produce images, aural and otherwise, that project an array of possibilities prefigured, but ordinarily only in the most fleeting and a barely legible manner. The *work* of art involves as much as anything else releasing these energies, also *beginning* to allow these ends to come into view. Our musical and other practices disclose nothing less than this power. They are, moreover, as much intimations of transcendence no less than figurations of intelligibility. One compromises, let alone abandons, neither one’s pragmatism nor one’s historicism when one says with John Berger, art is “either a social practice [serving] to maintain illusions, or [...] it is a glimpse of what lies beyond other practices, beyond them because it is not subject to the tyranny of the modern view of time” (BERGER, 2001, p. 488), (arguably, also beyond even artistic practices). “There is no question,” as he adds, “of looking away from the modern world and its practices” (idem, p. 488). To be an inhabitant of this world is to be caught up, at once, in the contradictions of modernity and, as a result of this entanglement, in the task of resolving them more thoughtfully, humanely, and imaginatively than has yet been done. It is to *experience* time as a force in our lives even more than as the condition of those lives (again, Berger). Our experience of music (the music of *our* time) inserts us in the flux of time in such a way that time

as a force—and history as a fate—*begin* to be better understood, because time and history are so intensely, intricately, and memorably *felt*. Feeling and understanding are of a piece here. From *within* our musical practices, we not infrequently experience the transcendence *of* time. But this is best understood as an achievement *in* time, a fleeting moment in an onrushing current. Works themselves can transcend the contexts of their origination and reception, but this too is a historical achievement, moreover, an invincibly precarious one. Nothing guarantees that what we christen classics will be timeless. Much in those works themselves however holds out the promise that the living energies crystallized in these absorbing figurations might be released into the indefinite future.

Some of us desire something more, much, much more. Witness Husserl in 1935 when he gave “his celebrated lectures in Vienna and Prague on the crisis of European humanity” (KUNDERA, 1988, p. 3).²⁰ He demanded nothing less than a transcendental justification (or “grounding”) of our historical practices and endeavors. Near the end of the essay from which I have just quoted, Kundera confesses: “Once upon a time I too thought that the future was the only competent judge of our works and actions. Later on I understood that chasing after the future is the worst conformism of all, a craven flattery of the mighty” (1986, p. 19). If the future is not a value for him, then to what *is* he attached? “To God? Country? The people? The individual?” (Idem, p. 20). The Market? The Revolution? Difference? He acknowledges his answer is “ridiculous,” but he is unhesitant in announcing it: “I am attached to nothing but *the depreciated legacy of Cervantes*” (ibidem; *emphasis added*).

We might enlarge this and say we need attach ourselves to nothing more than the always deprecated lineages²¹ of Socrates, Cervantes, and Charlie Parker, ones in which history is taken up and carried forward in a self-consciously historical manner, hence never from the perspective of the self-enclosed present. These lineages configure the present as a site in which past, present, and future contest each other. They are also themselves sites in which monumental works are to be encountered. But for such inheritors of these lineages as Bernard Williams,²² Milan Kundera, and John Coltrane,²³ monumental works are redefinitive ones, their ultimate value being that of enabling us, here and now, to renew the task of redefinition and reconfiguration. It tends to be renewed in the hope of transfiguration and transformation, transition and transposition (i.e., the thirdness of thirdness, the continual, if not continuous, growth of concrete reasonableness). Our musical practices reveal about themselves and all our other shared practices as nothing less than this drama, in its most intimate details and comprehensive scope. In their firstness, they offer us opportunities for experiencing

20 To the names of Descartes and Galileo, figures singled out by Husserl, Kundera wants to add that of Cervantes. This seems to be especially appropriate and insightful.

21 These are of course not merely deprecated lineages; they are also celebrated ones, if only by a relatively small segment of any given population.

22 I have included Williams here because of his realization of the importance of history. W. B. Gallie perhaps is, for this reason, even more deserving to be cited as a representative of this lineage.

23 These are contemporaries, Coltrane having been born in 1926, Williams and Kundera in 1929. Williams, Kundera, and Parker of course represent, respectively, the traditions of Socrates, Cervantes, and Beethoven.

the flux of time in its distinctively human forms (experiencing in arguably its purest form the *feel* of effortless transition, exalting ascendance, brutal clashing, rapidly intensifying struggle, seemingly impossible resolution, a seeming *non sequitur* that eventually reveals itself to be part of a logic far more subtle than the one we brought to the experience, and much else). In their thirdness, however, musical practices offer intimations of intelligibility beyond anything we appear to be able to articulate in any other medium. As much as anything else, these practices reveal the paradoxes of our existence as vividly and arrestingly as any other ones, for they show how the immediately somatic, visceral, impassioned modes of experience can be immediately conjoined to the unquestionably ethereal, elusive, and intangible features of these very modes of experience. They reveal how a densely somatic experience and a truly intellectual one are not necessarily separate but can be integral aspects of a single and indeed singular experience (cf. DEWEY, 1934).

Our practices of musicking go a great distance in proving that life is hardly a mistake. Put positively, they show how this stretch of time might, in itself, be sufficient to the duration: there is no need to look outside of the experience for its justification. At the same time (!), just because they demonstrate this, these practices open to experiences beyond the one in which such sufficiency is experienced. [*Experience & Education*] Just as the segments of a piece of musicking flow into one another, both insisting upon themselves and lending themselves to being taken up into an evolving pattern of before and after, (just as segments of musicking flow into one another) so too do our experiences. The qualitative immediacy of each distinct phase makes of that phase a whole unto itself. But the qualitative immediacy of the subsequent phase engenders a sense of contrast between what was just heard and what is now absorbing one's attention. But immediate qualities and their ineffable contrasts, their irreducible differences, their immediately felt oppositions are, in our experience of musicking, far from the whole story. There are, at least, always intimations of intelligibility beyond anything we can presently conceive or verbalize. But there are more than such intimations. There are also consummations, experiences in which the achievement of making sense of those experiences from within their flux is, at least for some of us, as exhilarating and memorable as anything else in our lives. We struggle to make sense—more coherent, accessible, and articulate²⁴ sense—out of such experiences of making sense. This reflexive struggle, this endeavor to make sense out of our experience of making sense of an experience from within the flux of the experience, intimates why philosophy is for some of us

24 Music is itself a mode of articulation, so this claim is somewhat misleading. It is, moreover, a mode of articulation sufficient unto itself. It does not stand in need of having itself explained in words. Music speaks for itself by not necessarily speaking and when it does use words it uses them *musically*, rather than in a purely linguistic manner. Even this is however misleading because what we ordinarily call language is hardly devoid of music. It is in general all too likely that we will draw all too sharp or absolute distinctions in our endeavor to make sense out of this experience of making sense. Here I am once again simply following Peirce's sage counsel: "We naturally make," he astutely notes, "all our distinctions too absolute" (CP 7.438). Perhaps our experiences of musicking can serve as a corrective in this regard as well.

a form of musicking²⁵ and, in turn, why musicking is for others (sometimes simply ourselves in a different role or on a different occasion) an intellectual adventure comparable to philosophical query. Such, at least, is the provisional conclusion to which my present reflections on musical and other practices have led me.

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25 Philosophy “performs for some,” Dewey astutely observes, “exactly the same office [or function] that the fine arts perform for others. There is a kind of music of ideas that appeals, apart from any question of empirical verification [or other modes of objective validation], to the minds of thinkers, who derive an emotional satisfaction from an imaginative play synthesis of ideas obtainable in no other way” (“Philosophy” in: *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*, vol XII [1934]).

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