

Western Oregon University

Digital Commons@WOU

Honors Senior Theses/Projects

Student Scholarship

6-1-2012

Demystifying the Performance Authentic: Translation, Preference and the New Aesthetic

Christopher McFetridge

Western Oregon University, crmcfetridge@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.wou.edu/honors_theses



Part of the [Music Performance Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

McFetridge, Christopher, "Demystifying the Performance Authentic: Translation, Preference and the New Aesthetic" (2012). *Honors Senior Theses/Projects*. 57.

https://digitalcommons.wou.edu/honors_theses/57

This Undergraduate Honors Thesis/Project is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Scholarship at Digital Commons@WOU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Senior Theses/Projects by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons@WOU. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@wou.edu, kundas@mail.wou.edu, bakersc@mail.wou.edu.

Demystifying the Performance Authentic: Translation, Preference and the New Aesthetic

By

Christopher R. McFetridge

An Honors Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for Graduation from the
Western Oregon University Honors Program

Dr. Perlman
Thesis Advisor

Dr. Gavin Keulks,
Honors Program Director

Western Oregon University

June 2012

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements:	3
Abstract:	4
Demystifying the Performance Authentic: Translation, Preference and a New Aesthetic	5
Bibliography:	29
Discography:	30

This paper would not have been possible without the close support of my friends, family and instructors. I would like to acknowledge and thank Dr. Mark Perlman for his liberal assistance in correcting some of my more glaring mistakes as well as Dr. Ryan Hickerson for his help in highlighting some of my argument's weaker moments. Without their combined input the following paper would likely appear less than convincing.

Abstract

Judgements of performance art are often contingent upon a notion of Authenticity. What we mean by *authentic*, however, is not readily accessible. An exploration of proposed authenticity-theories can help reveal the merits and impediments contained within those theories--and may ultimately suggest an Authentic-metric. However, such an analysis leads, counterintuitively, to the jeopardization of the term. We can suggest, in virtue of our analysis, that formal inconsistencies within the Authentic-metric promote a more elusive aesthetic discourse than otherwise necessary. By endorsing direct aesthetic discourse we can remove the obscured lens of Authenticity and begin encountering works as they are truly presented.

Many people believe that for a non-improvised performance piece of music to be good, it must be authentic. Deservedly or not, the results of this value based litmus test dominate the overall aesthetic evaluation of a given performance. Authenticity brings with it high aesthetic quality whereas performances that are not authentic will automatically have low, or at least lower, aesthetic quality. The employment of such an aesthetic paradigm is a pragmatic and commonsensical method of artistic appraisal. However, in order to initiate this aesthetic school of thought we must first determine how to define authenticity and how we ought to apply it in practice. Existing theories of the Authenticity of performance show us composer, musicians, instruments, and score as being the primary determinants of a work's aesthetic and authentic success. If our theory cannot be justified within these parameters then we may suggest a subversive motivation on the part of authenticity theorists as, presumably, an aesthetic theory cannot be made out of a theory unconcerned with aesthetics. Modern musicologists have proposed two paradigms of authenticity-theory which focus on the intentions of composers and performers. Both theories demonstrate debilitating frailties when compared to one which posits that the authentic performance is the one which takes the work at face value as presented through score, instructive asides from the composer, and traditional interpretation. Examining this third "documentary theory of authenticity," also fails, thus we are left with only the translated prejudices of consumers. When we posit that a work either obtains or fails to achieve a state of authenticity we are, more than anything else, obfuscating a preferred aesthetic quality and masquerading it as an aesthetic attribute.

The “auditorium-chair philosopher” is easily tempted to question the way in which a performance might vary were its composer currently alive. We arrive at this exploratory assertion if not only due to empirical evidence, but also due to the fact that unlike other fields of artistic expression music has been historically willing to adopt new technologies. The piano and the saxophone--in non-classical circles the influx of digital and electronic instruments--demonstrate this characterization. That in mind, a question along the lines of “what would Bach do with access to a modern orchestra?”-- as well as the more sweeping “what would Bach do with modern instruments?”-- seem to be poignant introspections in the mind of the audience member as well as the performer. If Authenticity is supposed to exemplify the intentions of a composer it is worth asking: would his compositional style have changed had he had access to a modern 88 key piano? Likewise, what would his string arrangements have sounded like had the craftsmen of the time been able to produce steel, as opposed to gut, strings?

To presuppose that Bach’s orchestral works would remain unchanged despite the availability of different technology would be tantamount to assuming that Thales, 5th c. b.c. cosmological conviction--“All is wet,” would not change were he to have been learned in the modern sciences. When one assumes that composers and their works would be unchanged given access to a different field of technology, one quietly posits the that composers somehow supersede their own historical context. Were roughly 250 years of technological and musicological advancement available to him, it seems implausible that Bach’s works would be utterly unaffected. I feel confident that a contemporary Bach, composing with access to contemporary instruments and recording methods, would

construct his works with some semblance to contemporary fashion. This ‘blasphemous’ opinion may abhor traditionalist musicologists; still it seems imaginable that a modern Bach--or a Bach-with-modern-orchestra--might toy with the timbres of technology, perhaps abandoning pipe-organ for something else, be it a synthesizer or modern symphonic orchestra. Abandoning what we might call our most creative interpretations (xaguilar79) the theory that time and technology determine composition still holds strong. Even when we explore the lesser formulation of this theory (above mentioned as Bach-with-modern-orchestra) the disparity between what *was* possible during the time of composition and what *is* possible with access to any given philharmonic group affirms our suspicion that change would be likely.

It seems nearly tautological to claim that what an artist produces is itself a product of the materials available to the artist. Yet, what makes a work of art is, indeed at least in part, contingent upon what materials are available to the artist. Were it possible to change the materials available to an artist, one would likely change the product of that artist. Accordingly, if Bach were to be composing in the modern era then an authentic performance of Bach could possibly include modern instrumentation. If such a strong response can be given to the skeptics of our what-would-Bach-do? paradigm, it only seems natural to question what could possibly hinder this authenticity-theory? The foremost and easiest objection is the simple assertion that we do not, and could not ever, know exactly what an individual would have composed under any situation other than that situation endured by the composer during his or her lifetime. Our aforementioned tautology turns against us and proves that what was produced by an artist is the only

formulation that we can reasonably conjecture. When we choose to explore the interrogative of the “modern composer”--asking “what would Bach do”-- we are, in fact exploring ourselves. We are so tempted to consider what a composer might do in a modern context because if we can succeed in convincing our audience of the authenticity of our interpretation then our interpretation is justified.

The failure to know exactly, “what *would* Bach do?” might give rise to another question in the mind of the performer: “what *did* Bach do?” Philosopher Aaron Edidin notes the rise of “historical authenticity” (Edidin 79) as a functional solution to our problem. Edidin opens his discussion, “Playing Bach His Way: Historical Authenticity, Personal Authenticity and the Performance of Classical Music” by describing the climate of classical performance, and subsequently the application of historical authenticity, among modern groups: “Performances on archaic instruments...constitute an appreciable proportion of top-level performances of baroque and earlier music and a nonnegligible fraction of performances of later music.” (Edidin 79) This movement, of Historically Informed Performance, utilizes what we will term “ideal first performance” to assign value to subsequent performances. “Ideal first performance,” here implies the way in which a composition would have been played upon its initial instantiation were it to be executed with technical perfection. We formulate our definition in such a way as to have the authentic performance depend on the specific time period of its composition while preventing mistakes made by musician or conductor from becoming ossified, emblazoned, and certified as authentic. In determining a work’s authenticity our reference is the past and not the imagined-present embraced by what-would-Bach-do? speculation.

Performances of Bach's "Toccatina and Fugue in D minor" are to be evaluated based upon their likeness in execution to the way in which Bach was relegated to performing them. Historical authenticity prescribes that period instruments, strings, bows, techniques, and styles be used in order to accomplish a truly authentic performance. These techniques and styles are discovered by lengthy and scrupulous studies in musicology. This musicological archaeology attempts to construct what the hypothesized "recording of Bach" (Kivy 48) might have sounded like. Were modern aesthetes presented with this imagined recording, thinks Rutgers professor Peter Kivy

[It would be possible to]measure any present-day performance against it to determine, in this particular sense of 'authenticity,' whether that performance was historically 'authentic' or not, or in what degree, by listening to the [modern performance]...and the recording of Bach, and comparing them...A present-day performance of a Bach fugue, then, is sonically authentic if it is sonically identical with a performance that Bach might have given. (Kivy 48)

Much of the classical music which has been recorded, printed, packaged and set for sale utilizes this "particular sense of 'authenticity.'" Columbia's line of *Materworks Recordings* champions, E. Power Biggs' performance of Bach due to the locale of its performance: the Thomaskirche in Leipzig (Bach's own church). They continue to emphasize the importance of the acoustics of the room as captured in the recording (Biggs). We might feel a natural inclination to regard Biggs' performance as having an authenticity greater than an equally well performed version on piano in a local auditorium ("Toccatina and Fugue in D minor (Piano)"). Somehow the fact that the Biggs recording is

taking place in the same location as Bach's would have gives it greater worth: perhaps even with good reason. Performing on a similarly attuned instrument in the same room that Bach himself composed, Biggs' performance makes every effort to conform to the ideal first performance and produces an aesthetically impressive work.

Despite the conformity of our notion of "greater worth" in Biggs' performance and the ideal first performance, we still encounter practical issues when we endorse this theory over others. When we support the notion that the ideal first performance is the authentic, or correct, version we necessarily generate a limit case in which *all* subsequent performances fail to truly achieve a state of authenticity. The ideal first performance sets a standard which cannot be achieved. The conditions of that imagined instantiation are necessarily removed from contemporary performers and necessarily inaccessible. The ideal first performance is couched in history and subsequently locale, attendance, style of dress, date, politics; not to mention instrument specifics. When we support such a formulation of authenticity we underhandedly assert the existence of an ideal which can only be approximated in contemporary performance, and never actually realized. Surely this is too strong a requirement for music written and clearly intended to be played long into the future.

Even weaker version of the "ideal first performance" still appears erroneous. Instead of utilizing "ideal first performance" as our metric, let us instead use the one which (in Edidin's phrase), "[realizes] the composers intentions and expectations regarding style." Such a position maintains a commitment to the technical specifics of the period--instruments, style of play--while dropping the unreasonably specific

metaphysical definition. A brief exploration of this new theory reveals that we are no longer talking about Authenticity as an aesthetic virtue in its own right, but are instead discoursing about the historicity of a piece.

If we consider a performance to be Authentic based upon its resemblance to a specific incarnation of the piece in a historical time period, then we are diminishing the importance of the Authentic and forcing it to be accompanied by a qualifier. “Authenticity” no longer stands on its own but must be accompanied by “Historical.” When we do this, however we equivocate “Historical authenticity” with “historical accuracy.” All analysis of a performance’s resemblance to an historically imagined performance is done outside of the work itself. And while there may be merit for discussing a piece based upon its recapitulation of a historical time period, it also seems foolish to allow accuracy (something outside of the work) to assign aesthetic success or failure (something within the work) to a work. Furthermore, if performers rely upon musicologists for their direction in performance--which style to play in, which instruments to use, which frequency to tune to--what would happen to all of the performances deemed “Authentic” were musicologists discover an error in their field of study? It is currently held by many musicologists that in the Baroque era the frequency of A was not 440 hertz, as is standard today, but instead was nearly a half step lower. If these same musicologists were to discover that, in fact, the frequency of A had never changed would all of the performances of the late twentieth century become retrospectively inauthentic? Would the “excellent” performances of today suddenly be deemed inauthentic because of this misinformation? It is awfully counterintuitive that

aesthetic quality could change in this way. It seems that the Authentic performance may well be related to historical performance, but authenticity is surely not fully encapsulated by details of history.

What are we left with if even the historical setting of a piece fails to engross the definition of Authentic? The notes, scores, and documented remarks of the composer. Arguing against the historical notion of authenticity Stan Godlovitch draws a comparison between score and recipe:

There are known degrees of uncertainty regarding relative proportions of ingredients, the strength and quantity of the vinegar, the precise varieties of the herbs and greens. Such uncertainties prompt empirical inquiry which may uncover further evidence about which exploratory hypotheses may be entertained...we are not tracking down the taste sensation of a fourteenth-century salad-eater. The recipe never promises that we can taste what they tasted. It does, however, give us good reason to think that we can at least prepare salad much as they did, and eat what they ate; and so the cook's-eye view of authenticity.

(Godlovitch 162)

What Godlovitch expresses bears resemblance to our historical authenticity model, and yet is distinct. "The recipe never promises that we can taste what they tasted" writes Godlovitch, anticipating the precise error which prevented our endorsement of the "ideal first performance" model. Instead, authenticity is a commitment to the recipe, with faith in the promise that we can "prepare salad *much* as they did [*italics mine*]." The authentic performance is the one which attempts to compile all of the performance notes in such a

way that it shows faith to the “recipe.” Strings, styles, costumes, do not *necessarily* impinge upon a performance’s ability to garner authenticity.

Those who are unhappy with this definition may try to denigrate it with claims of relativism. Given an audience with unsophisticated taste, an inauthentic performance could be mistaken for an authentic one much as a poorly prepared recipe may be well received. To suggest that an authentic performance is the one which shows ‘faith’ in our ability to perform “much as they did” is to allow for the inclusion of any number of non-conventional performance methods. An electronic instrument, for instance, specifically calibrated to mimic the timbre of the organ at Bach’s Thomaskirche, could render an authentic performance were it to be executed in such a way that it commits itself to the ‘recipe.’

In the hypothesized event that a performance of Bach were given on a synthesizer (smalin)--even if this synthesizer were to be superbly crafted--it would not, in fact, meet the requirements of the “cooks’s-eye” to earn the title “authentic.” The cook’s-eye view of authenticity has respect for the recipe. Thus we are able to rule out performances of the work on the myriad of electronic instruments currently in circulation. That we are “not tracking down the taste sensation of a fourteenth-century salad-eater” (Godlovitch 162) should not be exaggerated to incorporate the relativism suggested in the critique of the cook’s-eye view of authenticity. Certain ingredients can be substituted without decimating the general flavor of a dish. Likewise, various components of a performance may be changed without guaranteeing the piece’s failure to be authentic. Why should we discount a performance of Bach’s work based solely on its being performed on a newer

organ, a piano, or perhaps even with a full orchestra? Certainly his piece was written and initially performed on a specific organ in a specific locale, but as we have shown, if we *only* adopt history as our metric we can never truly call any performance authentic.

The flexibility of the “cook’s-eye” as an aesthetic perspective gives one the opportunity to return from the realm of excessively technical artistic constructs and concern ourselves with practical application. The success or failure of our theory depends upon its ability to successfully account for the aesthetic disparity between authentic and inauthentic performances. Having sketched a functional definition of the term, our next task is to determine which of the aforementioned performances stand up to the Authentic metric. Which performance of Bach’s Toccata and Fugue in D minor can be said to “give us good reason to think that we can at least [hear the performance] much as they did...” (Godlovitch 162).

The “cook’s-eye view” is demonstrative of a type of performance paradigm that philosophers like Peter Kivy have termed “compliance.” In simple terms this notion of compliance demands that an authentic work respect the “instructions for performing that are embodied in the score.” (Kivy, *Introduction* 225). Compliance-theory predicates this “respect” as a necessary condition of a performance’s being authentic. In our own discussion we can readily encounter this respect in the Columbia *Masterworks* performance by Biggs. In addition to its compliance, Biggs’ recording cements itself within the “spirit” of the piece in virtue of the locale of his performance. Biggs’ playing, it might then be said, is an exemplification or instantiation of the Authentic. But what are we to say of our other renderings of Bach’s famous work?

The rendition of Toccata and Fugue in D minor for piano seems a likely second place contender for the title: “Authentic”. The masterful and delicate performance by Alexander Gavrylyuk, taken from the 2007 Miami International Piano Festival clearly attains the power and force of Biggs’ opening throes. Though his instrument, piano, is incapable of achieving the same range as either Bach or Biggs’ organ, Gavrylyuk undeniably executes the transfer to piano with skill. Concessions must be made, however, if we are to deem his work authentic without argument. Because his performance is for an instrument which did not exist during Bach’s lifetime a conservative critic can easily suggest that Gavrylyuk’s performance is inauthentic. Even according to the conservative paradigm, though, his tokening of the Toccata seems to at least *approach* Authenticity: participating in the same “spirit” as Biggs’ own performance of the work as a performance of Bach on keyboard. It is this admission--and the hierarchical edifice which follows it--which will ultimately deconstruct the authentic.

It is in evaluating the intuitively “lesser” version of the Toccata that Godlovitch’s cook’s-eye view slides into what I will call the arbitrary and prejudicial *gourmet’s*-eye view. Despite our theory’s concurrence with the popular opinion that both our synthesized recording of the Toccata and the version performed for electric guitar represent mere vulgar or lowly manifestations of Bach’s great work, the fact is that both performances bear greater sonic resemblance to the original than Gavrylyuk’s. The performance given for electric guitar employs varied effects aimed at simulating the reverberation and timbre of a church’s organ. Furthermore, by the very nature of synthetic music, it is foreseeable that an electronic program could more perfectly represent the

Tocatta than Gavrylyuk of Biggs. Naysayers might debate the artificial nature of a synthesized performance as being of a different type; that their similarity is a result of the manipulation of an electronic signal and not in virtue of their natural sound. Perhaps rightly, they suggest that the synthesized performance circumvents some other essential aspects of performance: that works need to be performed by individuals. With these critiques in mind our critique of the “cook’s-eye” view can be rewritten to include not only human performance but also acoustic instrumentation.

While somewhat humorous, it is foreseeable that even a troupe of kazoo players could better perform Bach’s piece. The kazoos would need to be crafted in various sizes in order to account for the range of the piece, but given the right kazoos and enough time to practice our imagined group could presumably execute the piece with a great level of accuracy. While our example is downright foolish, the timbre of an imagined kazoo-symphony would bear greater sonic similarity to Bach than even a skilled pianist. How are we to account for this phenomenon? It appears that a conception of authenticity which resists the lowly, but sonically similar, performances of a work must appeal to some non-musical aspect of performance. Yet, surely musical authenticity and musical quality should depend upon musical properties. Cook’s-eye theorists might, in all fairness, respond to this accusation by saying that the inclusion of any non-conventional performance method is *invalid* in virtue of its failure to respect the implied conventions of the artistic culture of a piece. Analogously: if our authentic chef were to reject the substitution of a dark leafed romaine for a similarly dark leafed spinach, while endorsing the nutritionally and aromatically inferior iceberg lettuce, we would lament that his

motivation had little to do with the authentic repetition of taste or color in a salad. If the “cook’s-eye” theorist denigrates the kazoo performance, and embraces--or at least appreciates--the performance for piano then he has abandoned the recipe in favor of something else.

Compliance-theorists, as well as advocates of the “cook’s-eye view” of authenticity might respond by saying that the inclusion of any non-conventional performance method, would be considered *invalid* in virtue of its failure to respect the implied conventions of the artistic culture of a piece. The weight behind such an assertion lies in the notion that only certain instantiations of a piece ought to be given evaluation. Because Bach’s composition is so technologically removed from our ‘inferior’ examples the “cook’s-eye” theorist would suggest that they necessarily eliminate any possibility of their being authentic. Accordingly, the synthesized performance of the Toccata and Fugue in D minor, while sonically similar and respectful of the musical notation comprising the piece, is inauthentic in virtue of its *being* a synthesized performance of the Toccata and Fugue in D minor.

The convention of Bach’s performance is arrived at after careful consideration of the way in which Bach has been performed until now, thus the rebuttal of the compliance-theorist depends upon a functioning conception of how the *artworld* is constructed and regulated. Given that conception compliance theory can be said to posit normative modes of performance. Under this refined definition, performances of Bach’s piece on piano, or by orchestra (both of which may have a greater disparity in timbre than those of a

synthesizer) are considered authentic not in virtue of the actual sonic-envelope which they produce, but instead as a result of the culture of the *artworld*.

While the “cook’s-eye view of authenticity” succeeds at patching the holes of its predecessors, it does not stand upon its own independently of the paradigms which constructed it. If we are wont to accept a performance of Bach’s piece while rejecting performances on sonically similar instruments, then our notion of “recipe,” or authenticity, necessarily has little to do with the actual sound of a piece. It is awfully suspicious for a theory of musical authenticity and quality to ignore the actual sound of a piece of music.

Yet, why should compliance theorists, in their search for the performance authentic, appeal to the collective essence of art producers and purveyors? Institutional theorist, George Dickie explains this motivation by saying that “Whenever art is created there is...an artist who creates it, but an artist always creates for a public of some sort” (Dickie 219). The *artworld* proper comprises the multitude of individuals engaged in the creation and enjoyment of aesthetic works and does so in order to provide context for “[the] public to whom [the] art is presented” (Neil 219). By including the public, Dickie and other institutional theorists are able to account for the way in which audiences actually interact with art. The *artworld* proper comprises the multitude of individuals engaged in the creation and enjoyment of aesthetic works. In this particular mode the *artworld* functions as a seemingly benign micro-economy. As in other economic structures, however, the relationship between producer and patron is expressly dynamic. By this we mean to say that the relationship of power between artists and audiences is

bidirectional. In its dialectical production and consumption of art the *artworld* systematically develops rules by which to more effectively govern itself. The *artworld* does this in virtue of its own selective nature: by determining the successes and failures of particular works and work-types. Genius theory in general can be traced back to the emphatic endorsements of creator X.

When the compliance-theorist turns toward the *artworld* for assistance, they are appealing to an authoritative figure. Aesthetic philosopher, and *artworld* member, Roger Scruton expresses this appeal by declaring that “The great work has an authority for us: it stands beyond criticism, a monument to what is possible...They are, to use Matthew Arnold’s term, the ‘touchstones’ against which we try all lesser works, and towards which composers look for their paradigms.” (374) What Scruton points out, and what cook’s-eye theorists hope to capitalize on, is the way in which the *artworld* establishes normative judgements. Authentic performance makes its final stand as being that performance which conforms to the notion of “greatness” or “authenticity” endorsed by the politicking *artworld* conglomerate. However, this position willfully turns a blind eye toward the fact that the *artworld* is, in fact, the composite of multiply subjective and nuanced *artworldviews*. The problem of endorsing an appeal like Dickie’s to the *artworld*, in an attempt to salvage a definition of authenticity, is that such an appeal subjects itself to the relativism of public opinion: to the collective *artworldview* of any given period. In its greater sense, the *artworldview* is the particular expression of the popular undercurrents of the *artworld*. In the contemporary considerations we find exemplification of the *artworldview* in the notion that ‘great’ pieces of music are performed in concert halls, that

“hotel art” inherently fails to achieve aesthetic success, and in discussions of art/folk-art/craft distinctions. An aggregate of artistic peculiarities, the *artworldview* is not only representative of the flux of artistic fashion but also the research done regarding the contents of the *artworld*.

Presently, the belief is held that the A above middle C of Bach’s time existed at a different, drastically lower, frequency than the standardized 440 hz recognized by modern composers. Musicologists, as well as art historians, have found sufficient evidence to support this shift--yet, our concern lies apart from determining the sufficiency of evidence for an historical topic. However, as participants in the *artworld* musicologists themselves display a unique world view in their research and theorizing. In so many words, the nature of the musicologist’s interest in a topic can be seen as another product of a particular *artworldview*. Those researching the correct pitch of A over middle C were engaged with their topic as a function of their own culture. Were this not the case, a discovery like the correct pitch of A above middle C could not exist. No individual could correctly assimilate the evidence for the theory of “A over middle C’s variance” without some motivation on the part of an *artworldview*. We arrive at this conclusion because it seems implausible that something non-cultural could compel research in the topic of “variance in the pitch of A above middle C” a topic concerned only with culture.

Moreover, it is worth wondering how the correct pitch could ever have been lost in the first place without there first being a popular indifference over the correct pitch of A over middle C. What this line of reasoning shows us is that the “cook’s-eye” theorist errs in his

institutional appeal to the *artworld* because the *artworld* itself cannot produce an objectively valid description of the Authentic

The fluidity of our comparison and categorization shifts the heretofore absolute notion of Authenticity to a subjective, or at least popular, conception of the term. When we say this we finally discard of the belief that Authenticity exists in the work itself, or as a system of absolute rules. Arguing for the subjective understanding of the authentic Allan Moore posits that “Authenticity is a matter of interpretation which is made and fought for from within a cultural and, thus, historicised position. It is ascribed, not inscribed.” (210) Authenticity under these terms exists within the *artworld*, is a mode of positive “authentication.” When we call Biggs’ performance of Bach ‘authentic’ we are claiming that it complies with the curated opinion on how Bach ought to be performed, not with some special character in the score, or even an identifiable sonic signifier. ‘Authenticity’ in this respect is, as we have suggested, merely the socially dominant and approved method of performance. Distinction of the authenticities between one performance and another seem to rely only upon an individual’s fluency within the fabricated *artworldview* of their day and age. We use the word “fabricated” here not to diminish the value of the popular artistic world-view, but instead to indicate the way in which the rules of the *artworldview* only come into being after they have been “made and fought for from within a cultural and historicised position.” Moore concludes his paper by suggesting that a type of authenticity can be preserved by focusing on perceivers and what they find or fail to find within a work. I believe that by lingering upon what is

authenticated--what is “found” within a work--we may be able to categorize the habits of the perceiver: truly demystifying the nature of the performance authentic.

When the executives of the Columbia *Masterworks* series market E. Power Biggs’ recording as being played in the “Bach’s own church” and, even more so, when the listener is given evidence of the recording’s genuine instrumentation--“the disposition of the instrument...is particularly suited to the performance of works from the 16th to the 18th century...”--it is worth wondering what substance truly underlines the work’s implied authenticity? Clearly these rhetorical techniques attempt to validate and prioritize Biggs’ recording in the face of competing performances. But, as we have demonstrated, “authenticity” cannot be posited as an aesthetic attribute. Instead, the values which lie behind claims to authenticity can be translated into more direct language.

The Columbia *Masterworks* series--apparently invoking the ‘first performance’ theory--seeks to praise not Authenticity, as such, but rather History. Their concern with the history of a piece can be seen smuggled into their definition of the Authentic and their desire to replicate that which the composer could have *done* as a matter of fact. They rely upon the assertion that the “composer knows best” in order to structure their evaluative system. I do not wish to argue against the belief professed by Edidin, that “there is good prima facie reason to expect that following such suggestions will often be a source of aesthetic good.” (82) However, it is imperative that we highlight the way in which Edidin’s discussion takes place. Edidin’s paradigm appeals to specific qualities of a work and assigns those qualities values. Basing it on an alleged “authenticity” obscures the ways these specific qualities create aesthetic value. Describing Authenticity as being the

historical quality of a work is functional in common conversation, but invoking the Authentic in academic discussions is superfluous. No explanatory power is delivered to composers, performers or audiences by laying claim to the Authentic. Instead, they only transmute the arguable and finite terms of discussion to the enigmatic terms of aesthetic attribution.

In fact, Godlovitch's near success extolling the virtues of the "cook's-eye" view of Authenticity provides evidence for our claim against the enigmatic Authentic. We arrive at this conclusion when we consider that terms of the "cook's-eye" view generates only a few necessary conditions by which to determine if a work is authentic or not. In accordance with his analogy the salad constructed by the authentic chef need only give us "good reason" to think that we can "eat what they ate." By avoiding absolute terms of sufficiency--prescribing exactly which proportions of greens and vinaigrettes result in an inarguably authentic salad--Godlovitch constructs an approach to the authentic which denigrates "thinness" (172) in favor of empirically rich language. The "thin" appraisal, to Godlovitch, paints a broad picture which cannot be verified except subjectively: "Thin concepts like 'good' are relatively empty empirically." These "thin" evaluations are endlessly debatable. What this means in terms of his argument--as well as our own, to some degree--is that performances of works cannot be properly analyzed with the question "How ought this to be performed?" Where our two analyses diverge, however is in our reformulation of the question: "Which performance is preferred, and why."

It is with this question that we come to the true essence of Authenticity: preference. When we posit that a work either obtains or fails to achieve a state of

authenticity we are, more than anything else, obfuscating a preferred aesthetic quality and masquerading it as an aesthetic attribute. Theories regarding the tension between our nominal definition of Authenticity and the absolute or universal notion of the Authentic have been in circulation since the beginning of the 20th century. Writing in the early 1900's Dr. C. Hubert H. Parry notes in respect to the perceived authenticity of a work that

...unfortunately it is not in the least degree probable that any such simple and universal touchstones of quality will be found. All the people who think they have found them prove worse than useless, and merely cumber the road of artistic progress. When they think they have found tests to prevent being imposed upon they make them into formulas, and then they set up their formulas as fetishes, and the fetishes, after their kind, invariably cease to be intelligible to them...the standards change from day to day; new spheres of artistic energy are discovered; and in the bewilderment induced by its chameleon-like properties men fail even to recognize their own tests when they are staring them full in the face. (377)

And while these preferred aesthetic qualities may exist only within the popular *artworldview* of a time, they exist nonetheless. This fluid understanding of what is meant by authenticity as presented by Parry, and endorsed in this paper, amounts to the fact that aesthetics may pragmatically appeal to the notion of "authenticity" but that the word itself is only a sign referring to a dense cultural paradigm indicative of individual preferences.

When we translate our usage of the term, Authenticity, in respect to a performance of Bach's Toccata and Fugue in D minor, what we come to discover is not only a

categorical approval or disapproval of the work, but also a specific incentive for that judgement. When theorists like Edidin, Godlovitch or Moore take it upon themselves to promote refinements on the definition of the Authentic they begin and conclude their arguments at the same point of preference. Instead of arguing within the confines of limited preferences, though, these theorists argue their for personal preferences to a point of total abstraction. Careful analysis can show the ways in which claims to performance authenticity may be reduced and translated into claims of preference.

If we return to the inquiry made by our imagined auditorium chair philosopher, she questions “what would Bach do with a modern orchestra?” if not only out of sheer entertainment but also because she finds merit in constructing his own intuition of the performance. Likewise, When another individual praises a performance of Bach for closely representing the accepted musicological version of his work they are asserting that what is important to them is the resemblance of performance to such a musicological standard because they believe such resemblance brings with it aesthetic value.

Let us take for example the devotee of the ideal first performance. When this individual praises a performance of Bach for closely representing the accepted musicological version of his work they are asserting that what is important to them is the resemblance of performance to such a musicological standard. As we have shown, this preference of original over representation finds worth not in the performance itself but instead instead in what we might call “...the historical value placed upon [Bach] in his [Leipzig] context.” (Brook) Thus it is in their experience of the work they must be convinced that it is at least *somewhat* like what Bach could have accomplished as they

believe that such a resemblance will bring with it aesthetic value. They reject performance of Bach on piano, guitar, synthesizer, kazoo under the pretext that either i) those instruments did not exist at the time, or ii) Bach did not write music to be performed upon those instruments. Their statement of preference, “x is an authentic performance,” can be translated to better describe where they believe the aesthetic value of a performance lies.

Many will complain that such a against our translative theory with non-absolute expressions of authenticity theory will descend into mere aesthetic relativism. Their line of thought proceeds: if we are to reduce or translate expressions of performance authentic into statements of preference we will also eliminate our ability to discuss that which makes the satisfactory stand apart from the great. An even more hearty objection to this method of translation concedes our theory but renders it impotent. Authenticity is an expression of a preference based in a particular *artworldview*, they admit, but the mere fact that it expresses preference--and not some metaphysical attribute of a performance--does not strip it of its semantic meaning. So what? they say: our conversations still make sense when we use the term.

The first objection is, perhaps, best dealt with by another question: why does one prefer what she prefers? The difference between the satisfactory and the great performance does not vanish in the wake of our deconstruction of the Authentic any more so than the reasons that we have for preferring the great to the satisfactory. That is to say, reasons for preferring one piece to another--valid, communicable, and tangible reasons--continue to exist. If the concern of the audience member is that she will not be able to

justify her preference then it seems imperative that she pay closer attention. Why should the audience member prefer E. Power Biggs' performance of the Toccata and Fugue in D minor to the hullabaloo of a kazoo troupe? As an audience we could present valid arguments for our preference: the texture of the performance, or the skill of Biggs and his study of the piece. When we translate the Authentic into a statement of preference we simply make clear the real and specific bases of evaluation, and eliminate the enigmatic element of our discussion. No explanatory power is lost with our translation. If anything, it is gained.

“Authenticity,” as a term used to communicate an opinion of aesthetic experience, can still accomplish this task even given our analysis. The layman attending a performance of classical music may still question his neighbors as to the piece's authenticity. And in their response, his neighbors, may still affirm or deny that “authenticity” based upon their own *artworldview*; as if that title were akin to the truth value of a logical proposition. In the realm of Aesthetics, however, it is imperative that we recognize the hollow and inconsistent nature of “authenticity.” While still a plausible adjective within common language, it has been shown to be fraught with inconsistencies. In the realm of physics we could not allow that the idea of the sun “moving across the sky,” while linguistically valid, constitutes some sort of proof of the static earth theory. When we abandon the archaic conception of the performance authentic and embrace, in its place, the constituents of preference aesthetic discussion enters a new field of conversation. We ought to discuss the factors which make a work “moving” or “repulsive” and not trust in the intentionally obscure notion of our abstraction. By coming

to terms with the reasons why we prefer or reject performance we can better express the value of those performances and arrive at a new aesthetic.

Bibliography

- Brook, Eric. "Art Imitating Art." Contemporary Aesthetics. 2008.
- Dickie, George. "The New Institutional Theory of Art." Ed. Alex Neil. *The Philosophy of Art*. Boston: McGraw-Hill, 1995. 213-23. Print.
- Edidin, Aron. "Playing Bach His Way: Historical Authenticity, Personal Authenticity and the Performance of Classical Music." *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 32.4 (1998): 79-91. Print.
- Godlovitch, Stan. "Performance Authenticity." from Kemal, Salim, and Ivan Gaskell. *Performance and Authenticity in the Arts*. New York: Cambridge UP, 1999. Print.
- Goodman, Nelson. *Languages of Art: an Approach to a Theory of Symbols*. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1976. Print.
- Kivy, Peter. *Authenticities: Philosophical Reflections on Musical Performance*. Ithaca: Cornell, 1995. Print.
- Kivy, Peter. *Introduction to a Philosophy of Music*. Oxford: Clarendon, 2002. Print.
- Moore, Allan. "Authenticity as Authentication." *Popular Music*, 21:2. 2002.
- Parry, Charles Hubert Hastings. *Style in Musical Art*. London: Macmillan, 1979. Print.

Discography

Bach, Johann Sebastian. "Toccatà and Fugue in D Minor." *E. Power Biggs Plays Bach in the Thomaskirche*. Columbia Masterworks, 1971. Vinyl recording.

Miamipianofestival. "ALEXANDER GAVRYLYUK BACH-BUSONI TOCCATA / FUGUE D MINOR." *YouTube*. YouTube, 29 Mar. 2008. Web. 31 May 2012.

Smalin. "Bach, Toccatà and Fugue in D Minor, Organ." *YouTube*. YouTube, 10 Dec. 2005. Web. 31 May 2012.

Xaguilar79. "Toccatà and Fugue in D Minor (J.S.Bach)." *YouTube*. YouTube, 04 Feb. 2009. Web. 31 May 2012.