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ART AS ITS OWN INTERPRETATION

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Contributing to this volume dedicated to Michael Krausz gives me enormous pleasure. But I find the occasion also extremely intimidating, for I propose to respond to Krausz's two most recent books, *Rightness and Reason* (RR) and *Limits of Rightness* (LR).¹ What Krausz has to say in these two volumes is so cogent, so lucid, so masterly, that you are left wondering what could be added, questioned, or challenged. Krausz is in an especially good position to speak on these issues of interpretation as, in addition to being a philosopher, he is also an artist and conductor. Problems of interpretation arise for him not just as philosophical problems to be reflected on, but as practical problems that need to be dealt with during the process of creation and recreation, in art and music. My only hope, I have decided, is to be provocative, no doubt foolishly provocative. In this essay I will defend a version of what Krausz calls "singularism." The version that I defend makes what may well appear outrageous claims. Not only does it assert that works of art have one correct interpretation, it has the audacity to specify, in each case, what this one correct interpretation is. This view, you might think, exhibits all the overarching ambitiousness, the hubris, in the field of hermeneutics, that claims to propound the one and only true "theory-of-everything" have in theoretical physics.

As those who have read RR and LR will know, Krausz distinguishes two views, which he calls singularism and multiplism. Singularism asserts, as I have already indicated, that each work of art (or cultural artifacts more generally) has just one admissible, correct interpretation, while multiplism allows that some works of art may have several different admissible interpretations. According to multiplism, Vincent van Gogh's *Potato Eaters* (to take one of Krausz's examples) may admissibly be interpreted along formalist, psychoanalytic, Marxist or feminist lines. It may be possible to give reasons as to why one of these interpretations is better than another, but these reasons are likely to be inconclusive, and it need not be the case that just one correct interpretation exists. Two or more incompatible interpretations may be equally correct.

The version of singularism that I wish to defend holds that the work of art itself is the correct interpretation of itself. *King Lear* is the correct interpretation of William Shakespeare's play *King Lear*; the *Mona Lisa* is itself

the correct interpretation of Leonardo da Vinci's picture; and Johann S. Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* is the correct interpretation of itself. "This is nonsense," the cry may go up. "How can a work of art be its own interpretation, let alone the correct interpretation?" An interpretation is, by definition, something quite distinct from the work of art itself. A work of art may be a picture, a piece of music, a dance, a play, a novel or poem, a film, a sculpture. An interpretation, by contrast, is a piece of discursive prose that sets forth a particular view about the meaning of the work of art in question. Its function is to illuminate the work of art. An interpretation is not a work of art in its own right. An interpretation is a text that expounds, questions, criticizes, and argues. Apart from those rare cases where a work of art is itself just such a text (Plato's dialogues, perhaps), an interpretation cannot itself be a picture, piece of music, etc. No interpretive scholar paints, chisels or composes to write his text: he or she writes. The thesis is refuted.

Krausz would not, I think, agree with this objection. RR opens with a discussion of musical interpretation, during the course of which Krausz makes the thoroughly reasonable point that several performances may give the same interpretation of a quartet or symphony. We cannot identify an interpretation with a performance, but a performance (if any good) nevertheless yields, or is an example of, an interpretation. Here, an interpretation of a piece of music is itself a performance of that piece of music. And even when rival interpretations are being discussed, on the radio for example, to compare and contrast pieces of recorded rival performances, to indicate different interpretations, is normal practice. Art historians sometimes do something similar. They give sketches of a work of art under discussion to indicate structural patterns, geometrical forms implicit in a group of figures. Sometimes a crossover from one art form to another occurs: conductors, in order to indicate how they wish a passage to be phrased or interpreted, may do so with gestures, with sweeps of the hand in the air, even with grimaces. And this may be far more graphic and effective than anything they could say. Conducting is perhaps, in part, the art of indicating an interpretation by means of a kind of restricted dance.

Nothing here precludes the possibility of an interpretation being in the same medium as the work being interpreted, and nothing precludes the work from being its own best interpretation. In many circumstances, to take the form of a text, perhaps with illustrations, is more useful for an adjunct interpretation—as we may call an interpretation that is not the work of art itself—than for it to take the form of another work of art in the same medium. This will be the case whenever the adjunct work of art would be just as opaque, as incomprehensible, to the audience, as the original work. But this will by no means be always true. And in any case, no deep principle exists here: just a practical question as to what kind of adjunct interpretation will do the job best, in the given context, given the nature of the work of art, and the level of expertise of the audience.

Let us concede that an interpretation can take the form of a performance, a drawing, a gesture, and does not need to be a text. This does not establish that a work of art can be its interpretation. An interpretation, it may be argued, is distinct from that which is interpreted. No work of art can be its interpretation.

This question can be settled by fiat, by just defining "interpretation" as non-reflexive, incapable of applying to itself. But does this follow from the ordinary meaning of "interpretation"? Krausz refers to the *English Oxford Dictionary* definitions of interpretation as "explanation" and "exposition" (LR, p. 16). Why should these not be interpretable reflexively? Why should not something be self-explanatory, the best exposition of itself? Krausz goes on to quote the *Oxford Dictionary* as explicating interpretation in such terms as "construction put upon" or "representation"; and in terms of such prepositional phrases as "to expound," "to render clear or explicit," "to elucidate," "to bring out the meaning of," "to obtain significant information from," "to take in a manner," "to construe," and "to signify." Nothing here makes it impossible to construe interpretation in such a way that it can be reflexive, that a work of art can be an interpretation of itself. What could "represent," "expound," "render clear and explicit," "elucidate," "bring out the meaning of" "construe," and "signify" a work of art better than the work of art itself? If something other than the work of art represents, expounds, and so on, the work of art better than the work of art itself, is not this other thing, whatever it may be, a better work of art in its right? No conceptual or definitional objection has been found to holding that a work of art is its correct interpretation. But this does not make it true. Is it ever true? Is it always true?

One way of construing the matter would make it only infrequently true. Conceivably, a work of art, a novel or poem, might contain within itself an interpretation of itself. The author, using his authorial voice, tells us in no uncertain terms what the overall meaning of the novel is; the poet provides a stanza, which provides an interpretation of the rest of the poem. That is not what I mean when I declare that a work of art is its correct interpretation. That is a case of a work of art containing an (adjunct) interpretation of itself; it does not amount to the work of art, in its entirety, being the correct interpretation of itself.

So far I have considered objections to the thesis that a work of art is its correct interpretation. What positive grounds are there for adopting this view?

One great advantage of holding that the work of art is its correct interpretation is that this view automatically ensures that, in the world of interpretive activity, the work of art has pride of place. One danger that besets interpretive work (as usually understood) is that interpretation may come to appear almost more important than that which is being interpreted, the second being no more than the raw material for the first. Scholarly literary studies sometimes appear to exalt themselves above literature, and poor students, instead of absorbing literature at first hand, absorb diverse opinions of schol-

arly academic experts about literature. Scholarly debates between the experts can come to appear more important than the literature that gives rise to the debates in the first place. Likewise, history of art can appear to become a distinct, almost autonomous discipline, with its arcane rituals, remote from the art that art history is intended to illuminate.

The view I am defending implies that, even in the world of interpretation, the work of art itself is supreme. Adjunct interpretations can only be, at most, ad hoc additions to the correct interpretation, the work of art itself. Given this view, in seeking to improve our understanding and appreciation of works of art, to these works of art we must return, interpretive studies being used only as adjuncts. Music criticism is secondary to music, literary criticism secondary to literature, history of art secondary to art, and so on.

Many artists are reluctant to pronounce on the meaning of the works of art they have created. This reluctance can be construed as a manifestation of the view I am defending. For such an artist, the work of art says just what needs to be said, and is complete in itself. Its meaning is contained within itself. If the work of art could be summed up in a sentence, it would be redundant and the sentence would do instead. If the work needed additional remarks to be understood and appreciated, then it would be incomplete and defective as a work of art. Attitudes such as these, often implicit in artists' refusals to comment on their work, can be regarded as expressions of the view that the work contains its interpretation, its meaning; it expounds itself, and, if any good, does not need the prop of adjunct interpretations and explanations.

Holding that the work of art is its correct interpretation presents another advantage, which in some ways works in the opposite direction to the above: the line between art and its interpretation becomes much less divisive, much less a line of demarcation. If the correct interpretation is the work of art itself, then adjunct interpretations can, and perhaps ought to, aspire to being works of art in their right. Studies of literature that are not turgid, indigestible tracts of academic prose but are literature in their right are worth having. All good adjunct interpretations ought to embody good aesthetic standards that do not obstruct the job of being a good adjunct interpretation.

Let us concede it legitimate to construe "interpret" reflexively, so that a work of art is an interpretation of itself. Does it follow that a work of art is always, and necessarily, the correct interpretation of itself? Some years ago I read Simone de Beauvoir's novel *L'invitée* in translation, with the title *She Came To Stay*. It struck me then to be a novel that embodied a radically false interpretation of itself. The novel is based on Jean-Paul Sartre's and de Beauvoir's life together. In the novel the Sartre figure has an affair with a younger woman. Sartre and de Beauvoir—in real life, and in the novel—have agreed that possessiveness and jealousy are bad, bourgeois attitudes and emotions, to be banished from their lives. Love affairs with others are entirely acceptable, and can be accommodated within their relationship. In the novel, officially,

the de Beauvoir figure dislikes the younger woman, not because she is jealous of her, but because she thinks she is shallow, and because she sees her as scheming against her. That, at any rate, is how I remember the novel. My overpowering impression on reading the novel was that the Simone de Beauvoir character was furiously and passionately jealous of the younger woman, trembling and faint, at times, with rage and jealousy. This was depicted in the novel, but the author, the real Simone de Beauvoir, did not officially recognize these symptoms as jealousy, and it was not a part of the official plot and meaning of the novel that the heroine suffered from jealousy, even unacknowledged jealousy. The novel embodied a radically false interpretation of itself.

My interpretation of the novel may have been quite wrong. Simone de Beauvoir may, all along, have been writing a novel about repressed jealousy, about the hypocrisy that can result from deciding that an emotion does not exist because it has been judged to be deplorable. Quite conceivably, my interpretation of the novel is correct—or another novel misinterprets itself along the lines I have indicated. The conclusion is evident: a work of art can misinterpret itself. But if a work of art does misinterpret itself in this sort of way, then this is a serious artistic flaw. What may appear to be a misinterpretation might be nothing of the kind; a misinterpretation might be a quite deliberate, perhaps ironically intended perspective on the work of art, woven quite consciously and artistically into the fabric of the work, a vital dimension of the work, enriching its meaning.

Once we concede that a work of art can be a fallacious interpretation of itself, in the kind of way I have indicated, we have to conclude that all works of art are self-interpretations. The Simone de Beauvoir novel (as I remember it) is not a case of a work that contains, within itself, a false adjunct interpretation, a paragraph that declares, firmly and falsely, that this is not a novel about unacknowledged jealousy. The false interpretation is built into the whole structure of the novel as a feature of the novel itself, and is not confined to an adjunct interpretation contained within the novel.

We have given a strong argument in favor of holding that works of art do embody interpretations of themselves. That works of art do embody self-interpretations is the case for works of art that have a literary character associated with them: the novel, the poem, the opera, and even perhaps the ballet or picture that tells a story. But how a piece of music could embody a misinterpretation of itself is not evident. Some of Mozart's music, even when apparently sprightly and cheerful, has an underlying mood of immense sadness. But this is not misinterpretation, but great art. Nevertheless, if literary art can misinterpret itself, and thus invariably interpret itself, all art interprets itself.

Art is its interpretation and, apart from scattered cases of flawed literary works that misinterpret themselves, works of art embody the correct interpretation of themselves. Great works of art do that. I wish to defend this version of singularism.

But I can anticipate an objection that stems from Krausz's writings on interpretation. In LR Krausz declares that singularism and multiplism are parasitic upon the idea of "an end of inquiry," in the pragmatic sense that "informed practitioners may agree that all pertinent evidence or argumentation is available to make a suitably informed determination as to whether a given object of interpretation answers to one or more than one interpretation" (p. 9-10). But the work of art itself stands, not at the end of inquiry, but at the beginning of inquiry (apart, perhaps, for the artist herself). Notoriously, the work of art does not itself answer all questions. If it did, there would be no need for critics, art historians, musicologists, and other professional interpreters to produce their mass of adjunct interpretations. If the correct interpretation, or the correct batch of interpretations (granted multiplism), presuppose that, in some pragmatic sense, all the relevant features have been covered, all the relevant questions answered, then the work of art cannot possibly itself be the correct interpretation.

And I can also foresee another, related objection. In RR, Krausz characterizes the singularist as holding "his or her preferred interpretation to be conclusively right" (p. 2). But this is hardly something that the work of art can itself accomplish. Perhaps in some, and probably quite uninteresting, cases just one conceivable interpretation exists, no discussion whatsoever being required to identify it. But in most cases, and in most cases of great art, this is by no means true. Only after sustained imaginative critical exploration of diverse possible interpretations of the work of art may some agreed interpretation (or batch of acceptable interpretations) emerge; and even then it may be that no such agreement is reached. The work of art cannot supply this sustained exploration of possibilities; it cannot, of itself, establish that its interpretation of itself is "conclusively right." Singularism, as understood above, is untenable.

But neither of these objections is valid against the version of singularism I am defending here. To begin with, "correct" is not the same thing as "complete" in the sense that all interpretive questions that can be asked about the work are answered in a manner available instantly to everyone. In the first place, the work of art may contain within itself answers to questions about what the work of art means or says, but these answers are by no means obvious, even to those who enjoy and understand the work of art. The value of a work may be unperceived, even by experts. It took about a century for the grandeur and profundity of Bach's music to be perceived and enjoyed generally by the music-loving public. (In connection with this point, I have defended a version of realism about value in general, and aesthetic value in particular, to make room for the possibility of learning about what is of value, including learning about the aesthetic value of works of art.²) Second, there may be all sorts of historical, cultural, linguistic, or factual matters alluded to by the work of art, which need to be known and understood for a proper appreciation and understanding of the work, but which the work does not itself

answer. In order to be able to understand a poem or novel you have to understand the language; in order to understand and appreciate a picture, you may need to know about a mythological story depicted by the picture. In order to understand a piece of music you need to know something about, or to have had some experience of, the musical tradition within which the piece exists. Third, the artist may have left some matters of interpretation obscure; private references or allusions exist in the piece which no amount of knowledge about traditions, history, culture, and other publicly available matters can reveal. In this sort of case, it needs the artist (or someone who knows the artist well) to provide the necessary information.

In these sorts of ways, then, the correct interpretation of the work of art, namely the work of art itself, though correct, is unlikely of itself instantly to answer all interpretive questions for everyone. Diverse adjunct interpretations are needed to answer diverse questions that different people ask, perhaps because of different educational, cultural or historical backgrounds, or different interests. But this diversity of equally good adjunct interpretations does not mean that multiplism holds. The adjunct interpretations differ not because they contradict one another, but because they address different audiences, and tackle different questions about the work of art.

As far as the second objection is concerned, if singularism as understood here is correct, and known to be correct, then we do know what the correct interpretation is: the work of art itself. But because this interpretation is not complete, any number of crucial questions about the work may remain to be answered. And even if we concede that singularism, as understood here, is known to be correct, this does not mean that we know for certain which of several conflicting adjunct interpretations is correct. Because an adjunct interpretation, even if correct, will remain more or less conjectural in character, a range of conflicting interpretations may need to be put forward, to increase our chances of choosing the correct one. Just this situation obtains in science. In order to increase our chances of discovering the truth we need to put forward a range of conflicting theories, which then suggest crucial experiments that may be performed in attempts to weed out the false theories. In LR, Krausz acknowledges that fallibilist versions of singularism are possible, and that singularists may encourage the development of alternative (adjunct) interpretations for the kind of reasons just indicated (LR, p.10-11).

Singularism, as understood here, can do justice to a point emphasized by Krausz, that a work of art may be inherently ambiguous. Consider, for example, Leonardo's *Last Supper*. Following a famous essay on the *Last Supper* by Goethe, the tendency has been, in modern times, to interpret the fresco as depicting the moment at which Jesus announces, "One of you shall betray me . . ." This interpretation explains the reactions of astonishment, horror and disbelief from the disciples. Leo Steinberg has argued that the real meaning of the painting is the Eucharist, marked by the words "Take, eat: this is my body."³ Jesus' outstretched arms indicate bread and wine on the table before

him: his central position in the picture, his stillness in such marked contrast to the disciples, the way the whole picture radiates outwards from him, all indicate that what is depicted is Jesus giving himself to the world. For Steinberg, the announcement of the betrayal is absorbed into this greater meaning of the Eucharist. In a fascinating review of Steinberg's book, Michael Podro suggests a different emphasis: perhaps "the sacramental aspect can work effectively only if the astonishment at the prophecy of betrayal is highlighted, if the transcendent significance of the event is allowed to emerge understated, to radiate through the overall structure."⁴ The true meaning of the *Last Supper*, in short, is bound up, not just with the existence of two, equally valid, different interpretations (betrayal and Eucharist), but with the way in which these two readings interact with one another, or are related to each other, in the form of the picture. The correct adjunct interpretation will incorporate all these meanings.

Something similar can perhaps be said of Anselm Kiefer's paintings, much discussed by Krausz as a typical case of incongruence. Kiefer's paintings incorporate Nazi symbolism, and can be seen as "celebrating or exorcising the world's unresolved memories of that terrible past," as Joseph Margolis puts it in a passage quoted by Krausz (LR, p. 21). But here, perhaps the element of celebration, of fascination, is essential to the exorcism; if something of the ghastly appeal of Nazism is not depicted and appreciated, the exorcism will be perfunctory and incomplete. We have here, in short, not two incompatible interpretations ambiguously presented to us, but a coherent meaning which emerges out of the dissonance of the two interpretations indicated by Margolis. Krausz suggests something along these lines himself (LR, p. 23).

So far I have defended a version of singularism that declares that the work of art is its correct interpretation. Krausz, in defending multiplism, tends to write of different equally "admissible" interpretations, instead of different equally "correct" interpretations. "Admissible" is a much looser term than "correct." We might well want to hold that there can be many different, mutually incompatible, but equally admissible (adjunct) interpretations, even though only one correct interpretation can be found.

One way this state of affairs can come about is because of ignorance. We do not know enough to be able to decide which of two or more incompatible interpretations is correct; in order to be "admissible," an interpretation must be good enough to be a candidate for being the correct interpretation, given the knowledge available to us. We may need to put forward a variety of conflicting interpretations that are admissible, in this sense, in order to increase our chances of discovering the correct interpretation. As we have already seen, just this happens in science, where conflicting hypotheses are put forward as part of the attempt to discover the truth, all the hypotheses being "admissible," in the sense that they are candidates for the truth. Multiplicity of conflicting adjunct interpretations that are all equally "admissible," in this

sense, far from contradicting singularism, is required by singularism.

An interpretation might be “admissible” in other ways, even though not correct—and even though known not to be correct. What is admissible may well depend on context. Something inadmissible in one context may be admissible in another. In the context of satire, or the jokes of a stand-up comedian, interpretations of politicians, political parties, institutions, even works of art, may be entirely “admissible,” because hilarious, utterly absurd, and yet containing a tiny germ of truth (exaggerated to the point of absurdity), even though, in another context, such an interpretation would be shockingly and appallingly inadmissible. Political cartoons, jokes, and satirical comment depend for their effect on distortion and exaggeration: this kind of diversity of admissible interpretations is, again, compatible with singularism.

Another kind of context is closer to Krausz’s concerns, where the existence of diverse, conflicting equally admissible interpretations appears undeniable, and more of a challenge to singularism. I have in mind the context of the performing arts. In Chapter One of *RR*, Krausz makes what is, to me, a convincing case for acknowledging that there can be equally admissible, even equally correct, different interpretations of one and the same piece of music. And in the theatre, opera, and ballet too, we would say that the same thing holds. How can singularism, as I am defending the doctrine here, accommodate this point?

To some extent singularism can accommodate a variety of conflicting admissible interpretations of performing arts in ways already indicated. A range of interpretations of a symphony or play may be admissible in part because we want to discover what works, what most successfully brings out the inherent aesthetic value of the piece. Again, a range of different interpretations may be admissible because, when it comes to the performing arts, performers have aims other than to discover the “correct” interpretation. Directors of plays and operas may set out to shock, to provoke, or to win attention, a critical outcry, and an audience. Conductors, singers, actors, directors and other performers may want to highlight some aspect of a well-known work that they feel has been neglected, at the expense, perhaps, of more obvious and, in the end, more important, features. Mere fashion plays a major role in influencing how music and plays are performed. How odd that, as far as music is concerned, authentic performances are all the rage, but when it comes to theater, just the opposite fashion prevails, it being almost *de rigueur* that a production of *Hamlet* for today should be set in a modern corporation, the King, the Queen, and the courtiers being business executives wearing suits and name tags, and shooting each other with machine guns (as depicted by a 2001, “much admired,” production of *Hamlet* by The Royal Shakespeare Company).

Putting aside such examples of diverse admissible interpretations as these, which can be dealt with by singularism in ways indicated above, there appears to be a residue of cases which pose much more of a challenge to sin-

gularism. Symphonies can be performed in several different but equally legitimate, authentic, correct ways; and the same goes for plays, operas, and ballet. In some of these cases, the range of different interpretations might be narrowed down if we knew more. The composer or playwright might emphatically dismiss some interpretations as doing violence to his or her intentions. I do not want to suggest that the artist's verdict is decisive. Artists can change their mind, grow old, and forget what they originally intended, or just misjudge some performance matters, so that if their instructions are followed to the letter, the resulting performance fails to do justice to what is of most value in the work. There may be more than one creative artist involved, and these may not agree. Nevertheless, what the intentions of an artist were in creating a work of art is a factor in determining what constitutes a correct interpretation of the work. Discovering what these intentions are is difficult in many cases, the artist being long dead.

But even if we were able to consult the composer or playwright, thinking that the response would be sufficient to determine just one way of performing or producing the work as the correct one (in all cases) is implausible. When the artist still lives, he or she may be undecided, or even fallible, about crucial interpretive issues. A composer or playwright may be delighted that a symphony or play can be performed in a variety of different ways, different interpretations emphasizing different aspects of the work, several different interpretations being equally correct. If this is the case, what becomes of singularism?

One way to defend singularism against this apparently lethal objection is to argue that the performing arts are in a different category from other art forms. In the case of the performing arts, the work of art only comes to life, only exists, through performance. The score, the text of the play, or the choreographic score is not a work of art in its right, but is a set of instructions for the creation of a work of art, which comes to fruition in a performance. The work of art is not the score or text but the clutch of ideal kinds of performance, which realize the "set of instructions" in different, but equally valid, equally correct ways. What is peculiar about performing art is that the work of art—the clutch of ideal kinds of performance—is inherently multifaceted. In referring to Shakespeare's *Hamlet* or Ludwig von Beethoven's *Ninth* we are referring to several distinct works of art with some common features, a family resemblance, and a common inheritance: namely the distinct kinds of ideal performance, all engendered by, made possible by, Shakespeare's text, or Beethoven's score. Actors and musicians are creative artists aided and abetted by words and notes of the works they perform. And this way of viewing the matter is supported by our honoring great actors and performers as creative artists, along with the artists who create the works they perform.

That singularism breaks down in the case of the performing arts is due not to any inadequacy in singularism, but to the strange, "hydra-headed" character of a performed work of art. When a performer "interprets" a play or

musical score, he or she does something quite different from what an art historian does in providing an adjunct interpretation of a picture, and quite different, again, from what a musicologist or music critic does in writing about music. The performer recreates—or co-creates—the work of art. In performing Franz Schubert's *Moments musicaux*, a pianist brings into full reality, into our common, public world, something that, before, was only a potentiality, a set of instructions for the work of art the pianist (with the assistance of Schubert's instructions) creates. The art historian or music critic does nothing of the kind. Their adjunct interpretations are not realizations of the works of art under discussion. What we have, in short, in the case of the performing arts, is not one work of art and many different equally correct adjunct interpretations, but many different works of art, all sharing common features, and stemming from a common source, a common set of instructions, each having just one correct adjunct interpretation (apart from the qualifications to this that have been discussed above).

A mischievous interlocutor might at this point take up the above argument and, pushing it to the limit, argue that all art is performing art, there being no evident dividing line between performing art, and art that is not performed. Poetry can be performed, just like plays. Novels can be read out loud to audiences, and thus performed. Charles Dickens went on tours reading his novels. These days one can buy cassettes and CDs of actors reading works of literature. How a painting, or a sculpture can become a set of instructions for a performance is not quite evident (although some visual artists are “performance artists”).

On the other hand, pushing the dividing line between performance and non-performance art in the other direction, it might be argued that performances are just the result of tradition and custom, and are never essential, because we can understand, enjoy and appreciate all art without them. We do not have to go to the theatre to enjoy Shakespeare; we can pick up a book and read one of his plays. Even a musician can read a musical score, so that the music of the score is heard with the mind's ear.

Or, put another way, it might be argued that all art involves performance in that we, in experiencing, enjoying and understanding the work recreate it in our imagination. We read a musical score and, if we have the skill, create in our mind the sounds of a quartet playing. We read a play, and in our imagination put on a production, complete with actors, makeup, scenery, entrances and exits. We read a novel, and create in our imagination the landscape, the people, and the action. And when we look at a picture, we co-create the work of art, the forms, the landscape, the atmosphere, the mood and meaning of the picture. We are all artists, and works of art are all, without exception, sets of instructions for the creation of the works of art we see, hear, read, and enjoy. And since we are all different, with different past experiences, imaginations, knowledge, and skills, we all create different works of art from any one set of instructions: *Lear*, *The Mona Lisa*, *St. Matthew Passion*. Art is hydra-headed.

The version of singularism I have been defending here, which begins with the claim that the work of art is its interpretation, has vanished without trace. A work of art is much too multifaceted a thing to be capable of being “the correct interpretation of itself.” No such object exists, only a set of instructions, and as many distinct works of art as people who have used the “set of instructions” to co-create, for themselves, their particular, personal, performed work of art. Singularism is nonsense. It drowns in this ocean of multifaceted works of art.

This extreme subjectivist view can be resisted, and ought to be resisted. One way to do this would be to take the argument further, until it becomes a *reductio ad absurdum*. Not just works of art are created by the performances we stage in our imagination. The same applies to trees, houses, people, cars, to “middle-sized objects,” as Krausz would say, quite generally. What we appear to experience, is not out there, in the physical world, but is the outcome of the perceptual and interpretive machinery of our minds, or brains, getting to work on physical stimuli that we absorb via our sense organs. The world external to us is, roughly, what modern physics says it is, quite different from what we ordinarily experience and suppose it to be, or something unknown, unknowable, and unimaginable.

The quasi-Kantian view just outlined deserves to be rejected. It constitutes a false solution to what is, in my view, the fundamental problem of philosophy which, elsewhere, I have formulated like this: “How can we understand our human world, embedded within the physical universe, in such a way that justice is done to the richness, meaning, and value of human life on the one hand, and to what modern science tells us about the physical universe on the other hand?”⁵ This problem is to be solved by appreciating that physics is concerned only with a highly selected aspect of all that exists, that “causally efficacious” aspect, which determines the way events unfold. In addition to the physical is the experiential: colors, sounds, smells, tactile qualities, as we experience them, and moral and value qualities of people and works of art. These exist out there in the world around us, compatible with, but not reducible to, the physical. In particular, then, works of art exist out there in the world around us, imbued with the kind of aesthetic features we attribute to them.⁶ The world as we experience it is not, as René Descartes thought, and as Immanuel Kant thought in a different way, in the mind.

In particular, then, the usual distinction that we would make between a performed work of art, and one not performed, continues to hold. A performance is something that takes place in the public world, music played in a concert hall, or a play performed in a theatre. When we read a play, we may, in some sense, create a production of the play in our imagination; but this creation, being private, taking place only in our imagination, is not a performance. Even if we accepted the quasi-Cartesian or Kantian view, there would still be an analogous distinction between “public performances,” and “private imaginings.”

I have admitted above that a work of art, even though being (in most cases) the correct interpretation of itself, is nevertheless unlikely to be complete, in the sense that it answers all questions about how the work is to be understood. The question arises: can we be sure that always one correct answer to such questions exists, even in the case of non-performing art, and even if you allow that we may never know what the correct answer (if it exists) is? May not some works of art be inherently loosely specified, even be quite consciously designed to carry two or more incompatible adjunct interpretations? Is it beyond the wit of any artist to create such a work of art, perhaps with the deliberate intention of falsifying singularism? Consider William Wordsworth's Lucy poem "A Slumber Did My Spirit Seal," discussed by Krausz (RR, p. 77-79). Here is the poem:

A slumber did my spirit seal;
I had no human fears:
She seemed a thing that could not feel
The touch of earthly years.
No motion has she now, no force;
She neither hears nor sees;
Rolled round in earth's diurnal course,
With rocks, and stones, and trees.

Krausz considers two conflicting interpretations of this poem, by Cleanth Brooks and by F. W. Bateson. Brooks sees the poem as expressing the lover's agonized shock at the inertness, the dead lifelessness, of the loved one, depicted in the second stanza. Bateson, by contrast, sees the poem as expressing the pantheistic grandeur of the dead—Lucy becoming a part of the sublime processes of nature. These readings are incompatible; but nothing in the poem allows us to favor one over the other. Is this not a case of multiplicity?

Wordsworth himself might have favored one interpretation over the other, as doing better justice to his intentions in writing the poem. But even the author's intention might not be judged conclusive. It could always be argued that, even if Wordsworth did intend the poem to be understood in one way instead of the other, nothing in the poem itself supports this judgment. If this was Wordsworth's intention, then he failed to realize it adequately in his poem. Wordsworth might point to other poems and writings of his where, perhaps, the pantheistic theme is pronounced, to support Bateson's reading, but he would then be proceeding in the same kind of way that a literary critic would proceed.

My view is that this case does not refute singularism. I think the poem—the correct interpretation of the poem—incorporates elements of the two readings, Brooks's and Bateson's. The poem expresses the shock and horror associated with Lucy's inert state of death, her body being reduced to being

rolled round with earth, stones, rocks, and trees. But a kind of consolation arises from Lucy's participation in the grandeur of nature, as Bateson points out. The poem itself—the correct interpretation of the poem—includes the horror and the grandeur.

Singularism can be regarded as a blinkered, single-minded view, which insists that works of art have just one definite interpretation—a view that cannot tolerate ambiguity, richness, and contradictory emotional responses to things. But it could be argued that just the reverse is the case. The multiplist cannot tolerate ambiguity, richness, apparently contradictory emotional responses in a single interpretation, and feels obliged to postulate many different interpretations (each interpretation doing justice just to one aspect of the work). The multiplist is blinkered and single-minded, intolerant of ambiguity, richness, and the complexity of our emotional responses to things.

But what of the artist who sets out to create a work that has two contradictory interpretations built into it, in order to refute singularism? Even this would not refute singularism; for the correct interpretation would be that a single, coherent, artistic intention was to create a work with two contradictory interpretations.

To conclude, the view expounded here has features more characteristic of multiplism, although the view is a version of singularism that I have defended throughout. First, my view acknowledges that we may never know which of two or more conflicting interpretations is the correct one. Second, it emphasizes the importance of developing a variety of different, and possibly equally admissible, interpretations, in part in order to help discover the correct interpretation. Third, incongruence is recognized as a crucial feature of some works of art. Incongruence, when it exists, is incorporated within the single correct interpretation, and is not distributed between different interpretations, as multiplism might have it, none being able to do justice to the real meaning of the work as a result. Fourth, my view emphasizes that the whole point of adjunct interpretations is to help an audience all the better experience, know, understand, appreciate, and enjoy what is of most value in a work of art—or, possibly, see through what is fraudulent, shabby, dishonest, and third-rate. Adjunct interpretations, in order to be good, need to be appropriate to their audience, its education, the times it lives in, the experience it has of comparable works of art, and so on. There may be many different adjunct interpretations, at different levels, tackling different questions. None is complete; but all might be correct. Fifth, my view argues that in different contexts, especially in connection with the performing arts, a variety of interpretations may be admissible, even though not correct. Finally, the view recognizes the multifaceted character of performed works of art.

NOTES

1. Michael Krausz, *Rightness and Reasons: Interpretation in Cultural Practices* (RR) (Ithaca, N. Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993); Michael Krausz, *Limits of Rightness* (LR) (Lanham, Md: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000).

2. Nicholas Maxwell, "Are There Objective Values?" *The Dalhousie Review* 79: (1999), pp 301–317; Nicholas Maxwell, *The Human World in the Physical Universe* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1984), ch. 2; Nicholas Maxwell, *From Knowledge to Wisdom* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984), ch. 10.

3. Leo Steinberg, *Leonardo's Incessant Last Supper* (New York: Zone Books, 1993).

4. Michael Podro, "Space, Time, and Leonardo," *Times Literary Supplement*, no. 5153: (4 January 2002), p. 17.

5. Maxwell, *The Human World*.

6. *Ibid.*, ch. 2; Maxwell, *From Knowledge to Wisdom*, ch. 10.

