Virtual Works—Actual Things

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Virtual Works—Actual Things
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During the International Orpheus Academy for Music and Theory 2016, I presented a first attempt towards a completely renewed perspective on musical entities, one that could move beyond existing music ontologies, relating more to current performance practices and to the vast amount of available music sources and documents. Since the Academy, and partly as a result of it, my ideas developed into a music ontological thought strongly inspired by the differential ontology of Gilles Deleuze. A detailed account of my "new image of work" will be a major part of my forthcoming monograph Logic of Experimentation (De Assis 2018), but I wish to present its fundamental traits in this chapter, not least because they explain the title of this book, and of the Orpheus Academy 2016. I will proceed in three steps: First (section 1), I will point out some of the problems with currently available music ontologies, as they have been discussed in recent years (mostly) by analytic philosophers. Next (section 2), I will present some basic components of a Deleuzian ontology as it has been extracted from his writings by post-Deleuzian philosophers (prominently by Manuel DeLanda, and first and foremost based upon Deleuze’s seminal book Difference and Repetition). Finally (section 3), I will present a novel way of thinking about musical entities, suggesting a "new image of work," and, consequently, an alternative music ontology. I would like to emphasise that I do not claim to offer a complete, finished, and transparent ontological account. It is more of an attempt (a Versuch) that will be followed by other essays addressing specific topics in greater detail.

1. Music ontologies: some problems

To start with, one has to register (as the Orpheus Academy 2016 also proved) that currently existing music ontologies are in an impasse, not to say in a deep crisis. In a recent collective volume on the appeal to abstract objects in art ontology generally, edited by Christy Mag Uidhir (2012), Guy Rohrbaugh (2012) enthusiastically opens his chapter (the first in the collection) by stating that “we surely live in a golden age for the ontology of art” (29). However, throughout the chapter, he presents us with a series of burning issues that seem to condemn music ontology to irrelevance, even concluding that “an ontology

1 I wish to express my gratitude to Lydia Goehr, David Davies, and Lucia D’Errico for their extensive and precise comments on draft versions of this chapter.
ultimately driven by a description of what it is we already do, as it must if it is to be an ontology of art at all, looks like it will be unable to turn around and informatively explain or justify any of those doings we described. . . . One might say that there is no such endeavor as the ontology of art” (37). Along the way, Rohrbaugh addresses several problems around pragmatist and deflationist views, comparing various positions, authors, and recent debates, not hesitating to openly discuss critical problems that might endanger the field of music ontology itself. First, he observes that ontologists are motivated to preserve the appearances of dominant practices (32), which remain by and large unquestioned. Second, he identifies a serious problem in the fact that music ontologists are squeezed between traditional metaphysics and traditional musical practices (33), not taking into account alternative or innovative approaches. Third, expressing a dilemma he shares with Jerrold Levinson, Rohrbaugh confesses that “We describe objects that fit our practices to a tee and then proceed to claim that there are such objects. Unfortunately, they are not there. Any number of critics, myself included, have pointed out that the idea of an indicated type does not really make much sense” (33). Fourth, he acknowledges that music ontology often ends up with two discourses: one is obvious, and thus unnecessary; the other is of a hermetic character, and thus highly elitist: “At the object-level, our practices may be recognized as going on just as they do, while our deflationary attitude at the meta-level need only be known to the philosophical elite for whom it matters. . . . But instead of ending up with a picture on which our practices give rise to the very objects of their own concern, we instead end up with, quite literally, nothing” (34–35).2 Thus, what had been announced as living in a “golden age” seems to be more pertinently described as a discipline fading away in a sombre corner of the humanities.

A summary of all existing ontological positions would go beyond the scope of this chapter,3 but a very important observation—one that cannot be overlooked—is that the vast majority of music ontologists are philosophers attached to so-called analytic philosophy, focusing and presenting their arguments first and foremost in logical propositions, to which they claim most forms of human knowledge is reducible.4 In the last decade a significant number of philoso-

2 Guy Rohrbaugh's ontological arguments have been of personal interest to me, especially his notions of “continuants” and “historical individuals” (that he vaguely retrieves from biology and from processes of speciation), which makes his position—among all other currently available accounts—the one that comes closest to my own practice and perspective (even if still with substantial differences). Furthermore, I also share with him his declared scepticism about music ontologies, a scepticism related to the widespread use of a philosophical terminology that has lost the connection to the modes of existence of musical works and practices of our day.

3 For a precise and concise description of Platonism, nominalism, fictionalism, perdurantism, endurantism, and eliminativism, see the chapter by David Davies in this volume (pp. 45–64). Another excellent overview of ongoing positions and discussions, including viewpoints from several authors, is the volume Art and Abstract Objects, edited by Christy Mag Uidhir (2012), particularly Andrew Kania’s essay “Platonism vs. Nominalism in Contemporary Musical Ontology” (2012). A further recent edited volume on music ontology is Alessandro Arbo and Marcello Ruta’s Ontologie Musicale: Perspectives et débats (2014).

4 As David Davies mentioned to me (pers. comm.), analytic philosophers acknowledge the existence of some practical forms of knowledge (“knowledge [of] how [to do things]”), and many [analytic philosophers] would recognize that some knowledge is irreducibly embodied. For a detailed account of the complex field of analytic philosophy in relation to music, see David Davies’s forthcoming essay “Analytic Philosophy of Music,” which will be part of the Oxford Handbook on Western Music and Philosophy.
phers, such as Ross P. Cameron, Ben Caplan, Carl Matheson, David Davies, Julian Dodd, Andrew Kania, Chris Tillman, and Guy Rohrbaugh (among others), have contributed major essays on art and musical ontology, renewing an analytic discourse initiated in the 1960s and continued up until the 1980s by music thinkers such as Nelson Goodman, Richard Wollheim, Nicholas Wolterstorff, Jerrold Levinson, Stanley Cavell, Peter Kivy, and Stephen Davies (among others). The problem with this analytic tradition is that, despite their differences, the very structure of its arguments, so fundamentally concerned with the conditions of identity, is incompatible with the objects it pretends to define and explain (see Butt 2002, 62). Analytic philosophers define the identity of things by the necessary conditions that enable such things to belong to a general category, that is to say, they must have an “essence.” It was this kind of analytical landscape that Lydia Goehr, back in 1992, managed to call into question. Her critical perspective addresses not so much whether musical “works” exist as the particular moment in history when a specific way of conceiving musical works became “the” regulative force for musical practices. Goehr first and foremost disclosed the regulative function of the work-concept, showing its profound historicity. As a consequence, and in a second (though critical) moment, the work-concept itself appears as dependent on a historical point of view. As John Butt (2002, 62–63) expressed it, “In Goehr’s account, no analytic theory adequately accounts for the historical boundary of the music that it concerns.” According to Goehr [the work-concept] is an ‘open concept,’ allowing for the subtraction or addition of defining characteristics provided that its continuity is assured and that it is consistently recognisable over its period of operation.” Goehr was simply trying to get hold of the innumerable musical practices that were obviously incompatible with analytic constructions deprived of any sense of historical situatedness and ideally placed in a world without time and imperfections. As Goehr ([1992] 2007, 86) put it, “The lurking danger remains that the [analytic] theories will probably become forever divorced from the phenomena and practices they purportedly seek to explain. . . . The problem with the search for identity conditions resides in the incompatibility between the theoretical demands of identity conditions and the phenomena to be accounted for.” Moreover, the theoretical abstraction of analytic philosophies is not only divorced from musical practice, it is also completely removed from philological studies, from research on sketches, music editorial practices, changes in execution and interpretation paradigms—in a nutshell, from the complexities of history, and from the concrete, processual.

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5 In this respect, David Davies (pers. comm.) reminded me that that both Goodman’s and Wollheim’s writings “explicitly reject the project of defining art, any of the arts, and limit themselves to the more modest task of providing necessary conditions” for the existence of an artwork.

6 Here too, David Davies makes a call for a more nuanced formulation, taking into account recent developments in analytic philosophy. As Davies wrote (pers. comm.): “I think this is the important criticism of much of the analytic work on music (e.g., Kivy), although it is not true of all the writers you cite [in this chapter]. Levinson, for example, restricts his account of ‘what a musical work is’ to musical works of a certain period, and recent work by analytic philosophers has been much more sensitive to differences between musical practices. But it is also true that when Lydia Goehr wrote her book [late 1980s], analytic philosophy of music was, for the most part, guilty of the things she charged.”
and immanent fabrication of all those documents that enable us to think about “musical works” in the first place.

A second problem with contemporary ontologies concerns the problem of representation. Despite their profound differences and quarrels, the three main existing umbrella theories—Platonism, nominalism, fictionalism—share a common trait: they are all sustained by a representational model of thought and by representational musical practices. There is always the performance or the apprehension of something “as” something, or the performance “of” something. Whatever one perceives in any specific here-and-now (a performance, a recording, a description), it is a “representation” of something else. Platonists insist on the primacy of an original idea and of perfectly encapsulated sound structures (Wollheim’s types) that can be represented through performances (Wollheim’s tokens, which can be qualified or fully-qualified). Nominalists focus on the material entities internal to musical practice, rejecting abstracta but keeping the central assumption of performance as based upon the repeatability and variability of an immanently generated but clearly well-articulated work, which crucially pre-exists the performance and to which the performance is compared, thus reintroducing a transcendental entity into the picture. For fictionalists there are no works altogether, but through their construction of works “as if they existed” they commit—in practical terms—to the same model of performance as presenting (or representing) a pre-given musical entity (even if phantasmatic). They all agree that there “are” musical works (the exception being the eliminatists), and they all look for “what kind of things they are.” However, despite their considerable differences, these three main currents of music ontology further share a common set of fundamental questions that relate to the conditions of identity of musical works: What exactly is a musical work? Are musical works abstract ideas or concrete things? How can a musical work be identified as this musical work? How can an instantiation of a work be considered as adequate, legitimate, or, to use the language of ontologists, “fully qualified”? In addition to the conditions of identity, these questions also relate to the criteria of judgement of any given appearance of a musical work, thus doubly pertaining to a representational mode of thinking, a mode that is actually of Aristotelian imprint rather than Platonic.

In this double sense, the vast majority of current music ontologies could be seen as actually relying on the Aristotelian world of representation. But this world is umbilically related to Plato’s theory of ideas. The very notion of representation implies something prior to it that has the capacity for “being represented.” As Gilles Deleuze argued in a long section of *Difference and Repetition* (1994, 262–304), the Aristotelian world of representation is enabled, first and foremost by Plato’s theory of ideas, and crucially by its intrinsic moral motivation.

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7 Broadly agreeing with me (“this is true of mainstream analytic ontology of music”), David Davies stresses that there are some exceptions, among which he counts Kania’s paper “All Play and No Work” (2011) (which rejects the assumption among many analytic writers that most jazz performances also fall under the classical paradigm) and Stephen Davies’s account of jazz performances (2001).
Plato inaugurates and initiates because he evolves within a theory of Ideas which will allow the deployment of representation. In his case, however, a moral motivation in all its purity is avowed: the will to eliminate simulacra or phantasms has no motivation apart from the moral. . . . Later, the world of representation will more or less forget its moral origin and presuppositions. These will nevertheless continue to act in the distinction between the originary and the derived, the original and the sequel, the ground and the grounded, which animates the hierarchies of a representative theology by extending the complementarity between model and copy. Representation[,] thus[,] is a site of transcendental illusion. (Deleuze 1994, 265, my emphasis).

While discussing and critically challenging Plato’s notions of copy and simulacrum, Deleuze observes—in the conclusion to *Difference and Repetition*—that from a Platonist perspective the copy can always be systematically distinguished from the simulacrum by subordinating its own difference to a fourfold principle: of the Same, the Similar, the Analogous, and the Opposed (ibid.). According to Deleuze, these strict verifiable correspondences do not per se imply a system based upon representation: “with Plato these instances are not yet distributed as they will be in the deployed world of representation (from Aristotle onwards)” (ibid.). It is in the transition from the Platonic world to the world of representation that “a slippage occurs” (ibid.). As Miguel de Beistegui (analysing and paraphrasing Deleuze’s reversal of Platonism) makes clear:

> It is only superficially that the Platonic method involves dividing something according to its natural articulations, that is, according to genus and species. In other words, the operation of specification, from genus to species and all the way to what Aristotle calls “differences,” with which Plato’s work is sometimes associated, is only a preliminary step towards a more significant goal. Or, to put it differently, the Aristotelian operation of division and specification is itself an effect of, and a response to, the image of thought that Plato had identified for philosophy. (Beistegui 2012, 59–60)

Thus, it was actually after Plato that “the sameness of the Platonic Idea . . . gives way to the identity of the concept, oriented towards the form of identity in the object, and grounded in a self-identical thinking subject” (ibid., 61). A “thinking subject” that “brings to the concept its subjective concomitants: memory, recognition and self-consciousness” (Deleuze 1994, 266). In this new representational model, both objects and subjects are taken as being perfectly defined, transparent, and uncorrupted. This is what allows analytical investigations (of the objects, but also of their coded, i.e., linguistic articulations), on the one side, and for phenomenological considerations (of and by the subjects), on the other. The main operation for knowing the world becomes recognition, and difference in thought disappears because, as Beistegui (2012, 61) observes, “the image of thought as recognition . . . requires the concordance and collaboration of all faculties (perception, memory, reason, imagination, judgment, etc.) in the presentation of the same object, or the object in the form of self-identity. Far from breaking with the doxa, and becoming paradoxical, the dominant image of thought inherited from Platonism solidifies into an orthodoxy, all the more
difficult to shake off in that its hidden, underlying presupposition is moral through and through.”

In this light, and strictly in this particular sense, one can appropriate for musical ontology the Deleuzian qualifications regarding the problem of representation in Plato and Aristotle. Surprisingly, the major existing musical ontologies (even those not officially labelled “Platonic”) can be traced back to Plato’s theory of Ideas. The fundamental questions of the diverse music ontologies assume the existence of identifiable and stabilised musical works (be it abstracta or concreta), of uncorrupted subjects capable of immaculately apprehending them, and of a transparent link between a work’s written codification and its sonic manifestation in performance. They do not take into account the energetic, intensive conditions and processes of their coming into being, nor the intricacies of their transmission throughout time and history. They rely on a grounding model based upon the notions of original, copy, and simulacra, even if they disagree in the concrete definitions of these notions. And they agree on an ontological partition of the world into genera, species, and individuals, fully adhering to an Aristotelian conception of categories and hierarchies. The danger of falling into scholastic “great chains of being” is lurking at the door.8 The difficulty is to overcome rigidly entrenched beliefs, which keep many positions jailed in the sterile prisons of analytical logic and language games. As philosopher Manuel DeLanda (2012, 223) has put it, “For many analytical philosophers abandoning the categories of the general and the particular is a difficult step because many of them were trained to believe that all of mathematics had been reduced to logic.9 . . . It is not surprising, therefore, that realist analytical philosophers tend to speak like Aristotle, defining the identity of things by the necessary and sufficient conditions to belong to a general category. In other words, defining identity by the possession of an essence.”

This Aristotelian influence is manifest in some music ontological accounts, which explicitly refer to Aristotelian categories to ground their arguments. Curiously, this is particularly observable among the so-called Platonists. Julian Dodd, for example, when discussing norm-types, directly uses arguments from the field of biological species and individuals—his example being the domestic dog (Canis familiaris), about which he observes that even a dog missing an ear or a leg is still a token of the species (type) “dog”: “There can certainly be improperly formed tokens of The Domestic Dog (Canis familiaris): albino dogs and dogs missing an ear or a leg are nevertheless tokens of the type. And it is a truism that, just as long as an inscription is sufficiently close to being correctly formed, it counts as an inscription of a certain word, albeit one of which its author should not feel particularly proud” (Dodd 2007, 33). Jerrold Levinson, who defends a softer version of Platonism, accepting that composers are the “creators” of their own compositions (something that pure Platonists do not accept), in turn recurs to the hedgehog as his example: “The creatures we call

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8 In this respect, Gunnar Hindrichs writes that “Every ontology manifests a conceptual scheme that articulates the great chain of being” (see Hindrichs, in this book, pp. 67, my emphasis).

9 Against DeLanda, David Davies (pers. comm.) claims that he is describing something closer to logicism, a view of mathematics to which “very few analytic philosophers [would] subscribe.”
‘hedgehogs’ possess a certain structure and stand in certain causal relations to some particular creatures that came into existence at a given past date. . . . Musical works . . . are indicated structures too, and thus types that do not already exist but must instead be initiated. The same is true of poems, plays, and novels—each of these is an entity more individual and temporally bound than the pure verbal structure embodied in it” (Levinson 1990, 81–82, my emphasis).

Music ontologists, thus, talk about species, claiming them as means to further support their own art theories. As Rohrbaugh (2012, 36) wrote, “Orthodox views hold that species membership is a part-whole relation and that species are scattered individuals, perhaps four-dimensional sums.” Critically, the problem with these views is that they don’t allow, and they actually repress, any thought that could lead to the consideration of concrete and historical individuals as fundamental constitutive parts of musical works. On the contrary, “works” (especially with a capital W) become fixed, petrified, and highly reified generalities. Unfortunately, as Rohrbaugh (ibid., 37) puts it, “when one asks, ‘What sort of thing is a symphony?’ what one really gets in response is just an expression of the speaker’s own aesthetic views about what is and is not important about symphonies, in short, ideology.” Attempts to emphasise, or simply to propose the centrality of historical individuals, of elements that appear in a precise moment in time, that undergo changes throughout historical time, that disappear or that reappear in another century, are boldly excluded and rejected. This was the case with Guy Rohrbaugh’s concept of the “continuants,” which found resistances so strong that he himself (in a kind of externally induced self-critique) was forced to admit several shortcomings of his own (in my view interesting) formulations.

Thus, if one is aiming at a renewal of ontological discourses, if one wishes to propose and sustain a new image of work, one has to look farther away from the field of available music ontologies. One has to search for something capable of replacing Aristotelian metaphysics, for some sort of “image of thought” that doesn’t operate under the rules of the three Aristotelian categories of entities: genus, species, and individual. Moreover, such an image of thought must also overturn Platonism, in the strict sense of readdressing the fundamental distinction between icons and phantasms, between images and simulacra. In a nutshell, it must exclude both categorical hierarchies and idealist transcendence.

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10 In my view, this is the point where Rohrbaugh could have found a way out of the analytic tradition, making a critique of what he just so precisely described. Unfortunately, he continues alluding to the Aristotelian way of thinking about species as “scattered individuals” whose constitutive parts are individual creatures (his constituentes, which have been strongly criticised by music Platonists). Within the ontological account that I propose further down, Rohrbaugh’s continuants can find a new mode of existence, independent of transcendent systems and from hierarchical categorisations.

11 P. D. Magnus (2012, 108) even writes that Julian Dodd pronounced an “accusation” against Rohrbaugh’s idea that “historical individuals are familiar parts of the world.”
2. Beyond transcendence: grasping a Deleuzian ontology

The poisoned gift of Platonism is to have introduced transcendence into philosophy, to have given transcendence a plausible philosophical meaning. (Deleuze 1998, 137)

If one is looking for some kind of ally in the search for a novel, nonhierarchical, and fully immanent ontology, Gilles Deleuze seems to be one of the best placed philosophers to help us. As is well known, the overturning of Platonism (in the wake of Nietzsche’s famous claim) and the overcoming of “representation” were two of Gilles Deleuze’s life-long projects, and they are at the very core of his primary thesis for his Doctorat d’État, his famous book from 1968, Différence et répétition (see Deleuze 1994). Deleuze himself did not “officially” write texts specifically devoted to ontological issues, but, as Constantin V. Boundas (2005b, 191) has written, “For Deleuze, philosophy is ontology,” and one could even claim that his books (also those co-authored with Félix Guattari) make significant contributions, not to “one” ontology but to several, multiple ontologies. Crucially, Deleuze’s philosophy is one of difference, a difference that remains unsubordinated to “identity” and to “being,” rejecting hierarchical categories, and insisting on the profound reality (and realism) of his concepts of the virtual, the intensive, and the actual, which manifest themselves in various assemblages of energies, forces, and tendencies, making the world in which humans and non-humans live.

Among other philosophies of difference (such as Derrida’s), one must stress the point that while rejecting laws and axioms, Deleuze “offers us principles and methods . . . whereas Derrida offers us an ethos and style of writing about difference explicitly resistant to the emergence of principles or methods” (Williams 2013, 27). For someone operating in the creative field of artistic research, which is by definition a “constructivist” field of activity (as it generates objects or events of artistic nature), a permanent resistance to principles and methods would be counterproductive, if not simply sterile. That’s why philosophers like Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, or Félix Guattari are so relevant to artistic research: they offer a possibility for thought and practice outside laws and axiomatic principles, but they also enable the positive fabrication of materialities issuing from intensive processes. “Deleuze’s ontology,” as Constantin V. Boundas (2005b, 191) makes clear, “is a rigorous attempt to think of process and metamorphosis—becoming—not as a transition or transformation from one substance to another or a movement from one point to another, but rather as an attempt to think of the real as a process” (my emphasis). If the real is thought of as a process, its processuality simultaneously is fed by and generates a continuous flux of forces and intensities, which reveal themselves only in the very moment of their transductive actualisation. These forces and intensities do generate forms and matter, but it would be a mistake to think of them exclusively in terms of things and their qualities. Extension and extended magnitudes are only the result of the intensive genesis of the extended. “Becoming” is not “becoming-Being,” but a much more complex and elaborated process of per-
manent actualisation, of endlessly “becoming-something-different.” Instead of a linear process from one actual state to another, becoming is better conceived as an intensive movement from an actual state of affairs, through a dynamic field of virtual tendencies, to the actualisation of this field of forces in a new state of affairs.¹²

In what follows, I will briefly introduce five key notions that enable us to grasp the ontology of Gilles Deleuze, including the couple actual–virtual, intensity, individual and universal singularities, topological unfoldings, and multiplicities.¹³

Actual/virtual

The terminological doublet virtual–actual is central to the ontology of Gilles Deleuze, being present in his books and essays since his first published texts on Henri Bergson in 1956. Actual and virtual describe the fundamental domains of Deleuze’s differential ontology. According to Anne Sauvagnargues (2003, 22, my translation), “the actual designates the present and material state of things, while the virtual refers to everything that is not currently/presently here (including incorporeal, past, or ideal events).” It is the exchange and communication between the actual and the virtual that enable a dynamics of becoming as different/ciation and creation. Primary differences of energy and energetic potentials generate “differentiation” (virtual structure) and “differentiation” (the genesis of actuality). Such dynamics always happen in the form of an event—an event being the individuation of differentiation, and the actualisation of differentiation. One cannot overstress that for Deleuze, both the virtual and the actual are real. As Deleuze (1994, 208–9) himself has put it: “The virtual is opposed not to the real but to the actual. The virtual is fully real. . . . Indeed, the virtual must be defined as strictly a part of the real object—as though the object had one part of itself in the virtual into which it plunged as though into an objective dimension. . . . The reality of the virtual consists of the differential elements and relations along with the singular points which correspond to them.”

Importantly, Deleuze’s virtual is by no means to be understood in terms of “virtual reality,” but, on the contrary, as something absolutely real, that is even “actually” perceived as tension or inconsistencies in/of the actual, as a diagrammatic reservoir of effectively potential actualisations (some of which will affect the world, some of which not), but that exist in a topological space of possibilities.¹⁴ Moreover, the distinction between the virtual and the actual is

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¹² For a thorough discussion of the relations between the couple virtual–real and the notion of becoming, see Boundas (2007, 489–91).
¹³ Other concepts, such as the couple molar–molecular, the dark precursor, the quasi-cause, transduction, or the event are not addressed here for the sake of space, though they are also central to Deleuze’s ontological construction.
¹⁴ It is in this sense that Deleuze, directly inspired by Bergson, could talk of a past that has never been present (the virtual as immemorial past), and of a future that will never be present (the virtual as a never-attainable messianic future). This link between the couple virtual–real and past–future temporalities prevents any reification of the past (as in Plato’s recollection), or of the future (as in some teleological ideologies) as it presupposes non-determining and non-deterministic tendencies.
not unilateral, nor is it ontologically black-boxed. This distinction is pro cessual and differential, making the “a priori and the a posteriori . . . a product of individuating processes rather than their condition” (Toscano 2009, 389). The “virtual–real” might lead (under precise, yet unforeseeable transductive conditions) to an “actual–real,” which, in turn (as soon as it emerges-in-the-world) fabricates a new “virtual–real.” Without resembling the actual, the virtual nonetheless has the capacity to bring about actualisation, and yet the virtual never coincides or can be identified with its actualisation. The virtual is the whole set of forces, energies, potentials, and intensities that exist, that are real, yet that are not actualised in the here-and-now of the present. The actual are all the forces, energies, potentials, and intensities that are currently happening in the here-and-now of our presence. There is no actual without virtual, and no virtual that cannot be actualised.

**Intensity**

Both the virtual and the actual appear, then, as the result of concrete energetic processes, involving the passage, the relay, or the transformation of one type of energy into another, crucially establishing a connection between two or more series with different energetic potentials. The virtual does not exist a priori to the intensive processes that generate it; it does not pre-deterministically define the processes of its actualisation (which would imply a kind of neo-Platonism). At the same time, the actual is not an “image” (a “copy”) of a pre-existing model, but it emerges progressively as the result of concrete intensive processes of onto- and morphogenesis. Before the definition of any ontological category, there are several constantly ongoing ontological processes, which are summarised—in Deleuze’s terminology—under the notion of the intensive. Intensive processes generate singularities in the two sides of the real: individual singularities in the actual–real, and universal singularities in the virtual–real. Thus, Deleuze’s notion of intensity, the pre-individual relationship between two or more fields with different potentials, gains centrality within his ontological scheme. Intensities are not ontological entities or categories (as the virtual and the actual can be considered to be), they are real events “whose mode of existence is to actualise themselves in states of affairs” (Boundas 2005a, 131).

A thorough discussion of the complex relations between the virtual, the actual, and the intensive would lie outside the scope of this chapter, especially as there have been several attempts to clarify this topic, each leading to significantly different understandings.¹⁵ Be that as it might be, what seems clear from all these different understandings of Deleuze’s ontology, is that “intensity holds

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¹⁵ In fact, there is no consensus about the precise placement of these three notions within Deleuze’s ontological system. Dale Clisby’s recent essay “Intensity in Context: Thermodynamics and Transcendental Philosophy” (2017, especially 250–55) offers a short, yet precise, overview of the three main currently available positions: (1) those who align the intensive with the virtual, which is the (critical) position of Peter Hallward (2006) and Alain Badiou (2000); (2) those who think the intensive as a third ontological domain, as has been convincingly proposed by Manuel DeLanda (2002) and John Protevi (2013), who excavated the precise scientific influences in the writings of Deleuze; and (3) those who consider the intensive as being part of the actual, or as “the being of the actual” as Jon Roffe (2012, as quoted in Clisby 2017, 253) has suggested.
the true key for Deleuze’s metaphysical system,” as Clisby (2017, 251) pointedly summarises. Critically, Deleuze’s ontology is an ontology of forces and of actualisations, not an ontology of actualised phenomena. As its object, it takes not the completed form (be it ideal or nominal) but formation itself. In the words of James Williams (2013, 42), “Deleuze’s view is that no object is fully accounted for through its actual properties since the changes that it has undergone and will undergo, and the differences implied in those changes, must be considered to be part of the object.” In this sense, as long as we insist on the existence of well-defined things, Deleuze’s position will not be grasped, and his case to overturn Plato and Aristotle will not prevail. With Williams (ibid., 69), one can say that “to be is not to be a well-defined thing with recognisable limits [but] on the contrary, it is to be a pure movement or variation in relation to well-defined things.” The process of actualisation does not occur in a vacuum: “at every moment there exists a field of intensity implicated in the explicated objects of experience” (Clisby 2017, 254).

Within a dynamic system, any process of individuation starts from intensity, leading to the emergence of singularities, whether actual singularities or virtual ones. In the fifth chapter of Difference and Repetition, Deleuze (1994, 247) clearly states that individuation precedes and gives rise to actualisation: “Individuation does not presuppose any differenciation; it gives rise to it.” Thus, “every differenciation presupposes a prior intense field of individuation” (ibid.). Critically, this “prior intense field of individuation” is a problematic field. There is no transparent nor straightforward correspondence between the prior field of individuation, the field of individuation itself, and the individuated singularity it affords. In all phases and at all moments of the individuating process there are multiple and incommensurable forces playing a complex game of intensive tendencies and unfoldings. Any intensive process is a metastable flux of energetic discharges, potentials, and tendencies. And whereas this differenciation establishes a problematisation, the concrete actualisations of that virtual field express differenciations as the constitution of solutions (by local integrations), leading to the formation of actual things. Such things are formed by different sets of specific individual singularities that are actualised in the here-and-now, in the present. The process of differenciation happens through transduction, changing one type of energy into another, critically leading to the formation of new and unexpected individuations, which contain emergent properties that were not predetermined in advance. These actualisations result in individual singularities, which can be things, objects, or documents, all with two parts: an extensive part (quantitatively measurable and divisible) and an intensive part (qualitatively active and non-divisible). The actual things in the world are thus not only the result of an intensive genesis, as they remain processual, even within their physical constraints. They are never (or only very rarely) petrified in a final state of zero energy. Intensive processes never stop and never come to an end.
Singularities

From the working together of the notions of virtual-actual, intensity, and transduction (or modulation as Anne Sauvagnargues prefers to call it), one starts grasping the virtual diagrams and the actual things that populate Deleuze’s materialist world—a world that radically departs from, and that is totally different from, the Aristotelian system of categories. With the couple virtual–actual and with intensity, we have the ontological “domains” of Deleuze’s system. I will now turn to those entities that Deleuze acknowledges as existing in the world. For Deleuze, the actual world is populated only by individual singularities that often appear as populations of individual singularities, which exist in different spatio-temporal scales and in different modes of interaction among individual components. The actual world is the world of actual things, and all these things have the same ontological status—thus, no hierarchies, but a flat ontology to start with. As DeLanda (2010, 83) makes clear: “In [Deleuze’s] approach all actual entities are considered to be individual singularities, that is, all belong to the lowest level of Aristotle’s ontological hierarchy, while the roles of the two upper levels are performed by universal singularities.”

Every individual singularity emerges as the outcome of a historical process, it is the concrete result of intensive processes that occur in the world. Every singularity is produced or fabricated in a specific point in time and space. So, for example, atoms of hydrogen are fabricated inside stars; there is no “hydrogen in general,” but a concrete population of materially existing hydrogen atoms (DeLanda 2010, 85). Likewise, there is no canis familiaris in general, but rather a population of single dogs, each of which is an individual singularity, unique and unrepeatable (as a simple DNA test can prove). As every individual singularity is unique, special, and remarkable, what deserves attention are not the “species” but the moment of “speciation,” that particular moment when something changes state or phase, when a mutation occurs, when a cosmic phenomenon happens. Bigger populations of singular individuals define “larger individuals,” and what matters are those moments when a new species appears, and when it disappears. Species are historical entities that depend on the concrete evolution, transformation, and mutations of all the individual singularities that define them—one individual at a time, one by one. The focus on such ontogenetical processes, on intensive individuations, enables Deleuze to populate reality exclusively with immanent entities, eliminating any transcendent ones, such as the essences of Aristotle’s two upper categories, genus and species. For

17 Deleuze’s extremely dense critique of Aristotle—which essentially focuses on his concept of “difference,” and which aims at showing that Aristotle’s definition of difference is problematic and misses a deeper understanding of the term—is to be found in paragraphs three to five of the second section of the first chapter (“Difference in Itself”) of Difference and Repetition (Deleuze 1994, 38–44). On this difficult passage, see also Williams (2013, 64–68), Somers-Hall (2013, 23–30), and Hughes (2009, 40–42).
18 As this is a notoriously difficult task, I support my inquiry with reference to authors who have already dealt with this topic in great depth. In addition to Constantin V. Boundas, I am deeply indebted to Manuel DeLanda’s several accounts of a Deleuzian ontology, to Anne Sauvagnargues on its implications for art, and to Arkady Plotnitsky for his invaluable clarifications in relation to mathematics (see Boundas 2005b, 2005c, 2007; DeLanda 2002, 2006, 2010, 2012; Sauvagnargues 2003, 2005, 2013, 2016; Plotnitsky 2006, 2009).
Aristotle the world is already divided by general and specific categories that are eternal, unchangeable, and not subject to corruption and decay. For Deleuze, on the other hand, the world of discrete things emerges constantly, as solutions to problems that are defined by conditions that do not determine a result, nor impose consistency. Finally, as DeLanda writes, “as these ontological problems undergo a process of actualization they become progressively differentiated into a multiplicity of actual solutions. This differentiation proceeds in a fully historical way, and may only reveal a portion of the possibility space at a time” (2012, 236, my emphasis). Thus, the Aristotelian categories of the general and the particular (in musical Platonism: the types and the tokens) can be replaced in a Deleuzian ontology by two radically immanent entities: the universal singular and the individual singular.

**Topological unfoldings**

Influenced by theories coming from mathematics and embryology, Deleuze thinks of the actualisations that lead to the individuation of singularities as happening through a sequence of “topological unfoldings.” In very simple mathematical terms, a topological entity is one that can be folded into another form without losing its identity. As philosopher and mathematician Arkady Plotnitsky (2006, 191) defined it, “Geometry has to do with measurements, while topology disregards measurement, and deals only with the structure of space qua space and with the essential shapes and figures.” Differently than in Euclidian geometry, in topological geometry a circle, for example, can be stretched into an ellipse or into a quasi-square without losing its topological identity. A sphere can be compressed into a cylinder, a cone, or a pear-like shape, its topological identity remaining untouched. In an essay on mathematician Bernhard Riemann (who, together with his teacher Gauss, was one of the inventors of topology), Plotnitsky (2009, 201) is very precise about this identity: “Insofar as one deforms a given figure continuously (that is, insofar as one does not separate points previously connected and, conversely, does not connect points previously separated) the resulting figure is considered the same.” However, spheres are topologically different from tori, and they cannot be converted into each other without disjoining their connected points.

If one extends these mathematical notions to biology, genetics, and embryology, one can think of the unfolding of an embryo as a matter of topological transformations, or of a vertebrate animal as the result of topological changes and developments. French naturalist Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire thought (at the beginning of the nineteenth century, i.e., before Darwin) that species could be conceived without genera, as transformation (transmutation was his word) from one into the other. This leads to the perspective that the world can be conceived first and foremost as a continuum of intensity that becomes segmented into species only as certain tendencies are manifested and certain capacities exercised (see DeLanda 2010, 91). These remarks are extremely relevant as we attempt to eliminate transcendent entities from the world. Every single animal or embryo is the result of concrete, immanent, intensive processes, and is absolutely not an “instantiation” of an idea, of a “genus,” or of a “species.” We need
to think of an animal as a topological animal (ibid., 96), which can be folded and stretched into the multitude of different animal species that exist on Earth. Of course, this is only physically possible at the level of the embryos, which are flexible enough to endure these transformations. Moreover, every topological or “virtual” animal must have the capacity of being divergently actualised (leading to concrete divergent individual singularities), and each actualisation must be inheritable with a slight degree of unpredictability. We come close to describing DNA structures, and it is indeed “the structure of the space of possible body plans that replaces the genus ‘Animal’” (ibid., 97). The relevant causal agents (chromosomes, genes, genes marking axes of longitude and latitude, cellular populations, etc.) do not operate and act as “formal causes,” but as “efficient causes.” As DeLanda highlights, “Aristotelian species like ‘Horse’ and ‘Human’ should be replaced by historically constituted species that have the same ontological status as the organisms that compose them, that is, that are individual singularities; and the genus ‘Animal’ should be replaced by a space of possibilities in which the different body plans are universal singularities, capable of being divergently actualized into a large number of sub-phyla and classes” (DeLanda 2010, 102, my emphasis).

On a higher scale, biological populations of individuals (what we use to call “species” in common language) are “as singular, as unique, and as historically contingent as individual organisms: species are born when their gene pool is closed to external flows of genetic materials through reproductive isolation, and they die through extinction” (ibid., 93–94). As today is widely accepted, no species is sempiternal, they are all historically contingent and ephemeral. Even stars are ephemeral: they exist for a limited amount of time, even if this is beyond our human capacity of imagining. Everything is ephemeral, everything is contingent, everything is part of a continuous relay of intensive energies from one actualisation to the next, without being predetermined and without being predictable. The diversity of entities that populate the world are bounded in extension, but they are generated by invisible and temporal processes set in motion by immanent differences of intensity—not by any transcendental “substance” or “essence,” which are no more than unreal reified generalities.

**Multiplicities**

In addition to the singularities and topological intensive transductive processes, the concept of “multiplicity” is absolutely crucial for a Deleuzian ontology. It is one of the most recurrent concepts in the works of Deleuze—alone or in collaboration with Félix Guattari—and it finds its roots not in philosophy or linguistics, but in mathematics, particularly in the subfields of differential geometry, group theory, and dynamical systems theory. Deleuze mentioned it early on, in his 1966 book *Bergsonism*, where the subtitle of the second chapter is precisely “Théorie des multiplicités” (Deleuze 1991, 37–49). Although

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19 This has been exhaustively disclosed and explained by DeLanda (2002, 2010). A very different perspective, critical of DeLanda’s assumptions and interpretation, has been offered by Mary Beth Mader (2017).

20 A subtitle that, unfortunately, is not rendered in the 1991 English translation of the book.
originally derived from Bernhard Riemann’s differential mathematics, Deleuze first uses it in relation to time (duration) and space, particularly focusing on the notion that time is the condition for change or becoming. As Eugene B. Young (2013, 210) observed, this has profound consequences: “If [time] is taken as the foundation for conceiving space, then space (or objects and subjects within it) is not subjected to transcendent criteria but must be conceived in terms of difference and intensity.”

For Deleuze, an important part of the role played by the concept of multiplicity is to further enable a replacement of the Aristotelian concept of essence. The essence of a thing is what explains its identity, and consequently how many different objects resemble each other by the fact that they share such an essence. However, in a Deleuzian ontology, “a species . . . is not defined by its essential traits but rather by the morphogenetic process that gave rise to it” (DeLanda 2002, 9–10). As we have seen before, species are historically and contingently constituted entities, not the representatives of timeless categories. While an essentialist worldview sees species as static, a morphogenetic account, such as the one offered by Deleuze, is inherently dynamic. As Boundas (2007, 489–90) has put it: “Deleuze’s ontology is an ontology of forces attempting to correct the mistake we make whenever we think exclusively in terms of things and their qualities: in privileging extension and extended magnitudes, we overlook the intensive genesis of the extended.”

Critically, Deleuze’s notion of space, surfaces, and points on a surface is directly indebted to the mathematical constructions of Gauss and Riemann, particularly to their surfaces, which are spaces in themselves and thus do not need to have an additional (n+1) dimension perceived. These are purely immanent surfaces; they are not placed within a transcendent space. In such surfaces, which build a dynamical system, each point in the surface becomes a possible state for the system—be it in an actual or virtual mode of existence in the present moment. The complete space is a collection of all possible states that the system can have. Crucially, Riemann also discovered that some points more probably “occur” than others—these are called topological singularities. As there are too many possible points in a system (all its universal singularities), we cannot map them all. Instead, we can map the topological singularities (also called “attractors”). This is what allows for a replacement of hierarchical categories and of the necessary and sufficient conditions for those categories: a topological space of possibilities, where individual singularities are actualised entities, and universal singularities are virtual points. It is the virtual network of connectors between those topological singularities that makes the structure (the diagram) of a dynamic system. As Deleuze famously stated, “the reality of the virtual is structure” (Deleuze 1994, 209, my emphasis).

I insist on the crucial aspect that these universal singularities are by no means to be confused with Platonistic ideas. They are real and effective parts of a dynamic system, and they can be actualised instantly at any given time of the system’s lifespan. They are not the result of predeterminations, nor are they pointing towards necessary or unidirectional solutions.
To avoid any possible misunderstanding over Deleuze’s use of this term, one has to stress right away that structure is understood by Deleuze in its mathematical and anthropological sense, not in the conventional musicological sense of the “fixed system of relations” or “infra-structure” of a given piece. As Christopher Hasty (2010, 10n23) has put it, “Deleuze’s understanding of structure is quite different from that of musicology or linguistics, in which structure is regarded as a fixed form, a substance underlying the accidents of performance. Structure for Deleuze points to the differentiated multiplicity of Idea.”

James Williams (2013, 160) expressed a similar remark, clarifying that “structure as multiplicity is in movement and does not give priority to fixed structures.” Multiplicities specify the structure of spaces of possibilities, which, in turn, offer an explanation for the regularities and inconsistencies in the morphogenetic processes, and in the concrete, material actualisations of the individual singularities. “The reality of the virtual consists of the differential elements and relations along with the singular points which correspond to them. The reality of the virtual is structure. We must avoid giving the elements and relations which form a structure an actuality which they do not have, and withdrawing from them a reality which they have” (Deleuze 1994, 209).

In the last sentence of this quotation we find crucial arguments against the two dominant schools of music ontology. Nominalists should not insist in defending at all costs the actuality of all singularities that are part of a musical work (“we must avoid giving the elements and relations which form a structure an actuality which they do not have” [ibid., my emphasis]), and Platonists should not axiomatically deny the material and real existence of singularities that are part of a musical work (“we must avoid . . . withdrawing from them a reality which they have” [ibid., my emphasis]). As multiplicities, what we usually call “musical works” are diagrams of the virtual, that is, they are real but not actual, and they are capable of divergent actualisations in several different media, times, and modes of appearance.

To conclude this section, one can summarise Deleuze’s ontological proposal as defining a world view made of three separate, but intrinsically interrelated domains. One is the domain of actual individual singularities, of materially existing and observable products of natural and human invention, which can be defined by their extensive properties, by their length, area, volume, weight, number of components, and so on. Next there is a domain of intensive processes (transduction), defined by differences of potential, flows of energy, phase shifts, and critical thresholds, which change quantity into quality, and quality into quantity. They link the individual singularities to the universal singularities that remain virtual, some of which are more likely to be actualised than others (topological singularities). Finally, there is the domain of virtual structure, the topological space of possibilities, which diagrammatically maps the universal singularities.
irtual Works—Actual Things

ties, and that accounts in a purely immanent way for the regularities (but also for the inconsistencies) in the processes and in the individuations. The virtual diagram cannot exist without the actual and virtual singularities that build it. Nothing would happen in the world without the continuous relay of intensities from the virtual to the actual, and vice versa.

This leads to an ontology that is processual, immanentist, and based upon difference (differentiation), a difference that is conceived not negatively, as lack of resemblance, but productively, as that which drives dynamic processes. Epistemologically, it defines a problematic epistemology (or an epistemology of problems and problematisations), one that gets rid of the general laws of axiomatic epistemologies without denying the objectivity of physical knowledge, which is now investigated by immanent distributions of the singular. The notion of truth is also devalued, as the dynamic processes are not predetermined, nor are they predictable. Ethically, the world emerges as profoundly transformed: a closed, finished and authoritative world pervaded by transcendental ideas and categories gives place to an open world of immanent events and singularities, “full of divergent processes yielding novel and unexpected entities, the kind of world that would not sit still long enough for us to take a snapshot of it and present it as the final truth” (DeLanda 2002, 6).

3. Virtual works, actual things: towards a new image of musical work

Deleuze’s philosophy has the potential to revolutionise other disciplines. (Williams 2013, 234)

At this point, the choice of our title for the Orpheus Academy 2016 is clear. What traditionally, or at least for the last two hundred years, have been called “musical works” are specific “zones,” or partial elements of something that can be more aptly described and thought about in terms of musical “multiplicities,” which are fabricated by intensive processes that generate virtual structures and actual things. Music Platonists focus only on the structures, the reality of which they deny and which they conceive as purely abstract, fixed, immobile, and eternal. For their part, nominalists rely only on extensive individual singularities, historically contingent, but also fixed and totally defined, to which they deny a virtual (intensive) component. For a Deleuzian-inspired music ontology, musical multiplicities must be grounded in the actual, even as some of the forces that the actual summons might remain virtual. Both—abstract structures and petrified strata—have to be overcome. Structures are mobile and fluid, while strata are constantly being dismantled and reshaped. As Michael Gallope stated, in his attempt to define “a Deleuzian musical work,”

Deleuze offers a glimpse of something different: music for him is certainly based in a materiality of sound, but is not reducible to any social or perceptual situation. It has a strange kind of autonomy, one that is oriented towards the absolute, but not as a
vehicle for the actual work's content. Incredibly, he tries to think a musical work that
is once more ideal and more empirical than the common perspectives. A Deleuzian
musical work would be more ideal than a Platonist view since the logic of sensation
has no “fallen” or exterior moment like performance external to itself. And it would
be more empirical than a historicist perspective since it takes no recourse to the
regulative norms of any historical moment. (Gallope 2008, 117–18)

Michael Gallope’s essay “Is There a Deleuzian Musical Work?” (2008) is, to my
knowledge, the only serious attempt so far to think about music ontology from
a Deleuzian perspective. However, he places his inquiry within currently avail-
able ontologies, using Peter Kivy and Lydia Goehr as two examples of the polar-
isation of the debate between Platonism and historicising views. My take is
different: I think it is indispensable to think outside existing music ontologies,
to come up with a new image of work (which replaces the word “work” itself),
and to appropriate for music ontology the basic features of Deleuze’s ontol-
ogy—and not so much what Deleuze said or wrote about music. So, I don’t
think there is “a Deleuzian musical work,” which is Gallope’s central concern.
There cannot be a Deleuzian musical “Work” (with a capital W). There can only
be a Deleuzian musical work, which is a multiplicity made of virtual topological
singularities, actual individual singularities (containing a virtual component in
themselves), and intensive transductive processes (generating the virtual and
the actual).

Under this new image of “work,” every musical multiplicity has two halves:
a virtual image and an actual image, resonating with Deleuze’s statement that
“every object is double without it being the case that the two halves resemble
one another, one being a virtual image and the other an actual image” (1994, 209,
my emphasis).

If we consider these two images in relation to musical works, one can think
of the virtual image as the one relating to the structure, to the diagram of a
musical work, with all its topological singularities. It remains ideal without
being abstract (because those singularities are real; that is, they “exist”), and is
dependent on the quantity and quality of the concrete mapping of its univer-
sal singularities made by every single person. Thus, there are as many virtual
images of a musical work as persons “thinking” of it. Every single person has
his or her own and unique “diagram” of any given musical work. This diagram is
always individual, and can only be “thought” if one starts from the topological
singularities that enable us to think about it in the first place. It is by no means
something prior to our mapping of the singularities; it is not an abstract or
transcendental entity. On the contrary, it is the most extreme immanently gen-
erated construction, being dependent on an innumerable amount of concrete
singularities working together in a specific assemblage of forces, intensities,
and tendencies (remember that every singularity is the result of intensive
ergetic processes of individuation, thus, not “sempiternal” Platonic fic-
tions). In order to emerge, this “structural” image requires a “transcendental
empiricism,” an enormous (“transcendental”) amount of events, of individual
and topological singularities, of intensive processes, of forces and tendencies
empirically experienced by every single agent (performer, listener, reader, etc.).
Thus, virtual images of a musical work are potentially infinite—there are no “absolute” or universally intelligible musical works. Every musical “work” is a space in itself, which has to be navigated internally by every single actant—it is not placed within an overarching (n+1) transcendental space containing it. Thus, a musical work is as many “works” as the people thinking of it. The virtual image, thus defines a problematic field, determining the virtual content of a musical work as a problem, as an ideal (though not abstract) constellation of differential topological singularities.

Whereas this differentiation (with a “d”) establishes a problematisation, the concrete actualisations of that virtual field express differentiations (with a “c”) as the constitution of solutions, leading to the formation of actual images. Such images are formed by different sets of specific individual singularities that are actualised in the here-and-now, in the present (and in the presence) of a receiver, be it a reader of a score, a listener of a recording or concert, or an active performer of the music (or a non-human for non-human forms of expression). The process of differentiation happens through transduction, changing one type of energy into another, critically leading to the formation of new and unexpected individuations, which contain emergent properties that were not predetermined in advance.

As we have seen, current music ontologies primarily insist on the conditions of identity and recognition of a given musical work. Their common basic questions are of the type: what is a musical work? Are musical works abstract ideas or concrete things? How can a musical work be identified as this musical work? How can an instantiation of a work be considered as adequate, legitimate, or “fully qualified”? However, these questions take for granted precisely what needs to be explained, namely, the fact that those objects they label as “musical works” emerged at a given historical time, have been defined by innumerable sets of physical documents, have been the result of intensive processes of generation, and undergo constant redefinitions throughout time. Anyone with experience of editions of musical works (for print), or in research on sketches (in archives), just to give two simple examples, knows that any fixed “definition” of a work is highly problematic, open to criticism, and the object of change over time. Not only do traditions of musical practice and reception change, but the very definition of a musical text is constantly shifting.23 Musical works from the past have been different entities throughout time. Think of a symphony by Beethoven and its many, varied, and literally different editions over the last two hundred years. There have been instruments added or changed, even pitches have not been totally indisputable. And the more one looks into its sketches, more problems arise and more options seem acceptable. Musical works don’t possess a final, definitive, and sempiternal formal definition and unchangeable identity. If anything, they are mobile entities.

23 I addressed this topic in detail in “Beyond Urtext: A Dynamic Conception of Musical Editing” (De Assis 2009, 7–18).
Traditional ontological accounts seem to ignore this, they treat musical works as perfectly defined entities, which are to be played by perfect performers, and which can be apprehended by perfectly intentionally oriented listeners. Instead of relying on such traditional ontologies (focused on “Being”), one needs to focus on the onto- and morphogenesis of musical works. The starting questions are, then, quite different: How are musical works effectively generated, constructed, formalised? Which intensive processes lead to their individuation? Which pre-individuating forces and materials create the humus where they will emerge? On which material basis are they transmitted throughout time? Which parts of them remain hidden and which ones are disclosed to a specific discipline, perspective, goal? What is the affective power of their extensive parts? Which concrete documents allow for their performance? How are they concretely performed? What other things influence their passive reception by an audience? Which things build their special topological singularities? Which are the modes of existence of such multiplicities? How can their “diagrams/structures” be thought? In the place of “fundamental” or “higher order” ontology, one urgently needs an “ontogenesis,” an account of the modes of individuation and continuous historical change of musical “works.”

From this perspective, one cannot ignore the intensive energetic processes that lead to the emergence, that is to say, to the factual production of sketches, scores, editions, recordings, analyses, and theoretical reflections on a given “work.” Critically, one cannot forget the innumerable material objects and things that enable the construction of any possible “image of work” in the first place. Before gaining their “identity,” their unmistakable modes of appearance, their enduring character, or their “aura,” musical works are constituted as energetic tendencies that generate complex conglomerates of things, such as sketches, drafts, manuscripts, scores, editions, recordings, transcriptions, treatises, manuals, instruments, depictions, contracts, commissions, letters, postcards, scribbles, diagrams, analytical charts, theoretical essays, articles, books, memories, and so on. These innumerable things are actual, they have been historically actualised at some precise point in time, and they persist existing, even if remaining modally and temporally flexible. Any single item from the list presented above can be differently read, interpreted, exposed, presented, or assembled as part of a book, an edition, a performance, a lecture, an installation, or whatever format. At this level, the individual singularities pertaining to a musical multiplicity function in a similar way to Guy Rohrbaugh’s “continuants,” possessing three qualities that Platonic entities do not: they are modally flexible (they might have had different intensive properties than the ones they currently afford), they are temporally flexible (their intensive properties might differ over time), and they can come into and go out of exposure. Thus, they are not ideal and sempiternal, nor are they materially fixed once and for all. When Julian Dodd asks Rohrbaugh, “where are those historical individuals you claim to identify?” (quoted in Rohrbaugh 2012, 33), well, here they are! But they are not the full story, they are not “the work,” they are transient, partial, and not always actualised components of the wider construction not of “works,” but of works as multiplicities.
In very concrete terms, we have to be clear about which things we consider to be a legitimate part of the actual components of our musical multiplicities. In this sense, and as a useful tool for music practitioners creating innovative modes of performance, I have been proposing a terminology based upon strata and processes of stratification, which is vaguely inspired by Deleuze and Guattari’s use of these terms in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987, 39–74, 637–39). Appropriating their terminology, and remaining aware of the unavoidable anisomorphism between philosophy and art, one can divide all those music materials that physically exist in the real world into diverse types of strata. *Substrata* are materials that already existed in the world before the first traits of instantiation of a new piece were produced; among them one finds other musical pieces, instruments, instrumental and compositional manuals, spoken and unspoken rules, codes of behaviour and practice, lists of personnel, payment sheets, and so on. *Parastrata* refer to documents produced while composing or preparing a performance, produced in view of the generation of a new piece, directly leading to the emergence of a new musical multiplicity; they include sketches, drafts, first editions, letters, and writings or annotations by composers and performers. From that particular moment in time, when a piece has been first defined, many other future materials become thinkable and possible: new and renewed editions, all sorts of catalogues (of the sketches, of the variants, of the renderings), technical analysis of the piece or parts of it, reflexive texts about it, theoretical contextualisations, recordings, and so on—these are *epistrata*, they appear from the first materials that defined the piece and evolve from them in ever growing circles. Next, there are *metastrata*, new materials generated at every future historical time, by practitioners aiming at presenting or, better, at exposing specific sets of materials from a given multiplicity in a new way; such strata include performances, recordings, transcriptions, expositions, or any other mode of critically reflecting on the available sources. Furthermore, there are also *interstrata*, particular singularities that function in more than one register, being sometimes part of one strata, sometimes of another one. Finally, materials that have apparently nothing to do with a given piece, but that might under certain circumstances create relations to it are called *allostrata* (one simple example is a concert situation where, for example, a piece by Schumann enters into an unexpected relation with a piece by Ligeti). Significantly, all these different strata are not ontologically predefined, that is, their belonging

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24 Deleuze and Guattari (1987, 522n14) acknowledge their appropriation of these concepts from Italian paleoanthropologist Pia Laviosa Zambotti, more specifically from her book *Les origines et la diffusion de la civilisation* (1949), where she develops a whole theory on nomadic cultures and their progressive diffusion over the Earth’s ecumene. Especially in chapter four, she addresses the topic of strata, substrata, and parastrata, illuminating the processes by which a nomadic culture interfered with, and was influenced by, the sedentary cultures it met. A set of substrata, which were part of the structures of a sedentary population or of its milieu, starts being challenged, while new configurations (parastrata) begin to emerge. The concrete planetary movements and migrations of human populations described by Zambotti proved to be wrong by the late 1950s, but her descriptions of the kind of interactions between humans, and between humans and their milieu, still have validity and are worth reading.
to this or that stratum is more functional than “existential.” It all depends on the specific use made of them by the musical actants.

We can now understand some of the strata at work in the opening performance of the Orpheus Academy 2016, Rasch (see Introduction). Moscheles’s piano étude Zorn, which Schumann notated in his sketchbook to Kreisleriana, acted as a substratum, a piece of music that existed in the world prior to the composition of Kreisleriana and that had an impact on it. The same applies to Beethoven’s An die ferne Geliebte, which is literally quoted in Schumann’s immediately preceding work (the Fantasie, op. 17) and evoked at the end of the second number of Kreisleriana. Roland Barthes’s essays operated first as metastrata (when Barthes was writing them), and now as epistrata, adding new individual singularities to the multiplicity called “Robert Schumann’s Kreisleriana.” If one thinks of musical works as multiplicities, their constitutive parts become not only innumerable but also unpredictable, an aspect that enables infinite differential and experimental reconfigurations of their connectors and relationships.

In fact, one of the goals of ME21’s Rasch series is to generate an intricate network of aesthetico-epistemic cross-references, through which the listener has the freedom to focus on different layers of perception: be it on the music, on the texts being projected or read, on the images, or on the voices. Situated beyond “interpretation,” “hermeneutics,” and “aesthetics,” the Rasch series is part of wider research on what might be labelled “experimental performance practices.” Such practices offer a tangible mode of exposing musical works as multiplicities. On the contrary, if one sticks to a traditional image of work based upon the One (or Idea), one has necessarily to stick also to notions of “work-concept,” interpretation, authenticity, fidelity to the composer’s intentions, and other highly prescriptive rules that originated in the nineteenth century. And if one sticks only to the historical situatedness of practices and codes of the time of the original compositions, then one is condemned to historicism, to the cultivation of relics and fetishes from other epochs (even if “historically informed practices” are a highly modern invention, as Richard Taruskin sharply demonstrated in several passages of his book Text and Act [1995]). What I mean is that every musical practice, every way of doing performance depends on, or is the direct result of, a specific ontological commitment. If one’s goal is the passive reproduction of a particular edition of a musical piece from the early nineteenth century, one is indeed better advised to remain within the “classical paradigm,” with all its associated practices of survey, discipline, and control. But if one is willing to expose the richness of the available materials that irradiate from that piece, one has to move towards new ontological accounts, such as the one proposed in this chapter.

Critically, different disciplines look at the different strata differently, each discipline constructing its own specific “image of work.” Robert Schumann’s Kreisleriana is a different “entity” for a music sociologist, a music analyst, a clinical psychologist, or a pianist. They all take into account different actual things relating to that multiplicity, and they all build different virtual diagrams of it. And each individual person, even from the same discipline, sees different things and articulates them differently, thus constructing his or her own
image of work. The (impossible to grasp) totality of materials pertaining to a work can only be considered as being virtual in the Deleuzian sense I explained above. Any actualisation of the virtual music singularities is a snapshot of wider images of work, the particular snapshot that a person, a group, or a community perceives for a certain duration of time. Brought together in specific configurations (historically, geographically, and disciplinarily situated), every imaginal individual stratum in its interaction with other strata enables the material, psychological, and sociocultural construction of diverse images of work, which have the potential to replace those reified generalities that we usually call “musical works.”

Works appear then as multiplicities, as highly complex, historically constructed assemblages defined by virtual structures and actual things. While traditional musical ontologies remain attached to hermeneutic, analytical, and interpretative approaches, the new image of work enhances the emergence of creative, performative, and experimental events. Beyond transcendental typologies, beyond extreme or qualified versions of Platonism, beyond functional theories of operative concepts, and beyond aesthetic considerations coming from the ivory-towers of academia, this new “image of work” offers a redefinition of musical works as highly flexible, mobile multiplicities with potentially infinite constitutive parts that can be exposed in different modes, to different audiences, and at different times. The shift from a work-centred perspective to a vision of an exploded continuum made of innumerable objects and things, in steady, intensive interaction with one another, creates fields of discourse, practice, and perception based on pure difference, leading to processes of differential repetition. Every single performance then becomes “different”—not different from any original transcendental idea, but different from difference itself. It is only one ephemeral solution to the problematic field defined by a musical multiplicity.

When looking at those exploded things, a musician or a scholar has two options: one is analytical, remaining at a certain distance from the materials of musical practice, questioning things in terms of what they are, how they appear, which properties they have, and what relations they entertain with each other; the other option is one that decidedly dives into the materialities of music-making, focusing on what to do with these things, how to reactivate them, searching for the yet unseen virtual components that they possess, asking which potentialities they have, how to give them renewed sounds and furies, and how to express them anew. The first approach remains hopelessly imprisoned in the past; the second creatively and productively designs new futures for past musical objects and things. The first relates to conventional scholarly research and disciplines, the second—so I claim—to new modes of research, primarily to artistic research, a mode in which the artistic dimension is quintessentially needed and requested. In the place of a reiteration of uncritically inherited performance practices, or patronising instances of survey and control, this perspective offers a methodology for unconventional, critical renderings that expose the variety and complexity of the music materials available today. More than repeating what one already thinks one knows about a given
work, it claims the pure unknown as the most productive field for artistic practices. Rather than accepting a reproductive tradition, it argues for an experimental, creative, and vitalist attitude.

References


