



Alessandro Bertinetto

Moral concerns about artistic activity

Article  OPEN ACCESS

Résumé

Une grande partie du débat contemporain sur l'art et la morale porte sur les conséquences comportementales de l'expérience des œuvres d'art, sur la dépendance ou l'indépendance entre la valeur esthétique et la valeur morale des œuvres d'art, et se demande si des défauts ou des mérites éthiques des œuvres d'art devraient également être considérés comme des défauts ou des mérites esthétiques (et vice versa).

*Ici, je vais me concentrer sur un autre sujet, bien qu'il soit lié au premier. Je vais examiner si les artistes ont des devoirs envers l'art lui-même, comme Luigi Pareyson l'a affirmé dans son *Estetica. Teoria della formatività* (1954). En d'autres termes, je vais poser la question de savoir si la poursuite de la réussite artistique nécessite, entraîne ou peut causer une sorte de position morale envers l'activité artistique. Je suggère que la notion d'authenticité comprise non seulement comme une obligation ou un devoir, mais plutôt comme une vertu, peut être utile à cet égard.*

Index de mots-clés : Obligation artistique, Luigi Pareyson, authenticité, Art et morale

Abstract

A large part of the contemporary debate on art and morality is over the behavioural consequences of consuming artworks, the dependence or the independence between the aesthetic and the moral value of artworks, and whether ethical flaws or merits of artworks should also be considered as aesthetical flaws or merits (and viceversa).

*Here I will focus on a different, although related, topic. I will consider whether artists have duties towards art itself, as Luigi Pareyson argued in his *Estetica. Teoria della formatività* (1954). In other words, I will raise the question whether the pursuit of artistic success requires, entails, or can result in a kind of moral stance towards artistic endeavour. I will suggest that the notion of authenticity not just as an obligation or a duty, but rather as a virtue, may be useful at this regard.*

Index by keyword : Luigi Pareyson, Authenticity, Artistic Obligation, Art and Morality

Zusammenfassung

Ein Großteil der heutigen Debatte über Kunst und Ethik betrifft die Verhaltenskonsequenzen der Erfahrung von Kunstwerken, die Abhängigkeit oder Unabhängigkeit zwischen dem ästhetischen und dem moralischen Wert von Kunstwerken, und die Frage, ob moralische Mängel oder Verdienste der Kunstwerke auch als ästhetische Mängel oder Verdienste zu berücksichtigen sind (und umgekehrt).

*Hier werde ich meine Aufmerksamkeit mich auf einen anderen, wenn auch verwandte,n Thema. Ich werde prüfen, ob Künstler Pflichten gegenüber der Kunst selbst haben, als Luigi Pareyson in seiner *Estetica. Teoria della formatività* (1954) argumentiert. Mit anderen Worten, werde ich die Frage aufwerfen, ob das Streben nach künstlerischen Erfolg eine Art moralischer Haltung der künstlerische Tätigkeit gegenüber erfordert, mit sich bringt, oder dazu führen kann. Ich werde vorschlagen, dass der Begriff der Authentizität nicht nur als Verpflichtung oder Pflicht, sondern vielmehr als Tugend, in dieser Hinsicht sinnvoll sein kann.*

Schlagwortindex : Künstlerische Verpflichtung, Kunst und Ethik, Authentizität, Luigi Pareyson

Table des matières

- [1. Introduction](#)
- [2. Moral obligations towards others' artistic intentions](#)
 - [2.1. Restorers vs Performers](#)
 - [2.2. Forgery and plagiarism](#)
- [3. Moral obligations towards art itself](#)
 - [3.1. The morality of art](#)
 - [3.2. The \(non-Dickian\) Art Circle](#)
 - [3.3. Art morality as authenticity](#)
 - [3.4. Different authenticities: Miles vs Wynton](#)
 - [3.5. Aesthetic personal coherence and exemplary creativity](#)
- [4. A kind of conclusion \(with references to John Coltrane and Quentin Tarantino\)](#)

1. Introduction1

That art is not “beyond the reach of moral criticism” seems to be a truism. As Kareen Hanson wrote in a well known paper, “since art is, or is a product of, human activity, and since human action is among the natural subjects, is perhaps the central object, of moral evaluation, a theory that exempts art from moral evaluation may seem an untenable *deus ex machina*.”² After all, if human beings are morally judged for what they freely make, artists are also judged for their artworks, because they are responsible for them. “(...) Art,” Hanson adds, “art making, and the experience of art may be considered from a variety of perspectives, placed in a variety of categories of activity or social practice.”³ In this sense, art is for instance an economic and a pedagogic activity. Hence, the question may be raised whether making an artwork, even an artwork which is not only aesthetically valuable, but also rich in moral insights, is a morally good or right behaviour, given certain circumstances. Sometimes, for instance, producing an artwork, instead of involving oneself in action, could be judged as a morally wrong behaviour (obviously, a similar point can be made regarding science and philosophy). Moreover, some questions concerning art are directly moral in character independently from aesthetic considerations: for example a moral issue is about the legitimacy, under a moral perspective, of harming the physical integrity of the artist, of other people, and of animals as well as of damaging the natural environment. There are plenty of moral concerns about artistic activity, in this sense.

However, “when art is considered as *art*, (...) and not in terms of any of its functions”⁴ or of its direct causal relation to life, art can legitimately be understood as a *specific* practice, that, exactly like other practices, is, at least to a certain degree, autonomous and independent from other ones. Of course, art, as human practice, is not isolated from other practices and, as recently argued by Georg Bertram⁵, its specific value includes also its contribution to other human practices and dimensions of life. Therefore, the question whether art as art has a moral impact is perfectly justified, I guess even from an autonomist perspective. Considering art as art, i.e. independently from other human practices and from its causal effects on the life of human beings, animals and natural environment, seems not to be out of place.

The point I want to make at this regard is whether the success of art as art is related as such, and especially from the perspective of artistic production, with a commitment on the part of the artist to the artistic practice itself, which can be understood, in some reasonable sense, as moral.

In other words, the question I am raising is whether artists have obligations towards their artistic activity, towards artistic traditions and styles, and towards aesthetic ideals. How should those, let’s call them so, “intra-artistic obligations” be understood? Could or should this kind of obligations be perhaps conceived in terms of, or at least in analogy to, “deontological codes” of professions like medicine and journalism? Could those artistic obligations conflict with other obligations?

2. Moral obligations towards others’ artistic intentions

A first step in answering those questions may be made by taking into consideration related questions whose answers are, at first glance, easier and could help in answering the main question at issue. First I will discuss the case of restorers on the one side and musical, theatrical and dance performers on the other side, comparing them and examining their differences at a certain length. Later, I will consider, even if in a very quick and sketchy way, the issue of plagiarism.

2.1. Restorers vs Performers

One can think that in the case of musical (but also theatrical and dance) performance performers have a moral, yet “intra-artistic”, duty towards respecting a composer’s or playwright’s instructions and intentions. This seems to be the case at least in the musical practices of the Western tradition based on the ideal of the *Werktreue*⁶. In this cultural context the performance of a musical work should be faithful to the composer’s intentions: performers must follow the instructions of the score and the conventions valid at the time of composition. This appears indeed to be very much a kind of moral duty. Moreover, one can go on arguing, this moral obligation is an outright artistic one, because it is a necessary condition for the correct instantiation and for the right experience of the artwork. A similar case, this time taken from the non-performing arts, can be made about conservators’ and restorers’ obligations towards the integrity of (mostly ancient) artworks. However, if one looks beyond first impressions, the cases of the musical interpreter and of the artworks restorer are interestingly different. Please forgive me for oversimplifying things here, in order to go straight to my point.

The main difference between both cases seems to be this. Restorers, like journalists, lawyers, and doctors, are bounded to deontological codes of established practices. These practices have norms that can of course change historically and culturally. However, given a certain historical and cultural context, their application does not (at least usually) change the normative code to which they are bound. The norm (the integrity of the old item) is known. It must be applied. Hence, for example, restorers and conservators must comply with moral standards: a robust sense of morality is required in the practice of restoration. For instance, according to the *Preamble of the Restorer’s Ethical Code from 28 November 1994* of the Czech Republic, “(a) restorer has to handle cultural property with large value and historical significance. To be worthy of these requests of special trust involves a great sense for moral responsibility. A restorer has duties not only towards art pieces but also towards the owner or custodian, to his colleagues and his profession and to the community and the public as a whole”⁷.

Conversely, *pace* the defenders of the Authentic Historic Music Performance, interpreters seem to be caught between (at least) two fires: the obligation towards the codified composers’ intentions and their personal artistic mission. Performers have duties towards composers and compositions, and they comply with these duties in different ways. The historical authentic performance, with period instruments, is only one of the available possibilities. Performers, as interpreters, have a certain degree of freedom: although they have to perform a certain musical work x, they can interpret x in different ways. So different performances of x have different properties (some are more long than others, some are more expressive than others, some are melancholic, other ones are languid, etc.) and, due to those different properties, listeners may assign them different artistic values. *De facto*, interpreters follow their personal idea of artistic interpretation, i.e. their personal style, even when –like restorers– they aim at being the tool for the faithful manifestation of an artwork whose genuine ontological integrity they are convinced to know and they wish to respect. However, performers may also *intentionally* serve other masters –the audience, their own performing practice, their moral and aesthetic beliefs– and may also think that violating composer’s instructions is (a) morally and/or (b) aesthetically valuable and rewarding in order to correct moral and/or aesthetic mistakes of the musical work.

(a) On the one hand, performers may think that being true to the composers’ intentions is aesthetically good, but morally wrong. In other words, being faithful to the composer could be an artistic virtue, but a moral demerit. A striking example is offered by opera arias composed for male castrati. Today we think that respecting this performing practice is morally defective, although it could be aesthetically and artistically valuable. Here the moral obligation clearly outshines the artistic duty⁸.

(b) On the other hand, interpreters may be bound to their own artistic mission. They may think that their main responsibility is towards music (or theatre or dance) as art (and towards the audience) and not towards composers (this is obviously clearer in the case of versions and covers of old works). This mission can conflict with the task of faithfully instancing the composer’s explicit instructions (or, in the case of versions and covers, it can conflict with the task of offering a rendition of the artwork which the author could hypothetically accept and appreciate, given the conventions valid at his/her time).

In general performers may think that the artistic value of their performances do not coincide with their craftsmanship as faithful performers of musical works. Hence a performer could be considered as a bad one, as executant of another person's will, but as a good one, as artist. Different values and different obligations are in place here that may dovetail: the obligations towards the creator of an artwork that should be presented to an audience and the obligation towards (the interpreter's own idea of) art. The first one can be considered as the obligation towards the fixed rules of a game. The other one is the obligation towards the own idea of a *good* play. If authenticity, as Stan Glodovitch claims⁹, means to be true to the music (or to theatre, or to art as such), it is not obvious that this truthfulness must be always searched for in the faithful compliance with the presumed authentic work. Therefore, an excellent musical or theatrical interpreter can be considered an artist in his own right, because showing a personal style is normally understood not as a contingent collateral effect of his practice or even a necessary evil, but rather as a virtue, and a proper artistic one. (The defender of the historical authentic music performance may not agree with me in this, but this would simply mean, I think, that they conceive music performers as restorers of ancient musical works. This is a partial view of the matter, to say the least).

Let's make an example. In the first part of a concert given at the Teatro Lauro Rossi in Macerata (Italy), on March 13th, 2014 cellist Giovanni Sollima and pianist Giuseppe Andaloro performed Beethoven's Piano Sonata n. 3 op. 69 in A major and Webern's *Drei kleine Stücke op. 11* (both for piano and cello). They are very different musical works, the most evident difference being that the Beethoven is tonal, while the Webern is atonal. Letting aside the stylistic traits of the performance, the most striking thing about this performance has been this: Sollima and Andaloro did not play the two works one after the other, but they mixed them. They played the first two movements of the Beethoven; then, instead of playing the *Adagio cantabile*, played the short *Stücke* von Webern and, after this, concluded the Beethoven performing the *Adagio cantabile* and the *Allegro vivace*. This is surely against Beethoven's, and probably also against Webern's, intentions. Beethoven didn't intend the performances of his musical work to be interrupted by the performance of another work, much less by the performance of a work he could not know.

One may think that there is nothing strange to this. After all almost everything was accepted *before* Beethoven's age. The institution of the concerto and its normativity established itself roughly speaking during Beethoven's life and largely thanks to Beethoven's icon. Analogously, one can also notice that in some musical practices and genres the *mash-up* is the rule, not the exception. Moreover, at least since the diffusion of the I-pod listeners often listen to a movement of, say, a Mahler's Symphony, and immediately after this to a song of Brassens. The aural contamination of different musical pieces is rather the rule, not the exception, of our musical experience. However, the Sollima-Andaloro's performance is a different case. They played the game of the Western Classical Music and they were conscious of its rule. Turning back on stage after the break Sollima felt the obligation to explain the astonished and amused audience (that for sure was enjoying very much an extraordinary exhibition) why they had violated the conventions of the musical performance and the expectations of the audience. He told that the short Webern's pieces make clearer some aesthetic aspects of the Beethoven and in turn the Beethoven illuminates the Webern. Hence, the violation of their obligations as executants was, according to them, an artistic license, taken precisely in the name of another kind of obligation: the obligation towards their mission towards art. One may think that, exactly as it happens with the clash of incompatible responsibilities, one obligation (in this case the one toward art as such) trumped the other. However, Sollima seemed to judge the fulfilment of the second obligation as a tool for a better fulfilment of the first one, although it apparently implied the violation of the first normative order.

The moral of this is that musical (and also theatrical and dance) performers are not like doctors, lawyers and journalists. The responsibility performers have towards the normative order of their practice tolerates moral and artistic exceptions. Now, I will consider only this second kind of exceptions, the artistic ones. Performers may legitimately consider artistic creativity as more important than the respect for the historical conventions of a practice and for the composer's intentions and instructions. They may legitimately regard the rules of an artistic performing practice as tools for artistic success; if other tools work better, than they may think that their obligations towards art (and towards the audience) consist in breaking the rules.

The discrepancy with the case of restoration can be explained considering the ontological differences of both practices. A work of music, theatre, or dance can be performed, in principle, an infinite number of times. So, if the violation of the obligations towards composers and playwrights does not result in a valuable artistic achievement, listeners and beholders can turn to other, more faithful and respectful performances, which satisfy the (moral and artistic) obligation of presenting the artwork as established by the author: performances in which the author is clearly the artist and the performer is clearly, so to say, his/her servant.

This is the common case with restoration. Restorers are faced with unique pieces, with artworks that cannot be repeated or multiply instanced. So even if the violation of the norm established by the artist in the past could result in an excellent artistically achievement –maybe better than the original work–, the risk of irrecoverable mistakes and the respect for cultural heritage trump the desire for artistic novelty and the hope for artistic success. In this case the aim is to get access to the original integral work and to evaluate in the proper way the contribution of time to the appearances of the artworks and to our taste (do we really want, for instance, to colour again the ancient statues?): in other words, the aim of restoration is recovering a cultural heritage in a satisfying way: the problem at issue here is how to find the better way to reach this goal, all things considered, not how to use the work as a tool for expressing the restorer's style or aesthetic ideal. An excellent restorer is not, as such, already an artist. The showing of an excellent craftsmanship in recovering old pieces is not considered –customarily– as an *artistic* ability.

This ontological difference between artworks that can and artworks that cannot have multiple occurrences is also the reason why we use to evaluate so differently, from an aesthetic *and* a moral perspective, the treatment of old artworks on other persons' part. Even though damaging an old masterpiece may be a great artistic performance or result in a great artwork, we want artists to use replica for this task. Otherwise the alteration of the *Monna Lisa* made by Duchamp would be an act of vandalism, rather than an artwork (no matter how you evaluate his Dadaist gesture). On the contrary, Jimmy Hendrix's Woodstock performance of the *Star Spangled Banner* (1969)¹⁰ did not destroy the American National Anthem, and if you don't like it you can listen to more faithful versions (but you are surely missing something!).

2.2. Forgery and plagiarism

A related topic concerns forgery and plagiarism¹¹. Things seem to be easier here. *Per se* forgery and plagiarism are obviously morally wrong, because they entail theft, falsification, and deceit. Moreover, the obligation to respect the outcomes of other persons' creativity is a typical intra-artistic obligation. For "aesthetic judgements are, in part, judgements about the artist's achievement in producing the work"¹². Forgery and plagiarism adulterate the judgment about the artist's achievement. So, avoiding forgery and plagiarism is an intra-artistic, and not only a moral, obligation: authorial authenticity is great part of what we evaluate as artistically relevant in an artwork¹³.

However, the validity of notions like forgery and plagiarism and the related value of this kind of authenticity imply the acceptance of other notions: in particular, the idea of an individual author. In cultural practices that accept the idea of distributed creativity, i.e. in which creativity is understood not as prerogative of some individual authorities, but as distributed between different individuals through time and space, the use of other persons' achievements as ingredients for new artistic creations is not to be intended *ipso facto* as an appropriation which is morally and artistically wrong, but rather as expression of an aesthetics of negotiation, collaboration and hybridization which is justified by the idea that art is not the private property of some single individuals, but a common good shared by all members of a community¹⁴. Hence, what in one cultural context could be regarded as morally and artistically wrong, may be highly estimated, both morally and artistically, in another context. The element that should count, but does not always count (especially in music), for deciding if we are facing with an artistic outcome or with a case of forgery or plagiarism is

whether deceit is involved or not (but I suspect that formalists would not agree with this claim). Again, (moral and/or artistic) obligations towards other authors may be trumped by (moral and/or artistic) obligations towards (the own ideas of) art and morality.

So far, I have tried to show that performers, differently, for example, from restorers and conservators, may have two different kinds of obligations, which are both “intra-artistic”: the moral obligation towards authors’ and composer’s intentions and conventions and the obligation towards what may be termed “art as such”, which justifies the satisfaction of performers’ own artistic ambition and/or the possibility of distributed creative achievements. Intra-artistic obligations may conflict with moral obligations (like in the case of male castrati). The validity of certain intra-artistic obligations relies on the acceptance of cultural institutions (like authoriality) that are not universally shared.

3. Moral obligations towards art itself

However, it is still unclear in which sense it is reasonable to claim that artists (I mean now all artists in their own right and not only performers of other people’s artworks) have obligations towards art as such and in which sense those obligations, which are intra-artistic, could be understood as moral obligations too.

3.1. The morality of art

In order to tackle this issue I turn to Luigi Pareyson’s *Estetica. Teoria della formatività* (1954). In a book’s chapter devoted to the relationship between art and other human practices, Pareyson focuses on the connection between art and morality. He argues that the morality we are concerned with in this case is not the morality of the artwork’s content, but rather the morality of the treatment of this content. In other words, the question is whether an “artistic form can be judged as moral or immoral precisely in virtue of its artistic quality”¹⁵. Then Pareyson goes on deepening this issue as follows.

“(…) (T)here is a morality without which the artwork does not succeed [as artwork, i.e. artistically] and the artist does not really become an artist. In order to succeed in his work, the artist had to consider art as a task to be engaged in, as the fundamental reason of his activity, as a commitment he is responsible for; and he had to consider the poetic norms, that his work from time to time demanded him, as out-and-out moral laws, to the observance of which he is bound by the same commitment initially and implicitly assumed: the violation of those laws would entail a demerit which is at the same time artistic and moral. (...) Of course, this is the morality of art as art, and it concerns the duties of the artist toward art itself. This morality of art consists in the necessary and structural ethicisation that, due to the concreteness and indivisibility of human life, happens in every operation, and that causes that the laws of thought, or the laws of art, inevitably become moral laws for those who start thinking or forming [= creating], by virtue of the same initiative with which an activity is specified; but it is also a practical and actual exercise of morality, enough to ensure that the artwork is at the same time an artistic as well as a moral value”¹⁶.

This kind of “morality of art” should not be confused with the use of art for moral purposes: on the contrary, as Pareyson explains, the presence of moral aims can weaken and even destroy art. Moreover, this “artistic morality” does not prevent artworks to deal with immoral subject matters or to offer immoral worldviews. Different personalities judge differently over the artwork’s subject matter, and judgments over morality or immorality of artistic contents may change. Yet, the key point is that artists must care above all about art; thus moral views and ideas should not be the aims of art and are not the core of artistic evaluation and criticism. If we read this text in the light of Pareyson’s whole aesthetic theory, we can understand that according to him, those moral views are rather part of the material of art in so far as they are elements of the artist’s *personality*. In other words, they contribute to the construction of a particular “formative” (= creative) *style*, i.e. of a particular way of creating artistically. And the *style*, as the artistic expression of the artist’s personality, is that what matters.

Hence, according to Pareyson, art is closely connected with morality, that is, the idea of an artistic morality makes sense, for the following reasons.

The idea of an artistic morality makes sense because artistic projects have a normative character for the artist, and a violation of the artistic, aesthetic and stylistic commitments results –or better: may result– in an artistic demerit, which is also a moral demerit.

It is a moral demerit, because art is intrinsically connected with morality. This is due to moral views and ideas being part of the style of the artist, i.e. of his artistic personality, that is at work and is or *should be* realized in the artistic projects of an artist as well as in each of his artworks.

Both aspects of Pareyson’s idea of artistic morality are meant to be two sides of the same coin. The moral normativity of artistic projects and artworks or, if you prefer, the obligations artists have towards art (or towards their particular idea of art), depend(s) on the fact that an artistic project or an artistic work includes a moral or an immoral worldview expressed in a particular personal style.

3.2. The (non-Dickian¹⁷) Art Circle

Both aspects of Pareyson’s idea of artistic morality are meant to be two sides of the same coin. The moral normativity of artistic projects and artworks or, if you prefer, the obligations artists have towards art (or towards their particular idea of art), depend(s) on the fact that an artistic project or an artistic work includes a moral or an immoral worldview expressed in a particular personal style.

This seems to be a circular reasoning. Artists are conceived to be morally obliged to artistic ideals, but those ideals are expressions of themselves as artists. Hence, in each of their artistic acts artists are obliged towards themselves, in order to express their own genuine personalities; yet, artists’ personalities can be settled only in retrospect, because they depend on each of their concrete artistic expressions. The normative force of an artistic ideal or style is not established independently from the artistic actions that reflexively feed (and transform) the normativity of the ideal or the style they are expressions of.

Pareyson would not deny this circularity. Instead, he explicitly endorses it. As such, this is a particular case of the circular relation between artwork and artist: while creating the artwork, the artist must follow the artwork that, as *forma formans*, is the rule followed by the artist while producing the work; the artwork, as *forma formata*, expresses the artist’s personal style. This circular connection is, in turn, a particular case of the recursive structure of art as a kind of making that –as Pareyson defines it– invents the way of making while making or in the making¹⁸. In other words, the normativity of art is self-regulating. Artworks are not only effects of the applications of received norms; rather they are the outcomes of applications of norms that contribute to the generation of norms: they are steps in the ongoing formation of artistic normativity, that can confirm or contradict a given norm. The obligational force of the norm is generated by each of its applications, and the works are *artworks*, in a proper, evaluative, sense, if they really succeed in expressing the norm that they themselves generate, and even though sometimes the norm is revealed only in the moment at which is violated, i.e. when the work is an artistic failure¹⁹.

Hence, artistic success largely depends upon the way artists are faithful in their work to their own personalities, that are always, as it were, “under construction”. Artists express their personalities as they shape them.

3.3. Art morality as authenticity

This is exactly what is meant by the idea of *authenticity* as *authentic expression of the self* in art. Authenticity does not mean only obedience to the rules of a genre or to the instructions given by an author²⁰; moreover, it is also not reducible to avoidance of forgery and plagiarism.

Authenticity as faithfulness to oneself in the artistic expression is so important in our concept of art (at least since Romanticism), that, as observed by Charles Taylor in his “The Ethics of Authenticity”²¹, “artistic creation becomes the paradigm mode in which people can come to self-definition. The artist becomes in some way the paradigm case of the human being, as agent of original self-definition.”

In other words, artistic creativity is not only a particular case, but the model of the ongoing construction and expression of a personality in the life of an individual. For, as again Taylor says,

“I discover myself through my work as an artist, through what I create. My self-discovery passes through a creation, the making of something original and new. I forge a new artistic language –new way of painting, new metre or form of poetry, new way of writing a novel– and through this and this alone I become what I have it in me to be. Self-discovery requires poiesis, making. That will play a crucial role in one of the directions this idea of authenticity has evolved in.”²²

In this sense, as Nietzsche would have it, to be authentic means becoming who one is. “In becoming who we are”, Nietzsche claims, “we become ‘human beings who are new, unique, incomparable, who give themselves laws, who create themselves!’”²³. According to Nietzsche, the development of a human individual personality is to having one’s own laws: self-creation. Interestingly enough Nietzsche links directly this process to artistic creativity. Successful artistry is indeed “a form of self-discovery – it is the discovery, in the lawfulness of one’s actions, of the innermost character of one’s intentions”²⁴.

This amounts to say that the autonomy of art is connected with the autonomous and authentic development of artistic personalities. The duties towards art itself are generated in the practice: both at the historical and at the individual level, the normativity artists are committed to shapes itself in virtue of their successes and failures. However, this is not say that authenticity, as truthfulness to one’s own personality, is “the enemy of demands than emanate from beyond the self”, say from an artistic tradition or an artistic genre. Like with other cultural fields, also in the field of art authenticity does not collapse in a pure individual understanding of self-fulfillment²⁵. Yet, the morality of art and the normative character of artistic traditions cannot be really fixed in proper “deontological codes”, because this “artistic morality” changes as the practice evolves; in other words, artists discover their obligations towards art as they invent or discover them, i.e. (paraphrasing the famous Wittgenstein’s sentence²⁶) “as they go along”.

One may object to this that many artists are bound to artistic canons and belong to artistic movements having explicit poetic programs or manifests that the members of those movements (are supposed to) follow. Those canons, programs and manifests could be equated to “deontological codes”. However, if artists do not reflexively take a stand towards those canons, programs and manifests, and do not assimilate them as constitutive elements of their own artistic projects and works or do not use them as ingredients thereof, the obligational force of those normative elements remains exterior to art as a creative enterprise²⁷. Therefore in this case either the artist’s adherence to the canons is false and inauthentic or the canons are rejected by concrete artistic praxis. Conversely, if artists take reflexively a stand towards canons, rules, manifests, and the like, those normative elements are not only passively received, but negotiated, adapted, transformed, and become aspects or parts of their own artistic personality, of their own style.

For this reason, potential conflicts between authenticity as faithfulness towards a canon or a genre and authenticity towards the own personal artistic identity are very frequent and common. Very common is also a potential disagreement concerning the way both needs of authenticity should be satisfied.

3.4. Different authenticities: Miles vs Wynton

We could find example of such a disagreement in all artistic practices. The paradigmatic one I have in mind has been the aesthetic quarrel between Miles Davis and Wynton Marsalis²⁸. It is well known that Marsalis and Davis did not have good relations, not only because of their rivalry as trumpet players, but also because of their opposite conception of jazz. Marsalis defended (and still defends) jazz as the American Classical Music: he proposed a conservatory view of jazz, with the explicit aim of identifying and preserving the canon of jazz, distinguishing jazz from other kinds of music. According to him, jazz player have an obligation towards this canon; otherwise their music would not deserve the name of “jazz” anymore. Miles explicitly rejected this conservatory idea of jazz, claiming that jazz is based on improvisation and it feeds itself with experimentation, contamination, and hybridization. Without this, jazz would be dead. Since Marsalis’s music, despite of his virtuosity as trumpet player, does not experiment, but only conserves and reproduces the music of the past, *his* music is not jazz, but an imitation of the old masters. Jazzmen, according to Miles, do not respect the old masters by means of passively repeating them. On the contrary they respect them by carrying forward their creative impetus. To base the construction of an artistic personality only on imitation of old canons it is artistically and morally wrong.

Who is right, Miles Davis or Wynton Marsalis? It is obviously hard to ascertain this, because, even independently of personal musical taste, the answer depends on which kind of authenticity one thinks must be preferred: the authentic adherence to an artistic canon or the authentic expression of the artistic individual personality. I personally prefer Miles’ attitude. I think that the respect of a genre or of a canon must not be privileged upon the pursuit of an original artistic style, because artistic genres develop through individual works (they are *per se* cultural abstractions). Differently from restorers, artists, as artists, have no rigid obligations towards a deontological code, but, taking a stand towards those obligations, they should devote themselves to exploration and experimentation, search their own artistic norms, and be “creatively” faithful to them (although –precisely like in Miles’ case– their personality can for sure change, even radically, through time)²⁹. This is, I think, that what Pareyson means when speaking about the “morality of art as art” and about artists “duties towards art”.

Hence, the personal aspect of the relation to canons, genres, and cultural conventions is that their normativity is not simply an obligation artists must comply with: rather this normativity forges itself through concrete works and projects. Thus, Pareyson’s notion of “artistic morality” or, as I called them, of “intra-artistic obligations”, seems to grasp the idea that there is a kind of artistic faithfulness artists should have towards their artistic personality, which, however, is not something given on the outset, but, like every single human life, an ongoing process that shapes its style through each concrete deed. This faithfulness is a faithfulness towards something which is not (only) present and entirely given, but also past (and partly lost) and future (hence literally inexistent).

To sum up, an “intra-artistic obligation”, as artistic, is an obligation towards which, I recall again the already mentioned Pareysonian concepts, is active as *forma formans*, but determines and realizes itself as *forma formata* only in the course of a self-regulated performance, which is the artwork or the artistic project (or the artistic life) itself. The artwork is authentic –and it is artistic moral– if what it is expressive of is coherent with the personality of the artist, which in turn is originally and uniquely discovered, elaborated and felt by the artist through his own concrete expressions.

3.5. Aesthetic personal coherence and exemplary creativity

Pareyson's point about "artists' duty towards art" may still remain obscure. I try to make the point clearer with the aid of some reflections of Ted Cohen. Cohen wrote a paper devoted to consistency in one's personal aesthetics. The paper is about the idea of a coherent aesthetic personality. He uses this idea for explaining in which sense individuals can build in their life coherent sets of aesthetic preferences. Introducing Cohen's paper, Jerrold Levinson clarifies what Cohen has in mind: "the integrity of the self as a locus of aesthetic judgment seems to demand of us that we at least try to discern some order, some rhyme or reason, in our aesthetic responses, that we at least endeavour to work out why, exactly, we admire or relish one thing and not another. If there is a moral imperative to be consistent in one's aesthetic reactions, it seems, it can be no more than that."³⁰

Everyone is faced with the difficult task of organizing his/her own aesthetic experience and his/her taste in a coherent way. The problem is that human beings are living beings, whose personality is built as it changes through time. Hence, the normativity of a personal aesthetic experience, or of an aesthetic style, is not fixed once for all, but changes in the making. So, again, it is not like a fixed deontological code.

At this regard Cohen rightly highlights the paradoxical nature of the task of building a coherent personal aesthetic style, and observes: "Explaining the coherence –the total sense– in a work of art is like explaining the coherent style of another person, and both are like explaining one's own aesthetical self. None of these explanations, in the end, is possible, and all must be attempted."³¹

Explaining the coherence of "one's own aesthetical self" is impossible, because it demands to determine, that is, to fix that what, during a person's life, is continuously "under construction" (analogously, Cohen maintains, following a venerable idea, artworks cannot be definitively explained). This must be attempted –just in this sense Levinson speaks at this regards about a "moral imperative"– because everyone needs to be, and to express him/herself, as *one* person. However, this must be conceived as an ongoing task, not as an accomplished deed.

I take from Cohen this idea. However, following Pareyson's suggestion about artistic morality, I use it the other way round, that is, from the producers', not from the receivers, side. In their artistic activity artists are committed with the construction and the expression of authentic artistic personalities, for complex this task may be. Art is indeed connected with creativity and intrinsically motivated creativity is part of the construction of a personal identity. As such, as recently claimed by Matthew Kieran³², creativity "requires (...) a kind of independence from conventionality" and "involves arriving at creative insights autonomously through the appropriate exercise of the agent's own judgement, skills and dispositions" and is rightly seen as a "virtue of character".

For this reason, the same way we praise authenticity and we blame insincerity in real life, we praise authenticity in art: for example, artworks that express sentiments which the artist does not feel and creative achievements to which the maker is only externally motivated (typically because they are means to make money) are worse than authentic artworks which express the personality of the artist. Indeed, as Alex Neill observes, "certain works of art are valued by us partly as articulations and expressions of the actual sentiments of their actual creators. And indiscernible insincerity will be a flaw in a work of this sort; it will give us reason to value such a work less highly than we would have done were it to have been sincere." For the fact that something is inauthentic is "a reason not to value it, or to value it less highly than we might otherwise have done."³³

Artistic expressions are authentic, and morally as well as artistically inspired, if they are faithful to their personality and "artistically insincere" or phony, if they are not so. Artists or, better, self-proclaimed artists may cheat, passing off as art, and as the expression of a developed personality that what is not the sincere expression of a personal worldview, and it is not embodied in a personal and creative style. In this case the works are morally dubious and this failure to follow the intra-artistic obligation of authenticity entails an artistic weakness. In this sense, art can fail because artists lie and do not express their own personality in their works or because the pretended artworks are expressions of a shallow and unreliable personality, which manifests itself through an inconsistent style. The failure of art as art is in this case also a moral failure towards the "intra-artistic obligation" of shaping a robust artistic self. It is the obligation towards a norm that is not there, but must be invented in each of its application. Therefore this obligation is different from the obligations entailed in "deontological codes", that are obligations towards establishes norms. For this reason, it is probably better to use at this regard the concept of *virtue*, instead of the notion of *duty*. For, if artists' duties towards art are satisfied by the authentic expression of a personality which develops through each of its artistic deeds, and the faithfulness towards oneself cannot be articulated the same way we speak about the respect of deontological codes of a practice, then the concept of virtue, as desirable excellence of character, which must find autonomously its ways of articulations, seems to fit better than the concept of obligation.

Obviously I am not saying that an artwork being the sincere and authentic expression of a personality and of a personal worldview is a sufficient condition for something to be art; still I tend to consider it as a necessary condition for art, that can be more important than technical dexterity and formal quality. However, it may be objected that art is appearance and entails artifice and artificiality and that therefore the notion of authenticity is at odds with art. Sometimes this important aspect of art is intentionally highlighted, and it is a reason of the artistic value of the artwork, like in the case of *virtuosity*³⁴, for instance; sometimes it is intentionally concealed, like in the case of *sprezzatura*³⁵. Both cases remind us that art is appearance and fiction: so, in which sense may an artwork be authentic or in which sense the fact that art is authentic impinges on its value? This objection does not hold. It assumes that the use of fantasy or imagination is contrary to authenticity in terms of faithfulness to an artistic style and personality. Like expressions of emotions, which can be more or less sincere and authentic, artistic expressions –which involve the use of creative imagination– may be more or less successful in manifesting a personal style. However, this is not an obstacle for respecting artists' obligations towards art, i.e. artistic authenticity as a moral virtue.

4. A kind of conclusion (with references to John Coltrane and Quentin Tarantino)

This idea has the advantage of being accepted by recognized artists. John Coltrane for example said in an interview (please replace "music" and "musical" by "art" and "artistic"): "I think the majority of musicians are interested in truth, you know – they've got to be because a musical thing is a truth. If you play and make a statement, a musical statement, and it's a valid statement, that's a truth right there in itself, you know. If you play something phony you know that's phony. All musicians are striving to get as near perfection as they can get. That's truth there, you know."³⁶

In defence of Coltrane's claim, which seems to confirm that authenticity ("truth"), as the artist's obligation towards art, is to be conceived of as a "moral virtue" which is an outright artistic merit, I conclude my talk with an example.

Quentin Tarantino's movies are often judged as immoral movies. They include murder, sexism and homophobia and, in general, they exalt violence³⁷. Aesthetic moralists (also the moderate ones, like Noel Carroll³⁸) take them as a typical case in which moral defects entail an aesthetic weakness. Aesthetic immoralists (like Mathew Kieran³⁹) may use them as examples of artworks whose aesthetic merits depend, in part, upon their immorality. However, we can –and on my opinion we should– see those movies in another way, and precisely like authentic expression of an artistic personality, in which a coherent artistic character, with a proper artistic style and solid artistic motivations, is developed. Tarantino believes the following: "Violence is one of the most cinematic things you can do with film. It's almost as if Edison and the Lumière brothers invented the camera for filming violence. The most cinematic directors, they're taking cinema and exciting you. I really do think about it like that."⁴⁰ In other words, Tarantino has some beliefs about the medium he works with and he coherently develops those beliefs in his work, articulating in this way an authentic artistic personality. His movies would not be better, but worst, if they would be corrected and purified from their alleged immoral

contents: they would lack the authentic character they show by being what they really are. An artistic personality is creatively and genuinely developed in Tarantino's movies, obviously, each time with different artistic results. The fact that the perspectives offered as contents of the movies are (sometimes) immoral (at least for some aspects: actually, the exaltation of violence is often ironic and it is often an amused tribute to Spaghetti Western and Samurai movies) does not result in an artistic demerit: they articulate and express an artistic personality and, as such, they can be judged as virtuous achievements, both artistically and morally.

Notes

¹ A first draft of this paper has been presented at the Conference *Etica ed Estetica* (Rome, University Rome 3, April 3.-4., 2014). I am grateful to Paolo D'Angelo, Stefano Poggi, Stefano Velotti, Wolfgang Welsch, Carole Talon-Hugon, Felice Cimatti, Daniela Angelucci, Peter Lamarque, Carola Barbero, and anonymous attendants for their comments and questions. This article was possible thanks to the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation (research project FFI2011-23362).

² K. Hanson, "How bad can good art be?," in J. Levinson (ed.), *Aesthetics & Ethics*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp. 204-226, here p. 215.

³ *Ivi.*

⁴ K. Hanson, "How bad can good art be?," cit., p. 216.

⁵ G. Bertram, *Kunst als menschliche Praxis. Eine Ästhetik*, Berlin, Suhrkamp, 2014.

⁶ The concept of *Werktreue* (fidelity to the work) is at the core of the "ideology" of the Western Classical Music, according to which the musical performance is at the exclusive service of the musical work. Performers have the duty to obey to the composer's will manifested in the score, that in turn presents the musical work. The *Werktreue* ideology is critically discussed in: L. Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1992; A. Ridley, *Against Musical Ontology*, in "Journal of Philosophy", 100 (2003), pp. 203-220; A. Bertinetto, *Musical Ontology. A View through Improvisation*, in "Cosmo. Comparative Studies in Modernism", 2 (2013), pp. 81-101.

⁷ http://www.restauro.sk/pdf/ethical_code.pdf.

⁸ Cf. T. Gracyk, "Authenticity and Art," in S. Davies (et al.), *A Companion to Aesthetics*, Malden, MA, Wiley-Blackwell, 2009, pp. 157-158.

⁹ S. Glodovitch, "Performance authenticity: possible, practical, virtuous," in S. Kemal, I. Gaskell (eds.), *Performance and Authenticities in the Arts*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999, pp. 154-174.

¹⁰ See T. Gracyk, *Meaning of a Song and Meanings of Song Performances*, in "Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism", 71 (2013), pp. 23-33.

¹¹ Cf. D. Dutton, "Forgery and Plagiarism" in *The Encyclopedia of Applied Ethics*, ed. by R. Chadwick, San Diego, Academic Press, 1998, vol. 3, pp. 1-10; P. D'Angelo (ed.), *Rivista di Estetica*, 31 (1/2006), anno XLVI, *Falsi, contraffazioni e finzioni*.

¹² G. Currie, *An Ontology of Art*, London, Macmillan, 1988, pp. 38-39.

¹³ See A. Neil, "Inauthenticity, Insincerity, and Poetry", in S. Kemal, I. Gaskell (eds.), *Performance and Authenticities in the Arts*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999, pp. 197-214.

¹⁴ On this topic, with a specific look on music cf. G. Born, *On Musical Mediation: Ontology, Technology, and Creativity*, in "Twentieth-Century Music", 2 (2005), pp. 7-36. See also, A. Bertinetto, E. Gamba, D. Sisto (eds.), *Ladri di musica*, Special Issue of "Estetica. Studi e ricerche", 1 (2014).

¹⁵ L. Pareyson, *Estetica. Teoria della formatività*, Milano, Bompiani, 1988 p. 294 (my translation, AB).

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p.296 (my translation, AB).

¹⁷ The allusion is obviously to G. Dickie, *The Art Circle: A Theory of Art*, Chicago, Spectrum Press, 1997. Pareyson's circle is non-Dickean because, while Dickie's circle concerns the circular classificatory definition of art offered by his *Institutional Theory of Art* (to put it bluntly, art is what is said to be art in the frame of artistic institutions), Pareyson's circle concerns the reciprocal link between artistic actions and artistic normativity: it is to be understood in the frame of an evaluational understanding of art.

¹⁸ Cf. A. Bertinetto, *Performing the Unexpected*, in "Daimon", 57 (2012), pp. 61-79.

¹⁹ Cf. A. Bertinetto, *Jazz als Gelungene Performance. Ästhetische Normativität und Improvisation*, in "Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft", 59/1 (2014), pp. 105-140.

²⁰ This incomplete, thus misleading, view is still endorsed by J. Dodd, *Upholding Standards: A Realist Ontology of Standard Form Jazz*, in "Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism", 72 (2014), pp. 277-290.

²¹ Ch. Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, Cambridge Mass and London, UK, Harvard University Press, 1991 (2003, 11 ed.), p. 62.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ F. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, transl. by J. Nauckhoff, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 335.

²⁴ A. Ridley, "Nietzsche: The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols", in R. Pippin (ed.), *Introductions to Nietzsche*, CUP, 2012, p. 215-239, here 222-223.

²⁵ Cf. Ch. Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, cit., pp.41 and 91.

²⁶ L. Wittgenstein rhetorically asks in the *Philosophical Investigations*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1953, § 83: "And is there not also the case where we play and — make up the rules as we go along?"

²⁷ See G. Vilar, *Desartización. Paradojas del arte sin fin*, Salamanca, Ediciones Universidad de Salamanca, 2010, p. 230.

[28](#) For a discussion of this view see A. Hamilton, “Jazz as Classical Music”, in M. Santi (eds.), *Improvisation. Between Technique and Spontaneity*, Cambridge, Cambridge Scholar Publishing, 2010, pp. 53-75. For a criticism of Marsalis’ idea of jazz, see D. Sparti, *Musica in nero. Il campo discorsivo del jazz*, Torino, Bollati Boringhieri, 2007, pp. 101-103.

[29](#) This holds at least for contemporary Western art. However, I think that also in the past the value of an artwork depends to a great deal from its degree of originality and creativity.

[30](#) J. Levinson, *Introduction*, in Levinson (ed.): *Aesthetics & Ethics*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 9.

[31](#) T. Cohen, “On consistency in one’s personal aesthetics”, in Levinson (ed.), *Aesthetics & Ethics*, Cambridge, Cambridge University, 1998, pp. 106-125, here p. 122.

[32](#) M. Kieran, “Creativity as a Virtue of Character”, in E. Paul and S. Kaufman (eds.), *The Philosophy of Creativity*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, forthcoming, pp. 15-16, pp. 20-22.

[33](#) A. Neil, “Inauthenticity, Insincerity, and Poetry”, cit., pp. 207-8. Neill adds (p. 211): “I suggest, from the fact that those works which we characteristically value partly as expressions of the actual artist’s actual sentiments are works that present themselves as sincere or (...) as “non-imitative”; they present themselves as articulating or expressing the sentiments of their authors. And in doing so they ask to be treated, to be approached and responded to, as such. Now if a poem that presents itself in this way is not in fact sincere -that is, in effect, if it is not what it pretends to be- then it asks its readers to respond to it as something that it is not; it asks from them a response which it does not deserve. The experience that such a work offers, in short, is one in which we are misled into responding to something as something. And that is surely an undesirable experience”.

[34](#) Cf. T. Carson Mark, *On Works of Virtuosity*, in “The Journal of Philosophy”, 77 (1980), pp. 28-45; cf. J. O’Dea, *Virtue and Virtuosity*, Westport, Connecticut - London, Greenwood, 2000.

[35](#) Cf. P. D’Angelo, *Arte est celare artem*, Macerata, Quodlibet, 2005.

[36](#) J. Coltrane, cit. in L. Porter, *J. Coltrane. His Life and his Music*, Ann Arbor, The University of Michigan Press, 1998, p. 259.

[37](#) Cf. <http://artarcane.wordpress.com/2011/04/11/can-a-work-of-art-that-is-morally-flawed-be-aesthetically-good/>

[38](#) Cf. N. Carroll, *Moderate Moralism*, in “British Journal of Aesthetics”, 36 (1996), pp. 223-238.

[39](#) Cf. M. Kieran, “Forbidden Knowledge: The Challenge of Cognitive Immoralism”, in S. Gardner and J. Bermudez (eds.), *Art and Morality*, London, Routledge, 2002, pp. 56-73.

[40](#) Q. Tarantino, cit. in B. Gaut, *A Philosophy of Cinematic Art*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. 295.

Pour citer cet article

Alessandro Bertinetto, «Moral concerns about artistic activity», *Phantasia* [En ligne], Volume 1 - 2015, URL : <http://popups.ulg.ac.be/0774-7136/index.php?id=355>.

A propos de : Alessandro Bertinetto

Università di Udine