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## **Musical Authenticity as ‘Being True to the Moment’**

### Abstract

In this paper I argue that the specific musical authenticity of improvisation in different kinds of music (especially, but not only, in Jazz and Free improvisation practices) consists of what I call ‘being true to the moment’ and that since the artistic success of every musical performance requires performers’ attentiveness and responsiveness to the moment of the performance, improvisational authenticity is the epitome of musical authenticity.

I proceed as follows. Firstly I present Peter Kivy’s plural view of musical authenticity and discuss Julian Dodd’s view of musical improvisation as essentially inauthentic. Then, I articulate two notions of improvisational authenticity, ontological and expressive authenticity, which I develop by means of a third, and crucial, notion of improvisational authenticity: truthfulness to the moment, which is the specific way improvisation realizes a fourth kind of authenticity: artistic authenticity. Finally, I argue that improvisational authenticity is paradigmatic for the authenticity of musical performance as performance.

### Keywords

Musical Authenticity, Improvisation, Musical Expressiveness, Musical Performance, Artistic Normativity.

### **1. Musical Authenticities**

Scholars, musicians and listeners highlight authenticity as an important artistic value of improvised music.<sup>1</sup> But, is there a specific sense of authenticity that is valid for musical improvisation? I think that the specific musical authenticity of improvisation in different kinds of music (especially, but not only, in Jazz and Free improvisation practices) consists in ‘being true to the

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<sup>1</sup> See for instance Fischlin *et al.* 2004; Santi 2010; Sarath 2013.

moment,' i.e. in improvisers' attentiveness and responsiveness to the moment of the performance. Moreover, since the artistic success of every musical performance requires performers to be attentive and responsive toward the performance situation, I think that improvisational authenticity is the epitome of musical authenticity. Finally, I believe that the negotiation of the normativity of the practice in relation to the situation of the artistic production is an important aspect of artistic normativity in general, and that for this reason the 'truthfulness to the moment' of improvisation exhibits a key aspect of artistic authenticity. In order to argue in favor of these views, I will begin by briefly presenting the topic of musical authenticity.

For this purpose, it is advisable to start with Peter Kivy's conceptual articulation. Although Kivy refers to Western classical music, his analytical discussion is also a good starting point for reflecting on authenticity in reference to the broad field of improvisational practices. According to Kivy, the notion of authenticity can apply to music in at least four ways: 1. "faithfulness to the composer's personal intentions;" 2. "faithfulness to the performance practice of the composer's lifetime;" 3. "faithfulness to the sounds of a performance during the composer's lifetime;" 4. "faithfulness to the performer's own self, original, not derivative, or an aping of someone else's way of playing" (Kivy 1995, 6–7). The polemical aim of the book was the so-called "movement for historically authentic performance" and its strong defense of the *Werktreue* ideal:<sup>2</sup> the truthfulness to the text of the musical work.

Roughly, the first three notions of musical authenticity can be considered as expressions of the ideal of authenticity as truthfulness to the work. Kivy argues that this ideal is not a necessary criterion for the artistic quality of a musical performance. Rather, the artistic quality of a musical performance necessarily requires the fourth type of authenticity (which does not only concern musical performances, but works of art), through which performers achieve two of the most admired artistic qualities: *style* and *originality* (see Kivy 1995, 123). Kivy believes that expressive authenticity, as he calls it, is compatible with, and often even required by, respect for the composer's intentions, and he claims that authenticity is, generally speaking, a trade-off: if the rate of authenticity as fidelity to the author's intentions or to the historical sonority increases, that of expressive authenticity diminishes, and vice versa. Moreover, he denies that the artistically-better performance is necessarily the one that respects the composer's intentions. On the one hand,

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<sup>2</sup> This ideal is supported for instance by Godlovitch 1998. For a critical musicological discussion see Taruskin 1995.

moral reasons in favor of respect for the composer's intentions can be balanced by other moral reasons, such as respect for the listeners. On the other hand, fidelity to the composer's intentions (assuming we can have access to them) is no guarantee of the best artistic quality of the performance of a work. Furthermore, Kivy criticizes the "historically authentic performance movement", because it is "a project aimed at collapsing performance into text" (1995, 277), and holds that the gap between performance and text is desirable, so that music remains a performing art.

To sum up, Kivy suggests on the one hand, that musical inauthenticity, as infidelity to the musical work as text, is neither a moral evil nor an artistic demerit; on the contrary, it seems to be ontologically required for the musical performance to be a performance. On the other hand, the expressive authenticity of the performers is necessary for the artistic quality of the performance.

I agree. So on this basis I will develop my thesis on the authenticity of musical improvisation.

## **2. Musical Authenticity and Improvisational Inauthenticity**

While strongly defending performance authenticity as truthfulness to the work, Julian Dodd has elaborated on the idea that a performance not faithful to the work as a text, which in this sense is inauthentic, can be artistically successful. "Musical authenticity" may mean either "score compliance authenticity" (Dodd 2012, 1), which consists in rendering the score faithfully, and in "being faithful to the composer's work-determinative instructions" (2014, 281), or "interpretive authenticity," which, in Dodd's words, is "a kind of faithfulness" to the musical work, which consists in "evincing a deeper understanding of the work performed" and allows the abandoning of "ideal fidelity to the score" in order to achieve "a more successful performance" which is "true to the work by interpreting it in a way that displays insight into its nature" (2012, 10, 17, 9).

Leaving aside complications (in Dodd's formulation it remains for example unclear what the "nature" of a work is), the important point is that in any case musical authenticity, as faithfulness to the work, is incompatible with improvisation. In improvised music, authenticity is not a "performance value," Dodds argues, because "improvised music [is] music in which what really matters is coping with challenges in the moment rather than being true to the work performed" (2014, 281). In other words: "Where improvisation disregards the work as scored, interest for

improvisation overrides interest for the work as scored. In this sense, there is a tension between improvisation and score-compliance. We may call this the *i n c o m p a t i b i l i t y t h e s i s*.<sup>3</sup>

This thesis is generally right, I think, but some qualifications are in order.

First, as musicological and ethnomusicological research has now definitively clarified, many improvisational musical practices are not centered around notions like work and composition and “improvisation is better understood in terms of the learning and application of culturally acquired, socially mediated, and embodied skills.”<sup>4</sup> In improvisational practices of oral traditions, Free Jazz, a free improvisation, there is no work to be performed. In this case, we cannot reasonably say that improvisation is inauthentic, in Dodd’s sense, because there is no work to be unfaithful to. The performance can neither be authentic nor inauthentic (in that sense). Authenticity, as truthfulness to the work, is irrelevant here, so we may call this the *i r r e l e v a n c e t h e s i s*. In these practices (Free Jazz, Free improvisation, and improvisation practices of oral traditions), it makes no sense to define improvisation in terms of deviation from the score and inauthenticity. Rather, the aesthetic dimension of these practices is understood if we grasp its historical, social, and cultural dimension.<sup>5</sup>

Secondly, recent empirical studies demonstrate that unintentional improvisation is unavoidable in performing a rendition of a musical work, even in the Classical tradition of performances of work-as-scored.<sup>6</sup> Hence, if there are authentic renditions of musical works, then musical improvisation does not prevent a performance from being authentic. However, this remark does not imply an insurmountable difficulty for the *i n c o m p a t i b i l i t y t h e s i s*. One may think that unintentional, unavoidable improvisation is not relevant: we rather need reasons for admitting or rejecting the possible authenticity of *i n t e n t i o n a l* improvisation.

Thirdly, in some cases improvising *is* following the composer’s instructions for a correct performance of the work. In Western ‘classical’ music we can find examples of this in the practices of the figured bass, of the free *canzona* or in the ‘open’ or ‘undetermined’ works of the *avant-garde*. In these

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<sup>3</sup> I thank an anonymous reviewer for this nice formulation I allow myself to insert in the text.

<sup>4</sup> I thank an anonymous reviewer for pushing me on this point and for the nice formulation I allow myself to incorporate in the text.

<sup>5</sup> See Treitler 1991; Berliner 1994; Nettl *et al.* 1998; Lewis 2004; Nettl *et al.* 2009. See also footnotes 9 and 14.

<sup>6</sup> See Schiavio, Høffding 2015; Seddon, Biasutti 2009, 35.

cases the musical score prescribes improvisation as authentic means for performing the work. When improvisation is required by the musical work's instructions (according to a given musical practice), then improvisation is both a necessary condition for the correct performance of the musical work and is still an improvisation. Within these practices, authentic performances, i.e. performances compliant with the score, are improvisational (or, if you prefer, involve improvisation): so this limits the scope of the *i n c o m p a t i b i l i t y t h e s i s*. Of course the score's instructions and musical practice's conventions constrain performers' improvisational freedom. If the score of a Baroque work prescribes improvisation for 12 bars, and the performers improvise for 30 bars in a Free Jazz style, then the improvised performance is unfaithful to the work and, in this sense, inauthentic. However it would be inauthentic as a wrong (improvisational) performance, not as improvisation *p e r s e*.

In other cases, for instance a Jazz rendition of a tune, "performers do not wait for the composer's permission or prescription before becoming improvisers. They freely decide to improvise, taking advantage of the composer's work for their performing aims" (Bertinetto 2012, 115). Unfaithfulness to the work-as-scored is required by the artistic practice and, consequently, here improvisation is inauthentic. Yet, as Dodd thinks, *t h i s* kind of inauthenticity does not imply a default artistic demerit of improvised music. On the contrary, an authentic performance, as faithful to the scored work, would be contrary to the practice here: it would amount to playing the wrong game (although, as I will argue at the end of the paper, playing a wrong game can result in the invention of a new artistically successful game).

However, as Kivy has already shown, the semantic spectrum of the notion of authenticity is broad and diverse. So, my point is that both the *i n c o m p a t i b i l i t y t h e s i s* and the *i r r e l e v a n c e t h e s i s* do not rule out or hinder the idea that improvisation may be authentic in other relevant ways. Once we acknowledge other kinds of musical authenticity, we can defend the idea that musical improvisation and authenticity are not mutually exclusive and argue that a certain kind of authenticity is a key artistic value of musical improvisation.

I think that what I will advocate is valid for standard Jazz, in which improvisers can be expressively authentic, as explained by Kivy, although playing performances that, in Dodd's interpretation, are inauthentic with respect to the musical work (perhaps regarding tunes such as *M y F u n n y V a l e n t i n e*, *I n a S e n t i m e n t a l M o o d*, *M y F a v o r i t e*

Things, and 'Round Midnight I would rather speak more simply of 'composition' instead of 'musical work.' However, I have discussed the issue elsewhere (Bertinetto 2012)<sup>7</sup> and here I will not discuss it any further). I am also thinking about improvisational performances that do not refer to compositions, as in Keith Jarrett's famous Köln Concert, 'Free' Jazz, and 'free'<sup>8</sup> improvisation of different kinds (from Gruppo di Improvvisazione Nuova Consonanza and Musica Elettronica Viva to the new avant-garde scene of contemporary Berlin Echtzeitmusik and improvising Laptop ensembles, only to make a few examples), in reference to which the notion of inauthenticity with respect to a composition does not apply, because in fact there are no compositions (at least in the common sense of the word). However, I believe that my thesis can be extended to the use of improvisation at least within the history of Western music. Not only forms of Popular music of oral tradition and Rock (the kinds of music Vincenzo Caporaletti has called "audiotactile" (Caporaletti 2005), but also Medieval and Baroque music and Classical music (in regard, for example, to the cadenza of a concerto) culturally centered around the notion of a musical work.<sup>9</sup> In all these cases where the music is improvised, improvisers can be more or less expressively authentic (in some cases; in others not, being inauthentic in Dodd's sense).

### 3. Authentic Improvisations

Improvisation can rightly be understood as authentic in at least three senses: ontological, expressive and situational-responsive. I will label this third kind of authenticity 'truthfulness to the moment.' Especially this last sense of authenticity constitutes the specific way improvisation realizes a fourth kind of authenticity: artistic authenticity. In this section I will deal with the first two senses, while in the next sections I will focus on the other two. I will suggest, first, to

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<sup>7</sup> Here I argue that, *pace* Davies 2001 and others, a jazz improvised performance of a tune is a performance of that tune. See Bertinetto 2016a.

<sup>8</sup> An improvisation is free in the sense of being unconstrained by scores, themes and harmonic grids, but it is never *ex nihilo*: it feeds on traditions, practices, styles, exercise, habits, etc.

<sup>9</sup> For the philosophical history of this notion see Goehr 1992. For different forms of improvisation in different historical musical practices see Gioia 1988; Rinzler 2008; Lothwesen 2009; Santi 2010; Guaccero 2013; Sbordonni 2014; *Saladin* 2014; Feige 2014; Guido 2017. See also footnotes 5 and 14.

consider 'truthfulness to the moment' as the specific meaning of improvisational authenticity and, second, to understand improvisational authenticity as paradigmatic for artistic authenticity.

### **(a) *Ontological authenticity***

In the field of philosophy of art, authenticity is commonly understood as that quality for which an artwork is materially the object attributable to a particular author as its producer. This kind of authenticity concerns the empirical question of the work's authorship. An authentic artwork is what it should be: it is the 'genuine' object, not its substitute. Therefore the authentic artistic object is identified by differentiation from other objects, such as copies (or falsifications) and cases of plagiarism, which occur when authorship is attributed to someone who is not the true, or authentic, author of the artistic object (see Dutton 2003).

Improvisation is authentic in this sense *d e f i n i t i o n a l l y*. For understanding this point, we may resort to the etymology of the word 'authenticity'. As simultaneous coincidence of invention and realization,<sup>10</sup> improvisation is *o n t o l o g i c a l l y* authentic in the etymological meaning of the word. Consider, 1. *a u t h e n t e i n* and 2. *a u t h e n t i k ó s* respectively mean: 1. 'to accomplish something, oneself,' 'to do independently,' 'to bear authority on something,' and 2. 'being handmade.' There is surely nothing more handmade than an improvisation: improvisers don't do what somebody else prescribes them to do, but act autonomously, bearing authority on what they are doing. Of course, as previously seen, performers may improvise in order to follow a composer's instructions that set limits on the scope of their improvisation. Moreover, a performer often improvises while interplaying with other musicians and accordingly to the performance's specific and concrete situation. Finally, at times improvisers play without consciously deciding what to do (also because their intentions are developed through the action) (Bertinetto 2015, 10). However, the point is that—perhaps relative to what they improvise within the constraints set by a composer—improvisers (individually and/or jointly) are nevertheless *a r t i s t i c a l l y r e s p o n s i b l e* for what they do:<sup>11</sup> they are authors, not

<sup>10</sup> I take this as a commonsensical minimal definition of improvisation, although I am perfectly aware that improvisation is not "creatio ex nihilo" and *d e f a c t o* the simultaneous coincidence between invention and realization is a matter of degree.

<sup>11</sup> This holds true even when artistic creativity, as exemplarily shown by improvisation, is due to the artist's lost of control of what emerges through her interactions with the material, the mental and the social environment of the performance.

merely interpreters. To sum up: if a musical performance is improvised, it is ontologically authentic in this sense: improvisers are the real producers of the music they perform.

However, this ontological authenticity of improvisation could be judged as not relevant enough for the artistic value of improvisation, in that it is too general: every improvisation, and even every action, is authentic in this sense. Moreover, etymology is not enough in philosophy. We must search for other ways for understanding improvisational authenticity.

### **(b) *Expressive authenticity and improvisation***

The meaning of authenticity that can be applied in a plausible and interesting way to improvisation is already available to us. I am referring to Kivy's notion of *expressive authenticity*. As "the faithfulness to the performer's own self" (Kivy 1995, 7), i.e. as the talent of musically shaping and/or expressing the performer's self, being true to it in concrete performing situations, *expressive authenticity* is one of the aesthetic ideals of musical improvisation.

The expressive authenticity of improvisation may be conceived of in contrast to musical expressiveness as a medium for revealing a musical work's emotional qualities or even the composer's emotional life. As defended by Clément Canonne (2013) (see Bertinetto 2016b), the expressiveness of musical improvisation is direct and immediate. Accordingly, musical improvisation is marked by the concomitance between the musical and the emotional flux underpinning the generation of the music of which the improviser is author. Hence, an improvised performance is *transparent*, in that it does not borrow the emotions expressed by someone else, but manifests the performers' emotions and moods in the moment of their arising in a specific situation.

However, nothing assures that what ensues from the artists' hearts, despite being 'naturally' authentic, is also artistically valuable. A manifestation of emotions may be authentic in this sense, but one may reasonably doubt that it is also artistically valuable. Indeed, like in other artistic practices, in improvisation expressiveness is not (at least, not only) a passive and immediate outpouring of feelings, but an active and articulated configuration through an artistic medium. As already argued by Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1975), musical expressiveness, in particular, shows the dynamic development of emotions and feeling, while sonically shaping them through time. The specificity of musical improvisation, in this regard, is the possibil-



ity of musically articulating emotions and feeling as they develop during the performance. Not only that: the physical exteriorization of the affectivity through which musicians react to the expressiveness of the music they play affects in turn the expressive quality of the music generated. It is a process of *s e l f - s t i m u l a t i o n*: musical expressiveness stimulates affective reactions shown by musicians' corporeal expression, and this in turn stimulates the production of particular musical expressions, while coping with artistic challenges in the moment of the performance.

This seems to fit with the widespread view of improvisation as "the means by which we acquire selfhood," that is, as a means "of self-generation" as Vijay Iyer (2016, 88) writes. Expressiveness is not (at least not always) merely the revelation of the performer's inner life and, accordingly, the goal of musical improvisation is not uncovering or discovering some truer or authentic inner self (see Foster 2016, 222): it is rather the *s h a p i n g* of personalities, in interaction with other personalities as well as with (and within) the concrete situation of the performance and the cultural tradition of the musical practice at issue. It is the shaping of responsive artistic personalities: personalities that form themselves through the music they play, responding, in the moment of the performance, to others players and to the audience, to their own musical tradition, to the situation of the performance, and to the events occurring during its course.

Personalities develop through the actions performed by individuals. Authenticity, in this sense, is an ongoing work: it is not the simple expressive revelation of a fixed self, but the expression of the creative task of shaping a self through the actions performed. In a way, as Charles Taylor (2003, 62) defended, artistic creativity is the paradigm of this expressive shaping of personality, because an important part of the artists' work consists in taking responsibility for their artistic expressions and, in so doing, shaping an artistic personality (Bertinetto 2018, 97–98).

We can appreciate the relevance of this idea for improvisational authenticity if we connect it with the view of improvisational expressivity as shaping of the performer's self, i.e. with the idea that "personality is a central product of all improvisation" (Hampton 2016, 235). As a result, it is not farfetched to conceive of improvisation as the epitome of the artistic construction/expression of personality in real-time.

In conclusion, the correction of the *t r a n s p a r e n c y t h e s i s* by means of a *c o n s t r u c t i v i s t v i e w* of improvisational expressiveness explains how improvisation can be authentic in a relevant artistic sense. Improvisation presents on the stage the articulation of this exercise of crea-

tivity, which involves shaping and expressing creative personalities in their interaction with a specific situation. If a condition for the success of improvisation is undeniably to cope with the challenges in the moment, those challenges are artistic and expressive ones, not only technical ones. Authenticity, as an aesthetic quality, applies to musical improvisation specifically in this sense: improvisation is authentic when the musical performance expresses the performers' selves *u n d e r c o n s t r u c t i o n*, or, still better, in the moment of their construction and as an ongoing construction, in creative interaction with other performers and with a given situation.

#### **4. Improvisational Authenticity as Being True to the Moment**

Obviously the artistic significance of this expressive authenticity comes more to the fore in those musical practices in which improvisation has a greater scope. The expressive authenticity of improvisation has as such a specific aspect that differentiates it from the expressive authenticity of the interpretation of musical works. As I will suggest later on, thanks to this specificity, improvisation is paradigmatic for music as a performing art (and the fact that music is a performing art is a key aspect of musical authenticity: Kivy agrees with current musicological research in this regard<sup>12</sup>).

This specific aspect of improvisational expressive authenticity may be called *'t r u t h f u l n e s s t o t h e m o m e n t'*. In fact, the expressive musical gestures of improvisers have to deal not only with the constraints of a composition, a theme or a harmonic grid (if we are considering what we can call 'constrained' improvisation), but also with what happens during the performance. If we consider 'free' improvisation, we could then say that the expressiveness of the improvisers is configured as a search for a way to be true to the moment. By the formulation 'being true to the moment,' I mean this: since improvised music is the invention of what is played in the moment (or 'on the spot') *i n t h i s s i t u a t i o n h e r e a n d n o w*, improvisers must musically do what is appropriate here and now. This involves responding creatively to what is happening here and now, in the course and in the flow of the performance, shaping and showing in this way aspects of the artist's own artistic personality, of the artist's own voice, in interaction with the situation which is developing in the moment.

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<sup>12</sup> See for example Taruskin 1995 and Cook 2013.

My point, then, is that “coping with challenges in the moment”<sup>13</sup> is of artistic merit, if it can be understood not only in terms of solving technical problems (for example, problems of coordination between performers), but as ‘being true to the moment’, i.e. as kind of authenticity.

Hence, expressive authenticity in improvisation is *kairōlogical*, *kairós* being the time of the right moment, i.e. of the moment in which the opportune choice is made and/or the opportune action is performed. However, it is not just about doing the right thing when the opportunity arises. It is rather about finding/inventing suitable opportunities for the (musically) right thing, responding to what is emerging out of the improvised performance. Of course, in an improvisational situation improvisers cannot completely *foresee* whether what they do is right or opportune or ‘true to the moment.’ What they do can be assessed as right or wrong—i.e. true to the moment—only in retrospect, when the moment is passed, thanks to others’ reactions (musical and behavioral inputs by fellow performers and, in a live performance, the audience’s responses) and to their own reactions to what they did.

The improviser’s art consists in exhibiting a fine sensitivity for the moment, both in the sense of the precise moment in which the performance is happening, and in the sense of the concrete situation and specific condition of the performance (the kind of audience, the type of location, the members of the group, the kind of music played, the sort of artistic event, etc.) without being able to grasp the moment before it happens or to dominate from the outside the situation of which they are a part.

This view of improvisational authenticity respects the ‘existentialist’ idea that for individuals to be (ethically) authentic requires becoming responsible for themselves, reflexively (see Ferrara 1998) taking a stance toward their contingent situations, which opens up an interesting sense of *artistic authenticity*. If authenticity consists “in assuming one’s proper possibilities as a free and situated revealing of the world” and, consequently, in being “able to make one’s existence, and one’s world, one’s own” (Baugh 1988, 479), then, applying this notion of authenticity to the artistic sphere, artistic authenticity, i.e. the aesthetic authenticity of an artwork, consists in creatively dealing with its contingent situation. *Artistic authenticity* may be defined as the successful practical and potentially transformative reflection on the normative conditions of an artistic practice and on the empirical situation of the artistic production through a specific artwork or

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<sup>13</sup> This, I recall, is what the task of musical improvisation consists of according to Dodd 2014, 281.

performance. Musical improvisation, thus, epitomizes artistic authenticity, since its aesthetic success requires assuming responsibility toward the specific situation of the performance and making the contingency of the moment a creative artistic resource.

It could be observed, and maybe objected to, that the view I have defended so far about the expressive authenticity of improvisation as truthfulness to the moment is (exaggeratedly) individualistic and that therefore its validity is limited to those musical genres in which the soloist, the virtuoso, the artistic genius are the protagonists. So my view could work for the *improptu* cadence of a concert or for the solo improvisation of a pianist, or for the performance on a Jazz standard in which musicians in turn perform their solos. But it would miss the point of other improvisational practices, like collective Free improvisation and Free Jazz. Indeed, on closer inspection, this individualistic conception would be misleading even in respect to the previous cases, given that, as rightly defended by many scholars,<sup>14</sup> “a musician’s voice and the music that is improvised is not just an individual achievement, but a result of collective action of musicians, in a reciprocal relation with their instruments, the constraints of a genre, and the wider social context in which they are active.”<sup>15</sup>

However, my view is far from being individualistic. I reject the idea that individual artistic expression (their style) is incompatible with the belonging of the individual to collectivities and with their being part of traditions of social, artistic, and musical practices. As Charles Taylor (2013, 91) claims, authenticity as being truthful to one’s own personality, while (inter)acting in specific contingent situations is not “the enemy of demands that emanate from beyond the self” (tradition, genre, work). In the field of art, those demands become elements of the artists’ personalities. In their practice, artists, including improvisers, discover and understand those demands and their artistic obligations towards traditions, genres, and works. Indeed, the normative force of traditions, genres, and works is activated by artistic negotiations, transformations, and adaptations, so that traditions, genres, and works become constitutive elements of the artists’ personalities that, in turn, develop while interacting with traditions, genres, and works. The same goes for the interaction between the individual performer and the group: the individual configures and transforms their personality through their relation-

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<sup>14</sup> Monson 1996; Benson 2003; Fishlin, Heble 2004; Borgo 2006; Hagberg 2008; Bertinetto *et al.* 2015; Hagberg 2016; Born *et al.* 2017; Peters 2017; Sbordononi *et al.* 2018.

<sup>15</sup> I thank an anonymous reviewer for pushing me on this point and for the nice formulation I allow myself to insert in the text.

ships and the context in which they live, to the life of which they contributes in their own way. The individual musicians shape and transform their style through the group, to the style of which they contributes in their own way.<sup>16</sup> In musical improvisation, these interactions happen especially and principally in the moment of the performance, through the way the group, and the individuals inside the group, try to be true to the moment, by means of negotiating performatively (musically and socially) their reciprocal relations, with different results and not without the possibility of conflicts.<sup>17</sup>

The notion of 'truthfulness to the moment', as I have explained it, nicely captures musical improvisation's specific kind of expressive authenticity. Moreover, it has two additional advantages. On the one hand this notion can be extended, with specific appropriate adjustments, to other forms of artistic improvisation, especially in performing arts such as dance and theater. A fine sensibility for the opportune moment articulated through a sort of 'grammar of contingency'<sup>18</sup> seems to be a requirement for good improvisational performances in all performing arts. With this notion, at first blush maybe obscure, I mean a variety of ways and means, specific to each tradition and style of artistic improvisation and, ultimately, to each performer, and 'plastically' variable according to the performing situation, for dealing creatively with the unexpected moment, making it the opportune moment.

On the other hand, improvisational authenticity as 'truthfulness to the moment' is a key aspect of all musical performances, including performances of musical work, in that, precisely as performances, they must not only reproduce and interpret a musical work, but must do so at a specific time and in a concrete situation. First, the perspective on the musical work performers have in a certain situation influences the way they interpret it. Second, in performing a work, performers may be differently sensitive with respect to the performance conditions and to what happens during the performance itself. The ability to respond felicitously to the environmental conditions (the spatial and acoustic setting of the location, the kind of listeners and their expectations, etc.) or to performers' musical and social behavior (for exam-

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<sup>16</sup> A view of this kind is proposed by Cobussen 2012.

<sup>17</sup> An aesthetic conflict occurred for instance between Miles Davis and John Coltrane during their last concert together in Paris on March, 21<sup>st</sup> 1960 (CD: Miles Davis & John Coltrane, *The final tour: Paris, March 21, 1960*, Columbia Records).

<sup>18</sup> I thank Bruno Besana (personal communication) for suggesting to me this nice formulation in a personal communication. "Grammar" is to be understood in a Wittgensteinian sense as a plural network of norms capable of giving meaning to our practices from within the practices themselves. For an articulation of this notion see my Bertinetto (forthcoming).

ple, the gestures of the orchestra conductor and the personal interactions between performers) is an important ingredient not only of the expressive authenticity of the individual and of the ensemble, but of the specific way score compliance and truthfulness to the work are achieved. Instead, performers who are not truthful to the moment are ‘not in the zone,’ ‘not in the mood,’ not really there. They are not attentive and responsive and this will result in a probable cause of failure, in that it will impede bringing the musical work into that situation in that moment, thereby hindering a successful transmission of the work to the listeners’ ears, hindering the achievement of the goal of this musical practice. Hence, improvisational authenticity is paradigmatic of an aspect which, to different degree, concerns all musical performances in as much they are *p e r f o r m a n c e s* and not texts (Kivy 1995, 270–277).

### **5. Improvisation, Truthfulness to the Moment and Artistic Normativity**

By stressing the paradigmatic character of improvisational authenticity for music as a performing art, I am far from denying that performing a work-as-scored and improvising are two different practices. Still, in both cases, music, as a performing art, is played here and now. Hence, each performance requires specific attention to and responsive negotiation with the conditions of the performance.

This requirement is normative and may be made explicit with this formula: ‘if you want to perform music well, you ought to be true to the moment, i.e. attentive and responsive to the specific situation of the performance.’ Truthfulness to the moment is a necessary condition for the practice of musical performance.

The normative import of this kind of authenticity is, I argue, broader than the normative import of the truthfulness to the work. Indeed, as nicely argued in a recent paper by Guy Rohrbaugh (2019),<sup>19</sup> score compliance is an end in itself as it is the ‘goodness’ of the practice of performing musical works in the Western classical tradition: it is not a reason for achieving some end, but is constitutive of that practice. Hence, if we do not respect score compliance, we are not ‘true to the practice,’ and this is how authenticity as ‘being true to the work-as-scored’ has been defended by philosophers such as Stephen Davies and Julian Dodd.

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<sup>19</sup> I thank an anonymous reviewer for pointing me to this paper.

However, being not true to that practice does not amount to not being true to music as a performance. Of course, being true to that practice allows us to promote specific musical values, for example a kind of symbolic and algorithmic complexity (as in the structural architectures of a Brahms' symphony) that only a notation allows to build and only the accurate performance of a work-as-scored can then realize musically. But other practices promote other values. The practice of improvisation, clearly in free improvisational situations, promotes another kind of complexity: the complexity of self-organized recursive processes that have the situation and the moment of their occurring among their constitutive elements. What complexity we choose is a matter of the 'goodness' we prefer. And the preference we have depends, in turn, on (how we understand and appreciate) the practice we are in. Hence, deficiency in score compliance is not an artistic flaw per se: it is not always an artistic deficiency. It depends from the practice we are in. Following Wittgenstein, "we make up the rules as we go along" (1953): the normativity of our practices is generated within the practices. Hence, the validity of the norms of the practice depends on the force that performers assign to it within the practice itself. In relation to the issue of musical authenticity, this may be interpreted in a 'narrow' and in a 'large' way.

The 'narrow' way can be articulated in terms of David Davies' pragmatism: the "properties taken to be normative" for a correct performance cannot be "characterized independently of the ways in which performances are or would be classified" as correct or incorrect instances of the work "within a particular historically situated performative practice" (2012, 653). The criteria for correct performances are located not only in "explicit rules for following scores, but also in the practical interactions between composers, performers, and receivers in a particular musical context" (2012, 656).

The 'broad' way can be articulated in terms closer to Georg Bertram's (2018) conception of art as human practice: the 'goodness' that constitutes the practice is valid if the participants in the practice make it valid through the practice, that is, if it is, for them, in their practice, an end in itself. Which means that the validity of score compliance depends on whether performers make it valid by enforcing it as a 'goodness' in their practices. The point is that musicians may not consider score compliance as their 'goodness' and perform the work in such a way that appropriate it, creatively making it an ingredient of a different practice, not grounded on score compliance, but, for instance, on the emotional and communicative powers of music.

Therefore, score compliance, as such, is not always a necessary condition of the artistic success or the artistic authenticity of the performance. In fact, the explicit and intentional violation of what, within the context of a musical practice, is understood as the musical content of a musical work may indeed produce, through a shift of practice, highly valuable performances. Jimi Hendrix's Woodstock's performance of the American national anthem, as well as John Coltrane version of 'My Favorite Things' are valued as artistically authentic and successful in this sense, even though, while *signifying* on those musical pieces, they distort what in other practices is understood as their musical content (see Bartel 2011), i.e. even though score compliance is not their 'goodness'. There are no *a priori* reasons that can prevent performers from avoiding score compliance and appropriatively violating what is commonly understood as the musical content of the pieces they are playing. As a matter of fact, it cannot be known in advance whether this appropriative violation will succeed, or not, artistically.

The artistic success of an artwork or of a performance cannot be guaranteed by the application or the violation of rules, conventions, and criteria that constitute a practice. What makes artistic success, i.e. the artistic authenticity of the work, possible is rather the creative way in which the work or the performance interacts on the moment, in the specific situation of its production, with rules, conventions and criteria. In other words, what is at stake in artistic authenticity is the specific way the artwork or the performance deals with the normativity of a practice, that is, how it reflects practically on the normative conditions of the practice, potentially transforming them. Not score compliance as the abstract 'goodness' of a practice, but the specific way in which this or another 'goodness' is achieved in this particular situation, is what matters artistically.

Consequently, I argue that score compliance is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for the artistic success of musical practices based on score compliance; but it is not a necessary condition for artistic success generally (artistic success in music does not always require score compliance). Instead, 'being true to the moment' is always a 'goodness' of a musical performance as an artistic practice, in that each performance requires a negotiation with the conditions of the performance: 'truthfulness to the moment' is a necessary condition for the artistic success of a musical performance.

In improvisation, I dare say, it is also a sufficient condition. Truthfulness to the moment is the *raison d'être* of musical improvisation. This makes improvisation paradigmatic for music, in its entirety, as a performing



art (see Bertinetto 2016a). The artistic authenticity of music ('being true to the music') is 'being true to the moment' of the performance. In an improvisation the meaning and the value of what is played is articulated through the way performers respond to what is happening in the moment. The authenticity of the music is due to the way performers creatively shape and express artistic personalities in interaction with each other as well as with the tradition of their practice, responding to the challenges and the affordances of the contingent situation. But also in the performance of a musical work, music is as it is performed in the present moment. The specific artistic authenticity of the performance is, even in this case, negotiated in the practice and, ultimately, in the performance itself: i.e. in the moment when the music is played.

In conclusion, the most relevant sense of authenticity in music is improvisational authenticity: being (artistically, aesthetically, and expressively) true to the moment; being able to respond in a creatively successful way to the demands that ensue from the artistic interaction with a situation, with other players, with the audience, as well as with a genre, a tradition, a musical work, thereby displaying the shaping of the artistic personality of the performers and creatively shaping artistic meaning.

Of course, I do not mean that improvisation, as a specific musical practice, is more artistically valuable than the performance of compositions (this would be silly, exactly like the opposite view). My point is rather that being true to the moment, i.e. improvisational authenticity, amounts to being true to the music *tout court* as a performing art. Musical improvisation is not trivially inauthentic: rather, its authenticity is paradigmatic for musical authenticity.<sup>20</sup>

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