

Musical Works as Assemblages

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Abstract

This article sketches a new image of musical **works**, situated beyond the «work concept», critically rethinking existing music ontologies, and grounded on Gilles Deleuze's central ontological commitments. After situating the problem (1), the paper discusses current issues in music ontology (2), explores specific Deleuzian and Deleuzo-Guattarian ontological concepts (3), and argues for a new image of musical **works** (4), which are more aptly described as *assemblages* (5), as highly complex, historically constructed multiplicities defined by *virtual structures*, *intensive processes*, and *actual things*.

1. Introduction: beyond the work concept

Moving beyond the *work concept* this essay presents a new image of musical **work**¹, critically inspired by Gilles Deleuze's central ontological domains (the *virtual*, the *actual*, and the *intensive*²), grounded on the Deleuzo-Guattarian notions of *strata*, *assemblage*,

¹ The proposed neologism **work** is used in this essay with a particular meaning. *Work* appears whenever I am referring to the notion of «work» as it is understood in the *classical paradigm* (David Davies), which is grounded upon the notion of the *work concept* (Lydia Goehr). To designate the kind of entities that I bring forward in this text – which have the potential to replace this classical notion of *work* – I propose the notion of *assemblage*. Thus, when thinking about my new image of «work,» it is immediately obvious that it is a new image not of the classical work but of something different. Yet, this difference unavoidably recalls the classical notion, which is still active when conceiving its own dismantling. Thus, by **work**, I mean the positive and constructive deconstruction of the old term; it is still there, but its foundations are being dismantled.

² A thorough discussion of the complex relations between the *virtual*, the *actual*, and the *intensive* would lie outside the scope of this essay, especially as there have been several attempts to clarify this topic, each leading to significantly different understandings. In fact, there is no consensus about the precise placement of these three notions within Deleuze's ontological system. Dale Clisby's essay "Intensity in Context: Thermodynamics and Transcendental Philosophy" (2017, especially 250–55) offers a compelling overview of the three main positions: (1) those that align the intensive with the virtual, which is the position of Peter Hallward (2006) and Alain Badiou (2000); (2) those that think the intensive as a third ontological *domain*, as has been 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.

and *diagram*, and broadly operating under a *logic of experimentation* situated at the crossroads of Deleuze's logics of *sense* and *sensation*.³ Questioning traditional ontological accounts and arguing for wider ontological perspectives, the proposed new image of musical ~~work~~, requires a fundamental redefinition of musical *works*, which are conceived as fluid *assemblages*, and not as idealised *monuments*. Musical ~~works~~ appear then as complex conglomerates of *things* and *intensities*, containing innumerable and potentially never-ending additional component parts, which are continuously rearranged and reassembled in their specific modes of appearance throughout history. More than refuting conventional theories, this notion of ~~work~~ as *assemblage* has the capacity to include conventional music ontological accounts as particular cases, as historically situated subsets, which take only a reduced number of parameters into consideration. Those simpler accounts are perfectly functional for musical practices that follow the mainstream notions of *work concept*, *authenticity*, *execution*, *interpretation*, *reproduction*, and *text-fidelity*, as well as for those other practices that focus on historically informed investigations. Only when one moves beyond historicity and beyond interpretation, entering the realm of more adventurous *experimental performance practices*, can there be an expanded perspective on musical entities. Importantly, this new view was born out of my concrete artistic practice, resulting from daily work, from material activity and interaction with innumerable sources, documents, scores, instruments, recordings, and performative options. All this work demonstrated that traditional ontological views have acted as repressive and limiting frameworks of reference, drastically reducing the accepted horizon of the possible and of the thinkable. Dominant images of musical works had – and still have – an enormous impact on what is performable and how it is concretely performed. They exert a policing control over artistic practices, allowing certain things to happen, and forbidding many others. When music philosophers talk about *qualified* and *fully qualified* performances of musical works, they are explicitly excluding several others as *not qualified*. And they do it based upon highly complex propositions and syllogisms that are used as powerful guardians of an idealised temple of immaculate works. This is the world of the *classical paradigm* of music ontology, sharply described on many occasions by David Davies (see, for example Davies 2011: 24), within which the notion of the work concept perfectly operates. However, as long as the critique has not been carried to the heart of that image of *work* (and not only at the level of its *regulative function*, as Lydia Goehr importantly did in 1992 [see Goehr (1992) 2007]), it is difficult to conceive of compositions and performances that operate beyond the propositional mode. A new image of musical ~~work~~, critically replacing *work* (noun) with *work* (verb), equals a liberation of practices and performance from those conventional images that imprison them. In this light, musical ~~works~~ can be fundamentally reconceived as having properties that are actual, and capacities that are real but not necessarily actual, even if they are not being exercised in a specific here-and-now of

³ For a thorough explanation of the precise meaning of my proposed «logic of experimentation» in relation to Deleuze's logic of sense (1969) and logic of sensation (1981) see de Assis (2018: 23-25).

performance, listening, or reflection. Musical ~~works~~ are then seen as having two main basic parts: actual things, which are to be found in the actual world (sketches, manuscripts, editions, theoretical essays, recordings, performances, etc.), and virtual diagrams, highly individual abstract constructions based upon particular *singularities*, which enable us to *think* about those ~~works~~.

2. Existing music ontologies: some problems

To start with, one has to register that currently existing music ontologies are in an impasse, not to say in a deep crisis. In a comprehensive collective volume on the appeal to abstract objects in art ontology (Mag Uidhir 2012), Guy Rohrbaugh (2012) enthusiastically opens his chapter 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 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. (Rohrbaugh 2012: 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 (*ibid.*: 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 (*ibid.*: 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. (*ibid.*: 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. (*ibid.*: 34–35)⁴

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 essay,⁵ but a very important observation to be made is that the vast majority of music ontologists are philosophers attached to analytic philosophy, focusing on and presenting their arguments principally in logical propositions, to which they claim most forms of human knowledge is reducible.⁶ Despite some considerable differences within this analytic tradition,⁷ its first major problem is that the basic 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 primarily addressed not whether musical «works» exist but 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. Consequently, 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,

⁴ 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 philosophical terminology that has lost its connection to the modes of existence of musical works and practices of our day.

⁵ For a precise and concise description of Platonism, nominalism, fictionalism, perdurantism, endurantism, and eliminativism, see Davies (2018). 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).

⁶ 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*.

⁷ In the last decade a significant number of philosophers, 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 until the 1980s by music philosophers and theoreticians such as Nelson Goodman, Richard Wollheim, Nicholas Wolterstorff, Jerrold Levinson, Stanley Cavell, Peter Kivy, and Stephen Davies (among others).

In Goehr's account, no analytic theory adequately accounts for the historical boundary of the music that it concerns.⁸ ... 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 (2007 [1992]: 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, and immanent fabrication of all those documents that enable us to think about «musical works» in the first place.

A second major problem with contemporary ontologies has to do with 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 listening 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

⁸ If one takes into account recent developments in analytic philosophy, a more nuanced formulation could probably be presented. But the point is that such recent developments will take many years until they reach the vast majority of music practitioners and musicologists. And even «nuanced» the core problem remains the same, namely that most analytic philosophers think in eternal qualities and categories, not taking history and historicity as the starting point of the investigations.

picture. For fictionalists there are no works as such, 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 eliminativists), and they all look for «what kind of things they are.» However, 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. 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 to *be represented*. As Gilles Deleuze argued in a long section of *Difference and Repetition* (1994: 262–304), the Aristotelian world of representation is enabled first by Plato's theory of ideas, and crucially by its intrinsic *moral* motivation.

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*. (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 permits 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 *para-doxical*, 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 foundational 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 in *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.⁹ 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 ... 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. Music ontologists even often refer to the field of biological *species* and *individuals*, invoking «domestic dogs» (Dodd 2007: 33) and «hedgehogs» (Levinson 1990: 81) as examples of entities that possess a certain structure (*species*) and that stand in certain causal relations to some *particular* creatures (*individuals*) that came into existence at a given past date. Thus, music ontologists talk about *genus*, *species*, and *individuals* 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.¹⁰ On the contrary, *works* become fixed, petrified, and highly reified generalities. 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 generally excluded and rejected.

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

⁹ In this respect, music philosopher Gunnar Hindrichs writes that «Every ontology manifests a conceptual scheme that articulates *the great chain of being*» (see Hindrichs 2018: 67, my emphasis).

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 kind of way of thinking about species as *scattered individuals* whose constitutive parts are individual creatures (his *constituants*, which have been strongly criticised by music Platonists). Within the ontological account that I propose, Rohrbaugh's *continuant*s can find a new mode of existence, independent of transcendent systems and from hierarchical categorisations.

fundamental distinction between icons and phantasms, between images and simulacra, excluding categorical hierarchies and idealist transcendence.

3. Beyond transcendence: approaching a Deleuzian music ontology

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 Deleuze's life-long projects, and they are at the very core of *Difference and Repetition* (Deleuze 1994 [1968]). 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 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 ex-

tended. *Becoming* is not *becoming-Being*, but a much more complex and elaborated process of permanent 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 in a new state of affairs.¹¹

3.1. A brief Deleuze dictionary

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, singularities, topological unfoldings, and multiplicities.¹²

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 differentiation and creation. Primary differences of energy and energetic potentials generate «differentiation» (virtual structure) and «differenciación» (the genesis of actuality). Such dynamics always happens in the form of an event – an event being the individuation of differentiation, and the actualisation of differenciación. 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.

¹¹ For a thorough discussion of the relations between the couple virtual–real and the notion of becoming, see Boundas (2007: 489–91).

¹² 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.

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.¹³ Moreover, the distinction between the virtual and the actual is not unilateral, nor is it ontologically black-boxed. This distinction is processual 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).

¹³ 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.

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.¹⁴ Be that as it may, what seems clear from all these different understandings of Deleuze's ontology is that «intensity holds 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: be it 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 differentiation; it gives rise to it.» Thus, «every differentiation 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 differentiation establishes a problematisation, the concrete actualisations of that virtual field express differentiations 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 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. 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

¹⁴ See footnote 2, above.

world are thus not just 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 *virtual-actual*, *intensity*, and *transduction* (or *modulation* as Anne Sauvagnargues prefers to call it),¹⁵ one starts grasping the *virtual diagrams* and the *actual things* that populate Deleuze's materialist world—a world that radically departs and is totally different from the Aristotelian system of categories.¹⁶ 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.¹⁷ 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

¹⁵ See Sauvagnargues (2016, especially chapter 4, “The Concept of Modulation in Deleuze, and the Importance of Simondon to the Deleuzian Aesthetic”: 61–84).

¹⁶ 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).

¹⁷ 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 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).

phase, when a mutation occurs, when a cosmic phenomenon happens. Larger 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 ontogenetic processes, on intensive individuations, enables Deleuze to populate reality exclusively with immanent entities, eliminating transcendent ones, such as the essences of Aristotle's two upper categories, *genus* and *species*. For 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. (DeLanda 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 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 dis-

joining 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 primarily 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 to be *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-phyyla 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 is widely accepted today, 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 to imagine. 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 Deleuze's works – 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.¹⁸ Deleuze mentioned it early on, in his 1966 book *Bergsonism*, where the subtitle of the second chapter is precisely “Théorie des multiplicités”¹⁹ (Deleuze 1991: 37–49). Although 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

¹⁸ 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).

¹⁹ A subtitle that, unfortunately, is not rendered in the 1991 English translation of the book.

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 permits 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.²⁰ 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).

To avoid any possible misunderstanding over Deleuze's use of this term, one has to stress 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.»²¹ 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

²⁰ I insist on the crucial aspect that these universal singularities are by no means to be confused with Platonic 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 do they point towards necessary or unidirectional solutions.

²¹ Deleuze's use of the term *Idea* would also require some further explanations, which unfortunately I cannot undertake here. In short, I simply stress that Deleuze's *Idea* is mobile and changeable, thus very different from the reified Ideas of traditional idealisms and from the Kantian concepts of the understanding, which Deleuze discusses in chapter 4 of *Difference and Repetition*, in relation to Salomon Maimon's reading of Kant (see Deleuze 1994: 168–76).

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, 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 (different/ciation), 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).

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

At this point, it is clear that what has been labelled as «musical works» are specific *zones*, or partial elements of something that can be more aptly described in terms of musical *assemblages*, which are fabricated by intensive processes that generate *virtual structures* and *actual things*. Music Platonists focus on the structures, the «reality» of which they deny, and which they conceive as purely abstract, fixed, immobile, and eternal (thus being «transcendent»). For their part, nominalists rely on extensive individual singularities, historically contingent, but also fixed and totally defined, to which they deny a virtual (intensive and non-material) component. For a Deleuzian-inspired music ontology, musical assemblages 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) has been, to my knowledge, the first attempt to think music ontology from a Deleuzian perspective. However, he places his inquiry within currently available ontologies, using Peter Kivy and Lydia Goehr as two examples of the polarisation 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 ontology – and not so much what Deleuze said or wrote about music.²² So, I don't think there is «a Deleuzian musical work,» which is Gallope's central concern. There cannot be a Deleuzian musical «work.» There can only be a Deleuzian musical *work*, which is a multiplicity made

²² In this sense, it would be worth exploring to what an extent do Deleuze's ontological commitments enable a view of artworks fundamentally different than the one he himself discusses, which is still grounded on the notion of «monument,» thus pertaining to the classical paradigm (see, for example, *What is Philosophy?* [Deleuze 1991: 184]). Is Deleuze's art theory less radical than his differential ontology?

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 assemblage 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 *flexible structure*, to the *diagram* of a musical work, with all its topological singularities. It remains abstract without being ideal (because those singularities are real; that is, they *exist*), and is dependent on the quantity and quality of the concrete mapping of its universal 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* about if one starts from the topological singularities that enable us to think of 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 generated* 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 energetic processes of individuation, thus, not *sempiternal* Platonic fictions). In order to emerge, this *structural* image requires a *transcendental empiricism*, an enormous (*transcendental*) number 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 *t*) 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 pre-determined 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 «musical works» emerged at a given historical time, were defined by innumerable sets of physical documents, were the result of intensive processes of generation, and continue to 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 and definitive formal definition. If anything, they are mobile entities.

Instead of relying on 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.»

²³ I addressed this topic in detail in «Beyond *Urtext*: A Dynamic Conception of Musical Editing» (Assis 2009: 7–18).

5. Conclusion: musical ~~works~~ as assemblages

Works appear then as *assemblages*, as highly complex, historically constructed multiplicities defined by *virtual structures*, *intensive processes*, 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, and how to express them anew. The first approach remains 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 surveillance and control, this perspective offers a methodology for unconventional, critical renderings that expose the variety and complexity of the musical 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.

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