

Modifying the score

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ABSTRACT: *Modifying the score* examines the practice, sometimes carried out by pianists, of altering a notated musical work by such devices as thickening textures, changing registers or adding pianistic elaborations. In particular, it examines this practice of modification in relation to the music of Liszt. Four main questions are addressed, and these concern: (1) the notional space occupied by modification in relation to other species of work alteration (such as transcription); (2) the modifying pianist's relation to the score; (3) the effect of modification on the listener; and lastly (4) the article examines why Liszt's music seems to be the object of modification more than any other composer's. After examining several recorded performances of Liszt's music which feature modification, the article's conclusion is that the practice occupies a notional space not previously theorised although it shares features with philosopher Paul Thom's notion of "realisation". Using Jean-Jacques Nattiez's ideas of poiesis and esthesis (creation and perception) the article demonstrates that modification extends performer control over a musical work beyond what is nowadays normally understood by "interpretation", and that such control can challenge a listener's assumptions about a work. Finally it concludes that although modification could be considered work-invasive, it does not seem to be at odds with the Lisztian spirit.

KEY WORDS: Pianist, Liszt, performance, modification

Pianists sometimes sport with musical works, embellishing, enriching or extending the original (as notated in a score), and the works of Liszt seem to be one of their prime targets. Ferruccio Busoni replaced the last thirty bars of Liszt's Polonaise No. 2 in E with his own mini-paraphrase and, more famously perhaps, Vladimir Horowitz amplified the technical challenges in Liszt's Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2 in C sharp minor, rendering his version even more powerful and brilliant than the composer's. Horowitz also created a twice-removed

version of Saint-Saëns' *Danse Macabre* by extending and intensifying the virtuosity in Liszt's transcription of the orchestral original.

The outcome of such sport seems to me to raise four main questions: (1) Where philosophically does such a musical phenomenon sit in the range of classifications extending from original work, through interpretation in performance to alterations such as transcription, variation and paraphrase? (2) What does it signify about the performer's relation to the score? (3) How does it impact on the (musically informed) listener's reception of the music? And finally (4) why Liszt? In responding to these questions most of my points potentially have general relevance to all mediums and repertoires within the Western art music tradition. However, since the type of sport with which this article is concerned seems mainly confined to the self-determining solo pianist with no fellow performers to consider, I am focusing my discussion around pianists, piano music and related performance practice issues.

Accounting for alteration

Interpretation

Regarding my first question, it does not seem admissible to include what I have so far loosely dubbed "sport" within the concept of interpretation as it is normally understood by the performing community operating within Western art music today. This common understanding is articulated by Claudio Arrau when he states that "fidelity and loyalty to what the composer wanted is only a basis on which the artist builds his own vision, his own idea of the work. But the vision must not jeopardise his respect for the text" (Mach, 1991, p. 4). Paul Thom assigns a broad philosophical remit to the notion of interpretation, the intricacies of which I do not propose to tackle here. However the initial statement of his concept is of relevance:

Any interpretation has an object – that of which it is an interpretation. The interpretation is made by an interpreter. What is made must in some ways exceed the object; because of this, interpretation involves creativity. The interpretation cannot simply reproduce the object, but it does represent the object, and because of this fact, interpretation requires fidelity to the object (Thom, 2007, pp. 72-73).

Within the confines of my admittedly circumscribed interpretation of the term "interpretation", the score-based performer can identify with at least one very obvious sense in which Thom's sentiment may be understood, which is that interpreting a musical score creatively engages the musical imagination. As Arrau puts it "[i]nterpretation is a synthesis of the world of the composer and the world of the interpreter" (Horowitz, 1999, p. 121). In any case, it has long been recognised that a score cannot determine its performances in all particulars:

no matter how scrupulously a piece of music may be notated, no matter how carefully it may be insured against every possible ambiguity through the indications of *tempo*, shading, phrasing, accentuation, and so on, it always contains hidden elements that defy definition, because verbal dialectic is powerless to define musical dialectic in its totality (Stravinsky, 1998, p. 123).

More emphatically Stan Godlovich asserts that “notated works massively underdetermine whatever emerges in performance” (Godlovich, 1998, p. 82). Perhaps this overstates the case, but the implication is nevertheless that the performer’s job is to make artistic decisions about the objects of his or her practice¹, in particular those areas of the work-as-score that the score alone seems to leave open – areas such as dynamics, tempo, rubato and pedalling for instance. However, none of the foregoing opinions, as typically applied to current practice, implies that a performer’s interpretative activities extend to substitutions of pitch, rhythm or texture at least in a fully notated musical work from the time of Beethoven onwards. So are we moving towards the domain of arrangement?²

Transcription, variation, paraphrase and realisation

The philosopher Paul Thom has examined the business of musical alteration and interpretation, focusing in particular on transcription, variation, realisation and, rather more briefly, paraphrase. It would now be useful to determine whether a pianist’s dalliance with a work-as-score in any measure matches Thom’s conclusions about the more widely accepted species of alteration.

Thom’s definition of transcription may be summarised as follows. A transcription involves adapting a musical work:

to a medium for which it was not originally devised. On the one hand, the transcription shares musical content with the original work; on the other it reworks that content for a new musical medium. It follows that a transcription of a scored work must contain a different set of performance directives from those contained in the score of the original work (Thom, 2007, p. xvi).

The type of alteration I described in the opening paragraph shares very little common ground with Thom’s account. Whilst a performer’s alterations to a work clearly do not obey the original performance directives, the disobedience is intermittent and often not available in a published score for general scrutiny. Transcription is therefore not a helpful concept in this instance.

So could what I earlier described as “sport” be thought of as variation? Thom differentiates variation from transcription principally by contrasting the “manner of presenting the features they share, or do not share, with their objects. A transcription highlights the shared features, and a variation highlights the unshared features” (Thom, 2007, p. 47). In this sense then, there is some affinity between sport and variation, in that the former certainly does highlight unshared features, be these radical departures from the score or merely textural alterations such as octave doubling or displacement. However, the affinity is significantly attenuated when the four subsidiary strands of Thom’s definition are considered. Briefly put, these are that “a variation’s theme, unlike a transcription’s topic work, need not be immediately recognisable”; that “there is the distinction between the theme and the subject of any individual variation”; that “a variation may have more than one subject”; and that “variations usually come in sets, so that within a single work a theme has

¹ The means by which performers arrive at an artistic decision about a work is clearly crucial to the final interpretative product. However since this decision-making process is hard for anyone other than the performers themselves to access, my discussion in this paper concerns final outcomes as heard in recordings and not the individual processes which led to those outcomes.

² Peter Kivy argues that all good performance involves a process analogous to arrangement (Kivy, 1995).

many variations" (*ibid.*, pp. 46-47). There may be some accidental correspondence between Thom's second point and pianistic sport, but the other points are inapplicable or simply irrelevant.

Maybe the notion of paraphrase could be helpful in defining what I am – temporarily and not entirely seriously – dubbing "sport". Thom believes that paraphrases, like transcriptions, "adapt old content to a new medium" but "do not track the material's content bar by bar, but instead adopt a looser approach to it, taking bits from here and there in the material, mixing them up, and linking them by novel transitions" (Thom, 2007, p. xvii). Many of the techniques used in paraphrases, such as those in Liszt's *Rigoletto* paraphrase or *Don Juan* fantasy may well be borrowed by sporting performers, as will be seen in Earl Wild's recording of Liszt's *Mephisto* Waltz No. 1, but the type of musical alteration practised by such performers is nearly always integrated into the score's musical plot, tracking the original quite closely and generally avoiding any significant cutting-and-pasting.

I am considering Thom's category of "realisation" last because it is the most obviously relevant to the present discussion. Thom divides realisation into two categories, notational and executive. The former involves printed performance indicators such as bowing, breathing, expression and tempo markings, as well as "written-out cadenzas and ornaments" and "alterations to the score such as thickened chords, descants, counterpoints, or additional orchestration" (Thom, 2007, p. 50). Executive realisation essentially concerns performance, and, within this brief, Thom includes the embellishment of "unsaturated" passages. By "unsaturated" Thom is referring to scores in which passages seem to imply performer embellishment as a possibility. The adagio slow movement of Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 23 in A K488 furnishes a good example of an unsaturated score in that many pianists now add fill-ins and decorations to the apparently skeleton piano part near the close of the movement. More controversial perhaps is Thom's own example of Leschetitzky's 1906 recording of Chopin's Nocturne in D flat, Op. 27 No. 2 in which the soloist adds many personal touches to the substance of the work. Writing in 1963, Harold Schonberg found the performance "by present standards ... intolerable" (Schonberg, 1987, p. 141). Thom remains non-committal merely commenting that "Leschetitzky treats [the score] as unsaturated. Schonberg takes it to be saturated" (Thom, 2007, p. 56).

Sport is undoubtedly a species of realisation, more executive than notational, though the latter is implicated. However the problem now arises as to whether virtuoso, narrative works such as Liszt's *Mephisto* Waltz No. 1 and 'Vallée d'Obermann' from *Années de pèlerinage* Book 1 could by any stretch of the imagination be considered "unsaturated", since the notation is already so full pianistically that a summons to embellish is not – to today's performer at any rate³ – an obvious conclusion to be drawn from their scores. (An artist may find the scored music unsatisfying, but that is not the same as unsaturated.) Even the score of the technically simpler Chopin Nocturne in D flat has a seemingly high saturation level

³ The type of score alteration that is the focus of this article was a fairly routine procedure for many pianists in the nineteenth century and early years of the twentieth, as Kenneth Hamilton has amply illustrated (Hamilton, 2008). Even a pianist like Hans von Bülow who was regarded by his contemporaries "as a rather strict, cerebral performer" showed in his edition of Beethoven's piano sonatas "just how far removed the nineteenth-century spectrum of attitudes to textual fidelity was from our assumptions" (Hamilton 2008, p. 204). To such performers the concept of a "saturated" versus an "unsaturated" score would probably have been not so much meaningless as redundant. In fact this entire article would probably have been considered redundant!

and it is therefore easy to view any further embellishment as uninvited – as Schonberg presumably did, at least by his yardstick of “today’s standards” (a nicety overlooked by Thom).

Modification

It seems then that we are still left with a notional space between conventional ideas of interpretation and those of arrangement, considered above, within which pianistic sport may lie. Sport does not involve the transfer of musical substance from one medium to another, so it is not transcription; it does not appear in a set or have a specific theme as its object, so it is not variation; it adheres closely to a work’s unfolding as notated in the score, so it is not paraphrase; it is often applied to works that are hard to describe as “unsaturated” so its resemblance to realisation is only partial; it also lies outside the remit normally licensed by interpretation as understood by the present-day performing community. Although there are overlaps with all the foregoing species of arrangement, and notional space is narrowed in particular by Thom’s concept of realisation, there is still some room left and this I shall now categorise by the term *modification*, and will drop my perhaps rather sporting use of the word “sport”.

Modification in context

Despite a narrow categorisation space, modification can be more or less close to the original. Take for example Earl Wild’s 1968 performance of Liszt’s *Mephisto* Waltz No. 1 where he performs largely in conformity with the score until he reaches the coda (Figure 1). Starting at bar 900, Wild expands Liszt’s last eleven bars (twelve if the silent bar 911 is included) to twenty-five, in which the main waltz theme is recalled in a bravura downward sequence. He follows this with an ascending flourish and ends with six punctuating chords (click [here](#) to listen). This minor adjustment has a slight affinity with paraphrase because Wild’s material is drawn from Liszt’s (thus borrows from its object) and is redistributively patched onto the end. However, the overall narrative of Liszt’s music is just slightly amplified, not redesigned, so the paraphrase element is at most marginal. In fact, modification in general is minimal in that Wild essentially plays the work-as-score, leaving his alteration to the last minute and taking the performance only just outside the licence normally admitted by interpretation. Perhaps the performance could best be described as an “interpretation plus”.

Rather more far-reaching is John Browning’s modification of Liszt’s ‘Après une lecture du Dante’ from *Années de pèlerinage* Book 2 heard in the performer’s 1985 recording of the work. The majority of his modification features octave transpositions which occur throughout the performance but most notably between bars 238 and 247. Here the right-hand octave passages are played an octave higher than notated with some of the accompanying left-hand chords played one octave and, more rarely, two octaves higher than written. These alterations, as suggested above, only constitute relatively minor textural adjustments. More controversially then, Browning redesigns the recapitulation of the work’s principal second theme by replacing the score’s descending chordal accompaniment with the descending triplet double-octave accompaniment associated with this theme on its first grandiose appearance at bar 103. The ending (Figure 2) from bar 360 is also substantially redesigned, Liszt’s toccata-like figurations, powerful chords and tremolandos being jettisoned in favour of chromatically descending double octaves, rhythmically punctuating dotted

rhythms and an abrupt ending containing the briefest allusion to the original D major left-hand tremolando (click [here](#) to listen).

The musical score for Liszt's *Mephisto Waltz No. 1*, coda, bars 865-911, is presented in six systems. The first system is marked *tre corde* and *p*. The second system is marked *cresc.* and *ff*. The third system is marked with a repeat sign and *ff*. The fourth system is marked with a repeat sign, *p*, and *rinforzando*. The fifth system is marked *ff*. The sixth system is marked *sf*. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings.

Figure 1: Liszt: *Mephisto Waltz No. 1*, coda, bars 865-911.

The musical score is presented in five systems, each with a grand staff (treble and bass clefs).
- System 1: Features triplets in the right hand and a 'rit.' marking. Dynamics include *p* and *cresc.*
- System 2: Continues the texture with a *p* dynamic and *cresc.* marking.
- System 3: Includes a *rinforz.* marking and a '(8)' annotation above a measure.
- System 4: Marked *ff*, showing a more complex texture with many notes.
- System 5: Marked *Andante (Tempo I)* and *fff marcatisimo*, ending with a double bar line.

Figure 2: Liszt: 'Après une lecture du Dante - fantasia quasi sonata', bars 354-376.

Wild has, to my knowledge, made no public statement about his treatment of the *Mephisto* Waltz but Browning has recorded his views on the *Dante* Sonata: “It has problems that are hard to describe. The joints don’t come together easily. I have a feeling that the piece was really a study for the B Minor Sonata. I think Liszt stopped working on the piece before giving it the final polishing that Brahms, for example, did with his early works” (Livingstone, 1985, p. 5).

The modifying performer therefore regards the performance potential of the work to be only partially encoded in the work-as-score. S/he senses a slight lack of work fulfilment in the notation and seeks to remedy the shortfall. (Again suggesting that s/he finds the score unsatisfying, but not necessarily unsaturated.) This is a particular type of performer involvement which extends the control normally admitted by interpretation, and for further elucidation on the matter it is useful to turn to the writings of the semiotician Jean-Jaques Nattiez.

Nattiez describes the creative urges that precede a composer’s production of a score as “poietic” (from the Greek meaning “to make”) and he claims that “the esthetic [perceptual] process begins at the instant the performer *interprets* the work” (Nattiez, 1987/1990, p. 72). The author further accounts for this by suggesting that the performer’s interpretative act is a completion of the composer’s poietic process as well as an esthetic process, both being triggered by a performer’s contact with the work-as-score.⁴ Normally a performer extends a work’s poiesis simply by interpreting the music and performing it, suggesting a particular balance of interests between poiesis and esthesis. In the case of modification the performer’s esthetic process presumably finds the work-as-score wanting and extends the latter’s poiesis further than a regular interpretative act would permit. In the case of modification then, esthesis involves the performer in a process that is both interpretative and invasive, and Nattiez’s poietic completion-through-performance concept is extended to become completion-through-alteration-and-performance.

Modification thus involves a more critical esthetic process on the part of the performer as well as greater involvement in a composer’s poietic process than is normal in the interpretation of Western art music. This deeper performer involvement in the creative aspects of music-making need not necessarily betoken disrespect for a musical work, more a free alliance – albeit unofficial – between composition and performer. The performer has felt moved to exercise his or her “artistic prerogatives” (Rink, 2004, p. 47), perhaps to the extent of a perceived inauthenticity, but, in the cases of both Wild and Browning, not to the extent that the stylistic or structural parameters of the music are violated.

Modification is a reflection of enhanced performer control and is by nature episodic in its work-altering function. If modification becomes continuous and formalised in a published score, this moves it into the realms of simple transcription, and the control assumed by the performer when involved in modification is now assumed by the arranger. For example Leopold Godowsky’s published arrangement of Albeniz’s *Tango* Op. 165 No.2 which he designates “Transcription de Concert”,⁵ although closely tracking the original, reworks

⁴ Nattiez uses the semiotic idea that the score is a work’s “trace” (Nattiez, 1987/1990).

⁵ Godowsky’s transcription of the Albeniz *Tango* does not really match Thom’s requirement that transcriptions should involve transferral from one musical medium to another, since both the Albeniz and the Godowsky pieces are for piano. Godowsky’s version certainly comes under the generic category of arrangement, but there is probably room for further reflection on this matter.

the harmonies and textures to an extent that the work has a new autonomous existence, itself possibly open to further performer modification; and so a cycle of endless progression becomes theoretically possible. This could also be said of alterations that are in spirit modifications but which have been preserved in print, as with Busoni's rewritten ending to Liszt's Polonaise No. 2 in E mentioned above. Busoni's performer control is now shared with others – who do sometimes employ this revised ending in performance – suggesting that another strand to modification is opening up.

Formal and informal modification

It was noted above that modifications operate on a sliding scale from minimal to significant but it now seems that there is also a range from the “informal” to the “formal”. The published modification, such as produced by Busoni, formally documents a performer's work-alteration in a score. Because a score is “read as instructions addressed to the work's potential performers” (Davies 2001, p. 4), the modification is easily repeatable and shared with the performing community at large and, as noted above, is also capable of engendering further modifications (“I prefer Busoni's ending to Liszt's so I'll play it in my next concert, but I don't like the last five bars so I'll substitute something of my own”). The unscored modification on the other hand is documented only through performance or recording and is therefore a more purely personal artistic statement with no apparent intention that others should adopt the alterations, although a recording does make the latter possible. Nonetheless it is hard to view a recording as a set of instructions to another prospective performer despite its potential as role model.

The second species of modification could be regarded as the more informal of the two and, as such, the more flexible. Some evidence for this can be found in Earl Wild's 1986 video recording of the *Mephisto* Waltz No. 1, where his reworked coda is nearly the same as in his 1968 sound recording, but in the later version, he extends the downwards sequence by another two bars, exploiting the deeper sonorities of the piano's bass range, before executing the remainder of the modification as described above.⁶ Further evidence of flexibility can be drawn from personal experience. In 1996, I prepared Liszt's second Polonaise for performance but decided to replace the composer's written-out cadenza (Figure 4) and ending, both of which I found rather ineffectual, with my own modification (click [here](#) to listen). Although engaging in the poietic/esthetic discourse described above, the product was at most temporarily fixed in that I did not notate the modification, but simply committed it to memory. When I began relearning the work in 2003, I decided to retain the modification but, after listening to a recording of the 1996 performance, opted for something similar but not identical and, in the case of the cadenza, I elected for a slightly more chromatic effect (click [here](#) to listen). This further illustrates the flexible nature of this species of modification, suggesting that a fresh poietic completion-through-alteration-and-performance, however minimal, is possible on each artistic reappraisal.

In sum, it may be observed that the informal/formal modification strand represents a sort of transition from a primary to a secondary score. Interpretation is of a work-as-score;

⁶ Wild did in fact go on to publish the slightly extended version of his modified ending to the *Mephisto* Waltz No. 1. It can be found in his 1988 *Great Performer's Edition* of Liszt's piano music (Volume 1) for G. Schirmer, Inc.

rich or extend what a composer has notated. In other words pianists tend to augment the challenges present in the score rather than to diminish them. Significant also is the fact that the repertoire in which the practice mostly occurs is already technically demanding (saturated) nineteenth-century virtuoso repertoire in which a performance tends to draw “the listener away from the qualities of the work towards the qualities of the performer” and in which virtuosity “can be regarded as the natural outcome of the performer’s quest for autonomy” (Samson, 2003, p. 74). Modification therefore represents a further step towards performer autonomy (a shift in the balance of poiesis/esthesis as described above), in which the performer plays a game of “one-upmanship” with the composer in attempting to outdo the latter’s prescriptions for virtuoso effect in performance. Simplification of a composer’s pianistic prescriptions may also attract attention to the performer but by seemingly advertising technical inadequacies, is more likely to be taken as an admission of failure, redolent of a “simplified version”, designed for the learner not yet capable of tackling the real thing. It is therefore not surprising that modifying pianists tend to establish their autonomy by displaying superior rather than inferior virtuosity.

Modification and the listener

My third question asks how modification affects a listener – and by “listener” I am assuming a person that is musically informed and has prior knowledge of the works under discussion. In attending a concert in which both the *Mephisto* Waltz No. 1 and the *Dante* Sonata are programmed such a listener is likely to arrive with a set of expectations based on his or her foreknowledge of the works and, maybe, of the performer too. In some cases our putative listener will be hoping to have his or her expectations confirmed whilst in others s/he may be hoping to have them challenged. Unless forewarned by a programme note or by familiarity with a particular performer’s practice, the listener is unlikely to expect modification. So to answer the third question we have to address the epiphenomenal question of how listener *expectation* works and how is it liable to be affected by modification.

The music psychologist David Huron identifies four ways in which musical expectations are generated, three of which are of interest here. For expectation to arise there has to be a corresponding memory of past experiences and events, and to explain memory of a specific musical work, Huron adapts the notion of episodic memory. An episodic memory is of something that has been recalled many times and, whereas memory of an autobiographical event can be “easily distorted ... through repeated recollection and retelling ... each exposure to [a musical] work is nearly identical to the previous exposure” thus allowing memories to retain “their accuracy and fidelity” (Huron, 2007, pp. 221-222). It is thus episodic memory that gives rise to veridical expectation (a term Huron borrows from Jamshed Bharucha), expectation which is based on work-specific recall. It arises “[w]hen listening to a familiar work” which guarantees “a pretty accurate sense of what will happen next” (*ibid.*, p. 224).

If episodic memory is the means by which veridical expectation arises then semantic memory is what prompts schematic expectation. Semantic memory is concerned with exposure to categories rather than specifics, although the former are derived from the latter. Huron illustrates the point by suggesting that “the concept of an ‘apple’ is a learned semantic category that arises, in part, from the totality of experiences we have had with individual

apples” (Huron, 2007, p. 225). Thus semantic memories are “generalisations formed by encountering many exemplars” (*ibid.*, p. 225) and it is these that give rise to what Huron terms schematic expectation. In music, semantic memory prompts a schematic expectation which draws on knowledge of certain musical models including formal design, melodic structure, tonal organisation and so forth, models which enable a listener to make informed, medium- to long-term judgements about what may happen next.

Huron’s third expectation class is dependent on short-term memory derived from brief periods of exposure. His research suggests that short-term auditory memory can store sound sequences ranging from three to a maximum of twelve seconds and can retain ten sound events reaching to an upper limit of about twenty-five (Huron, 2007). He notes that “one of the keys to retaining a pattern in short-term memory is repetition” (*ibid.*, p. 228), thus if a common-time metre has been heard over a number of bars the listener may reasonably deduce that the next few bars will also be in common-time metre. This type of anticipation Huron calls dynamic expectation, which occurs “[a]s the events of a musical work unfold” and “itself engenders expectations that influence how the remainder of the work is experienced” (*ibid.*, p. 227).

It may be argued that where a listener knows a musical work in advance of a performance, the only relevant expectations are veridical. But as Huron points out an interrupted cadence, when heard in context a few times, cannot confound veridical expectations but retains its element of schematic surprise – its “deceptive” element being embedded in a western-encultured cause and effect (Huron, 2007). Likewise a sudden change of time signature from, say, 3/4 to 7/8 contains no veridical surprise once the work is known but it retains its dynamic surprise, possibly forming one of those points in the performance of a work which a listener anticipates with pleasure, *because* of its ineradicable element of dynamic surprise. Huron (after Bharucha) suggests that “veridical and schematic expectations involve different neural pathways” (*ibid.*, p. 226) but admits that, where dynamic expectations are concerned, “[c]omparatively little work has been done on how one’s musical expectations adapt while listening to a work” (*ibid.*, p. 229).

Before moving on, I should point out that the following discussion of veridical, schematic and dynamic expectations as applied to modification is not based on statistical data but on personal insights gained as a musically informed listener, frequent audience member (and pianist). The application is therefore heuristic in that Huron’s chosen terminology is conceptually helpful in addressing issues raised by the relationship between musical work, modification and listener.

Listening to Wild, Browning and Volodos

Veridical expectations⁷ are clearly flouted in the cases of both Wild’s *Mephisto* Waltz and Browning’s *Dante* Sonata. In the case of Wild’s performance such expectations are only affected at the very end and, even here, given that Wild redeploys Liszt’s own material the shock to the listener is very mild. This is alleviated still further by the fact that schematic and dynamic expectations are unaffected. Wild is already into the work’s coda before his

⁷ It is possible to have veridical expectations upset by a performance which contains no modification but which does not conform to expressive features marked in the score (rubato, articulation, crescendo, diminuendo etc.) or heard in one recording with which the listener happens to be familiar. This is not however my concern here.

modification is heard, thus fulfilling schematic (and veridical) expectations, and his extension and amplification of the closing bars does nothing to disrupt Liszt's schema. Because the modification is in the nature of a closing flourish and stays within the pianistic and stylistic parameters already established by the work, dynamic expectations are also fulfilled. As a minimal modification (see Figure 1 above), it is not surprising that the effect on the listener is also going to be minimal.

The flouting of veridical expectations in Browning's recording is more substantial, though perhaps less than may first be suggested by the description of his modification given above. His alterations to the recapitulation of the *Dante Sonata's* second subject and his reconstruction of the coda definitely surprise the informed listener and are likely to provoke some reaction (internal or otherwise). However, most of his modification takes the form of octave displacement, affecting only the parameter of pitch but leaving those of tempo, rhythm and texture intact. At points such as these the listener is likely to be aware of some work-as-score variance but with a resemblance too great to attract much notice.

Browning's modification, though more extensive than Wild's, like the latter's fails to defy schematic expectations. The octave displacements do not in any way interfere with Liszt's loose sonata-form structure, neither do the more substantial modifications affect the formal role played by recapitulation and coda, thus schematic expectations are untouched. Where dynamic expectations are concerned, the octave displacements have little if any effect but the alterations to the recapitulated second subject and to the coda deserve some closer attention.

Ironically, perhaps, by presenting the reappearance of the second subject in almost the same pianistic dressing in which it is first heard, Browning is if anything fulfilling dynamic expectations more than adherence to the score would, in that the pianistic figuration is already familiar. Where veridical expectations are frustrated and schematic expectations unaffected, a sense of gentle surprise to dynamic expectancy may be replaced by a sense of dynamic predictability thereby, in terms of Huron's psychological approach, possibly weakening the passage's effect on the listener. The opposite is probably true in the case of Browning's reworked coda section. At bar 360 the dynamic brain is certainly expecting something pianistically spectacular in that the material of the coda to this point has announced its bravura nature. Any dynamic surprise that Liszt's continuation may prompt is outdone by Browning's in that the knowledgeable listener will detect a distinct similarity to the double-octave passages in bars 27-29 of 'Vision', the sixth of Liszt's *Douze études d'exécution transcendante*. Continuing drama will almost certainly be anticipated, borrowing probably not.

A not dissimilar situation arises with Arcadi Volodos's 2007 recording of Liszt's 'Vallée d'Obermann' from *Années de pèlerinage* Book 1 in which, amongst several reworkings, the pianist's modification massively amplifies the climax of the music between bars 195 and 213 (Figure 6), adapting the melodic material and adding extra octave passages in the left hand whilst keeping the right hand busy with leaping, chordal patterns high in the piano's register (click [here](#) to listen). As with Browning's and Wild's modifications, veridical expectations are infringed but schematic expectations remain unaffected in that the climax of the piece is amplified but not extended or repositioned. However given the "programme" of the work in which a "tortuous progression through conflicting [emotional] states leads to transfiguration and eventual apotheosis" (Rink, 1999, p. 237), the galloping bravura at the climax of

Volodos’s performance seems to belie the dynamic expectations of the predominantly solemn, if at times dramatic, musical narrative to this point and carries little sense of “apotheosis”. The surprise is such that questions of musical coherence could be raised, especially if one considers that Liszt stripped away the excesses – modest beside Volodos’s – of his own 1830s version before settling on the more focused 1852 revision where virtuosity and musical expression seem organically linked.

The image displays five systems of musical notation for piano, arranged vertically. Each system consists of a grand staff with a treble and bass clef. The music is written in a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and a 4/4 time signature. The notation includes complex textures with dense chords and rapid passages. Performance markings include *ff* (fortissimo), *rinforzando*, and *rinforz.*. A first ending bracket labeled *8va* spans the first two systems. A second ending bracket labeled *6* appears in the third and fourth systems. The fifth system begins with a *ff* dynamic. The score concludes with a double bar line and repeat signs.

The musical score consists of five systems of music. The first system shows a dense texture with many notes in both hands. The second system begins with a treble clef and a forte (*ff*) dynamic, followed by a bass clef section with a forte (*ff*) dynamic. The third system continues the texture. The fourth system features a bass clef section with a forte (*ff*) dynamic and a ritardando (*rit.*) marking. The fifth system concludes with a forte (*sf*) dynamic and a ritardando (*rit.*) marking.

Figure 6: Liszt: 'Vallée d'Obermann', bars 195–215.

As a closing thought on the matter, it may appear on first encountering Huron's notions of expectancy that veridical, as the most specific, is the least flexible type of expectation. However, after repeated hearings a modification itself acquires veridical expectations so

that the listener adapts these according to foreknowledge of the recorded (or even live) performance being heard. It is perfectly possible to develop robust veridical expectations for even the most inept and inappropriate modification; in such a case it is the violence done to schematic and dynamic expectations that is likely to be more troublesome.

Perversely perhaps, the novelty of modification is, to the informed listener, greater than that of any other species of alteration despite its less far-reaching impact on the original work. Many transcriptions (such as the Bach-Busoni Chaconne), paraphrases (such as Liszt's *Réminiscences de Don Juan*) and, especially, variations (such as the Brahms-Paganini set) have acquired a fully independent existence complete with their own unique set of veridical, schematic and dynamic expectations. The only way, therefore that a knowledgeable listener is going to be surprised in a performance of the Bach-Busoni Chaconne is if the pianist introduces modification into the transcription, making the work twice removed from its original, in the manner of the Saint-Saëns-Liszt-Horowitz *Danse Macabre* mentioned above.

Why Liszt?

Amongst nineteenth-century composers, Liszt in particular seemed to have an open-ended view of his compositions, sometimes making a “definitive” version hard to determine. Pinpointing a “definitive” version can be difficult, whoever the composer, and for a variety of reasons. For example, confusion over “authentic” Chopin is due mainly to the existence of multiple early editions and manuscripts of the composer's music which contain notational discrepancies from one to the other. Chopin may not have been especially careful in settling on a single definitive “text” for his compositions, but he did not habitually revisit and revise them – perhaps he did not live long enough! Liszt on the other hand often revised, restructured or added to earlier compositions. For example the *Douze études d'exécution transcendante* went through no less than three incarnations between 1826 and 1852 and *Album d'un voyageur* of 1835/6 was thoroughly revised by 1852 and renamed *Années de pèlerinage, première année: Suisse*. One explanation for such revision is that Liszt “may have had some sort of ideal form distantly before his eye, but he often never quite attained it, even by his own admission” (Hamilton, 2008, p. 229). John Butt's perhaps exaggerated claim that “major composers such as Chopin and Schumann quite clearly viewed their notation ... as offering examples of the way the piece might go rather than fixed prescriptions” (Butt, 2002, p. 112) is arguably more applicable to Liszt. As an older man, the composer's teaching habits tend to reinforce this perception: “Liszt habitually gave his pupils advice on oft-played works such as *St. Francis Walking on the Waves* that mildly contradicted any score printed during his lifetime. He also improvised new endings, which were then adopted by favoured students” (Hamilton 2008, p. 236). It is thus possible to regard modification of Liszt's works as a continuation of a seemingly ongoing process, although the task is now in other, less authorised hands. The underlying spirit of modification can be shown nonetheless to derive from Liszt's own restless practice.

Another factor to take into account is the improvisatory nature of some of Liszt's music. Writing about piano music of the 1830s, when Liszt's piano style was still forming, Jim Samson states that “improvisation continued to play a crucial ... role in shaping the detailed substance ... of early-nineteenth-century piano compositions ... the spontaneity of improvisation directly encouraged the idiomatic, sharpening the focus on instrumental devices” (Sam-

son, 2000, pp. 117-118). Cadenza-like passages in Liszt's mature works from the 1850s and 1860s often feature his own trade-mark instrumental devices, developed decades earlier, such as octaves, split octaves and tremolandos, and have especially the character of a written-out improvisation. For example, bars 72-98 of 'St. François de Paule marchant sur les flots' (the second of *Deux légendes*), devoid of any thematic relationship to the rest of the work, typically features right-hand leaps, bass-register "growls", harmonised chromatic scales and hand-swapping octaves. Maybe it is the improvisatory aspect that encourages Volodos in his recording of 'Vallée d'Obermann' to capitalise on a perceived sense of freedom and to lavish much of his modification on the *recitativo/presto* section during bars 119-169, in particular from bar 139. And maybe it inspires others to do the same.

Lastly one should not forget Liszt's own performance practice. He was not known for fetishising the printed page, and often elaborated on what was written down, sometimes to the disapproval of fellow musicians such as Mendelssohn, Glinka and Joachim: "When he played sonatas with Joachim, the German violinist found the collaboration a thrill only if the music was new ... Otherwise at the second or third performance Liszt would transpose simple passages to octaves or thirds or convert ordinary trills to sixths. He would indulge in such tricks even in Beethoven's *Kreutzer* Sonata" (Schonberg, 1987, p. 177). As teacher, his preferred edition of the Beethoven piano sonatas was not his own (!) but that by Hans von Bülow, an edition which "appears now to be lavish in its liberties" (Hamilton, 2008, p. 204). Despite this "Liszt had the highest admiration for this publication" (*ibid.*, p. 204). Clearly Liszt himself did not regard a notated score, even one as "saturated" as that of the *Kreutzer* Sonata, as in any way definitive, so it is arguable that by treating the composer's own scores as inconclusive, the interpreter is attempting another alignment of spirit.

Conclusion

At the beginning of this article I posed four questions raised by the practice of modification. I have addressed these questions, as they apply to Liszt, by examining the practice from the point of view of the work, the performer, the listener and the composer. The upshot of this examination suggests that modification occupies its own small, work-alteration space which is less far-reaching and systematic than other species of alteration; that the notion of modification has some breadth, embracing formal (published) alterations and informal (performer controlled) alterations and a field of operation that ranges from the minimal to the significant; that modification affects the nexus of relationships achieved by conventional interpretation, shifting it further in the direction of performer control and auditory challenge to the listener; and lastly it suggests that, whilst to an extent invading Liszt's oeuvre, modification does not usually violate the Lisztian spirit.

For better or for worse?

I have generally avoided passing judgement on the specific instances of modification described above but issues of artistic value nonetheless present themselves. Value judgement is *a priori* embedded in the act of modification inasmuch as the presence of modification in some measure presupposes an artist's dissatisfaction with a work-as-score. This is not to suggest that an artist's dissatisfaction is necessarily born out of any antipathy for a work. In fact the opposite is more likely – that it is born of a passion for the music and a commitment

to do the best for it, even if this involves a degree of personal interference. It is nevertheless hard to determine precisely what prompts a modification, although John Browning's (and my own) reasons have been given above. Browning's seem to be based on a view that the *Dante Sonata* is somehow "unpolished", whereas mine are derived from a desire for enhanced effect in performance. Although giving no real reasons for wishing to modify Liszt's Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2, Horowitz was apparently very pleased with the result, claiming that "it was one of the most difficult pieces he had ever played" (Schonberg, 1992, p. 334). This comment does however offer further support for the idea, expressed above, that modification usually intensifies whatever technical demands are already present in a piece, drawing attention to the performer and away from the work, thereby making it for some an attractive performance option.

If performers seem reluctant to comment on why they feel a musical work needs modifying, critics are also surprisingly restrained about the results. Of Browning's significant modification to the *Dante Sonata*, played as part of a Liszt recital disc, Joan Chissell writes in *Gramophone* "[l]iberties notwithstanding, this for me remains the recital's most winning performance" and offers no opinion concerning the merits or otherwise of Browning's "liberties". Given the tone of her remark, one can only assume that she feels no strong disapproval. More surprising, given the equally far-reaching effect of Volodos's modification to 'Vallée d'Obermann' is Jeremy Nicholas's sole reference in his *Gramophone* review to "the final peroration" in which "Volodos not only equals Horowitz's demonic ferocity but adds seemingly impossible difficulties of his own" (Nicholas, 2007, p. 81). It would appear that the writer is so dazzled by the "pianistic legerdemain" (*ibid.*, p. 81) as he describes it, that he does not even comment, never mind pass judgement, on the artistic outcome. Any possible questions, such as those I raised above, regarding Volodos's preservation of the work's narrative coherence seem to be lost in the "wow" factor. Truly it seems – in this instance at least – that virtuosity does draw attention to the performer and away from the work!

A cautious defence

Before making judgements concerning the artistic value of the above recordings and others like them, the critical listener may need to consider that modification represents in some degree a return to earlier performance practices. Prior to the early nineteenth century when composers gradually assumed greater notational control over the performance life of their works, performers were expected to assume some governance of the music in performance – Baroque ornamentation perhaps being one of the best known examples of such governance. A more recent example is that of the singer Johann Michael Vogl who "was well known for his free alterations of Schubert's Lieder and even induced the composer to make notational changes" (Butt, 2002, p. 112). As we have seen, the practice was still alive and well when Leschetitzky was recording in the early years of the twentieth century, and we must not of course forget the model most pertinent to this discussion – that of Liszt himself.

It seems ironic, in an age where historically informed performance ("HIP") has become successfully absorbed and integrated into virtually every branch of Western art music performance, that the historical practice of modification has received but scant attention, and certainly has not established itself as an accepted feature of the contemporary piano recital.

Hamilton believes that “[w]e surely have a lot to gain from adopting a more liberal attitude to our performance traditions – from taking seriously what players fashioned from the repertoire” (Hamilton, 2008, p. 281). So maybe the time is ripe for a reappraisal – such as that suggested by Hamilton – of this particular performance practice.

In conclusion I offer this final thought in my cautious defence of modification. Peter Kivy coins the term “sonic museum” to describe a modern concert hall in which “sonic artworks” are displayed (Kivy, 1995). Staying with Kivy’s metaphor, visual artworks in a museum are looked at, admired, possibly revered but rarely if ever touched by the onlooker who is thus deprived of any “hands-on” interaction with the display piece. Similarly, a sonic artwork is often played respectfully, dutifully and sometimes reverentially but rarely is the artwork “touched”, over and above what is demanded by mid-to-late twentieth-century notions of interpretation, thus ring-fencing creative dialogue between musical work and performer. In this post-structuralist age, where the old-fashioned musical work concept has taken an ontological hammering from Goehr (1992), Martin (1993), Small (1998) and others, denying it a hallowed autonomous existence, the case for ring-fencing creative dialogue between work and performer now seems less compelling. And with a core piano repertoire drawn from ever-receding historical periods, there is a growing danger of interpretative repetition and thereby possibly of stagnation. Keeping this core repertoire fresh and alive is a growing challenge to the present-day performer, and so tasteful modification in an appropriate compositional setting can offer one viable solution. It may be a risky one, but when did stimulating performance not involve taking risks?

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