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Decoding the virtual. Towards a Kintetic Ontology of Music

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When a cellist plays Johann Sebastian Bach's *Prélude* for violoncello solo in D minor he will, to some degree, most likely stretch the third note, *a* . In so doing, he follows a weighting of the second count suggested in the score by a certain montage technique which corresponds to a relief of the already unaccented three. The bow stretches into the string, the timbre is intensified to allow a musical opening to take hold which affects the entire cellistic production ensemble. This metrical stretching creates the need to slightly accelerate the following semiquavers: *f, e*, and *d* so that the second bar might come in on time. The interplay of temporal stretching and metric contraction immediately produces a pulsating musical agogic.

»Assuming an elastic band were to be drawn from A to B – could its elongation be divided up?«[1] Henri Bergson's rhetorical question makes it clear that a movement does not necessarily connect with the space it passes through. Rather, *it escapes all metrics.* While the space it passes through is divisible, a movement cannot be divided without changing its nature. It is generated out of the intensive spaces in between. Much like the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze argued, paraphrasing Bergson, in his 1983 study *Cinema I: The movement-image*, he makes clear that "On the one hand, you can bring two instants or two positions together to infinity; but movement will always occur in the interval between the two, in other words behind our back.« On the other hand, however much you devide and subdivide time, »movement will always occur in a concrete duration [*durée*]; thus each movement will have its own qualitative duration.«[2]

So far these descriptions contradict the image that the cellist sees before him on the music stand. At first, nothing here is particularly representative of qualitative durations or affective stretches. The note heads and phrasing arcs shown here are, rather, a graphic sequence of immovable "momentary cuts" that refer to an abstracted temporal

[1] Henri Bergson: »Le mécanisme cinématographique de la pensée et l'illusion mécanistique«, in: Henri Bergson, *L'évolution créatrice*, Paris: PUF 1968, p. 349 (translation B. Sprick).
[2] Gilles Deleuze: *Cinema I: The movement-image*, London: Bloomsbury 1986, p. 13.

order. A note is a point drawn in the grid of a time diagram consisting of vertical and horizontal lines. The musical movement must be taken from it in the spirit of a detour. A musical text is less like a linguistic recording and more like a diagram that can be analysed from the perspective of an implicit action. It becomes operative when the inherent thinking behind it is validated through sound. *A musical text is, in effect, a virtual force field*.

As is indicated by this short excerpt from my text, "Notes on the Sound-Image", my research is dedicated to a philosophical analysis of musical movement. I like to refer to this as a "cinematographic analysis of music" which may take some getting used to at first. The term "cinematographic" has traditionally been reserved for optical media ever since the *Lumière* brothers inscribed it in the history of technological innovation in regard to visual communication in 1895. When we speak of a "cinematograph", we are usually referring to an apparatus that records and reproduces moving images, as exemplified in the field of cinema. Music – this is the thesis I want to discuss with you today – however is no less "cinemato-graphic" than cinema. On the contrary: it, too, draws its effectiveness from a variety of inscriptions and transformations of movement and this calls for an expansion of cinematographic terminology.

In 1895 not only was the first cinematograph presented to the public in Paris, in that year Henri Bergson also wrote large parts of his book *Matter and Memory* which inscribed a restlessness into the philosophical question of movement through an unusual concept of the "image" [*image*]. In the 1980s, Gilles Deleuze laid out this restlessness in his two books on cinema, *The Movement-Image* and *The Time-Image* into an ontology of the virtual. I attempt to continue this train of thought in my work by exploring the possibilities of making Deleuze's and Bergson's terms effective for the discussion on musical aesthetics.

A cinematograph is initially – at least according to its etymological meaning –nothing more than a "writer of motion". It records movements and stores them in a peculiar way in order to be able to reproduce and exhibit them simultaneously. In the case of the filmic cinematograph, visible movements are first recorded on celluloid as individual "snapshots" and then reassembled into a continuous movement at the precise moment when they are exteriorly furnished with kinetic energy in the form of a rotary movement.

A cello also shares features with a "cinematographic apparatus". It converts kinetic energy into audible sound by setting in motion a multitude of resonating recording surfaces. Stimulated by the movement of the bow, the strings begin to vibrate. These vibrations inscribe themselves on the body of the instrument in order to interface with the air in the form of (more or less even) pressure fluctuations. They are "aerological", they are air-bound, their cinematography is fleeting compared to that of celluloid. *A sound wave moves through space as a movement*. It is populated by micro-cinematographies which makes metaphysical distinctions between "form" and "matter" ultimately questionable.

The ontological-cinematographic genesis of the musical material suggests that the virtuality of movement and its multiple relationships with time, as elaborated in Deleuze's work on cinema, can also be demonstrated in the aesthetic operations of music. Through music, forces of movement can be captured and assembled to give them aesthetic consistency in a variety of ways. I assume, following Deleuze, that the invention of the cinematograph at the end of the nineteenth century informs a philosophical problem that had already caused unrest in the arts and especially in music long before that. It concerns the question of how movement is inscribed and reproduced in a time-bound manner in and through aesthetic media.

Musical and filmic inscriptions of movement, however, are not only subject to very different technical reproduction contexts. They also follow different historical lines of development. While the history of film (in the technical sense) spans almost a hundred and fifty years, the history of music spans millennia, only to lose itself in the darkness of its infancy.

In line with the multidisciplinary research context in which my work originated, the argumentative development of my thesis (»Music is no less "cinemato-graphic" than cinema.«) proceeds in a speculative double movement. On the one hand, philosophical concepts are ›extracted‹ from musical practice that concerns the philosophical problem of movement. On the other, I transfer concepts from Deleuze's cinema theory to music aesthetics in order to open them up to dimensions of the cinematographic. It is with this approach that I aim to encounter a number of research desiderata: The problem of movement has hitherto only been given sporadic attention in the musical aesthetics led discussion on the relationship between ›music and time‹. Furthermore, the practice of

musical instruments rarely comes into focus. In addition, Deleuze's writings have failed to be systematically received in the discourse on musical aesthetics.

My goal is to develop a practice-oriented approach to musical aesthetic thought, an approach which is dedicated *to an analysis of the time-bound inscription and reproduction of musical movements.*

The ›cellophilosophical‹ argumentation of the first part of my doctoral thesis for example, begins with an analysis of the instrumental-technical act that regularly precedes artistic practice on a string instrument: so-called "tuning" and its paradoxical object, the concert pitch *a*. As a mixture of pitch and timbre, the tonal actualization of the concert pitch in the Kantian sense eludes the controlling access of a "determining power of judgement" and thus works against itself in a certain way. The multiple sound pressure movements of the concert pitch cannot be recorded exhaustively by consciousness. They communicate themselves to the musician as uncertainty about whether or not their instrument is already sufficiently tuned. At the same time, they 'automatically' pass through a series of technical interfaces and metric distances, which can be made the object of an aesthetic evaluation. Not only can a specific form of musical cinematography be discerned. In line with Deleuze's argumentation, the concert pitch *a*, can also be understood as a *perceptual* sound, which moves us toward the philosophical question of a "perception of perception".

This can be further discussed in terms of a cartography of the technical movement variables of cellistic sound production, which, during the practice of a scale, for example, reconfigures itself in accumulating layers. In reference to Deleuze's terminology, what we are talking about here is an *action sound*. An action sound can be best described as a constitutive decay and permanent remixing of cellistic production movements. These are – in connection with the aforementioned tone stretching in Bach – short-circuited with the note-image and its relationship to performance and technical reproduction. An *affective* sound announces itself here which works to interrupt pre-rehearsed sensomotoric reproduction schemes.

Despite all the connections to musical practice and its systematic reflection, the considerations of the first part of my doctoral thesis remain musically rather unspecific. The tone circulating in philosophical thought threatens to become philosophically ›monotonous‹ at times. In the second part, the isolation of the cellophilosophical practice cell is, therefore, abandoned and swapped out for the open

stage of an orchestral situation. Questions of an orchestral *tutti* become as virulent here as the cinematographic genesis of the musical work that resides in the space between performance and score.

Anton Bruckner's 7th Symphony, for example, presents the listener with a genuinely cinematographic sound production from the moment it begins. The symphonic process starts off with a tremolo from the first and second violins – a shimmering repetition of notes – that emerges from a multitude of individual, metrically uncoordinated bow movements. The virtual variety of sound, which was exposed *ontologically* in the first part of my work, is here turned outward *ontically*, to which an extended cello melody forms a conceivable contrast.

Let's artificially separate what actually belongs together. Let us try to give the passage we have just heard from Bruckner's symphony – starting from a paraphrase of some thoughts from Deleuze's *The movement-image* – its first cinematographic determinations, even if we have to correct them again later. As can be clearly seen, Bruckner's score initially frames a relatively abstract ›sound field‹, which corresponds to a no less saturated ›off-screen‹ state, musically. Most of the instruments pause at the beginning of the symphony but this does not mean that they are not involved in the musical events. Rather, the gaps they leave open allow the sound field to contract into a cello-cantilena staged as a solo. The musical framing – which I call, following Deleuze, *cadrage* – here initially appears as an operation of limiting framing, which at the same time creates an unlimited outside.

In Bruckner's work, the operation of musical *setting* is – in contrast to the more radical operations of the cadrage – connected with flowing and temporally opening inscriptions of movement. It sets the kadrated ensemble of the orchestral apparatus in motion, in order to simultaneously express the transformation of a whole that moves beyond the ensemble. In the example discussed here, two heterogeneous musical "shots" overlap, they are combined to form a superordinate musical image. The micrological sound synthesis of the tremolo is related to a far-reaching *plane* of melodic development. Every micro-movement finds its necessity in that it expresses an absolute change in a symphonic whole that the individual (sub-)ensembles go through.

Finally, in Bruckner's symphony, the musical *montage* takes on the task of coordinating the interplay of musical *cadrage* and musical setting in time. It relates

the individual sound-images to the duration [*durée*] and goes hand in hand with the production of an "indirect image of time" that can be deduced from the chain of each individual sound. At the beginning of Bruckner's symphony, for example, two figures of musical presence can be identified. The movement of the tremolo suggests a musical present that assembles the immediate flow of a musical "now" that works to erase the past and the future. The *cantilena*, on the other hand, creates a musical "now" that combines past and future while erasing the present. The tremolo reduces the intervals of time up to the point where it becomes a state of acoustic indifference, it's too fast. The far-reaching cantilena, however, extends a cyclic melodic movement toward infinity or at least tries to suggest this musically. The counter-movement of both orders of time gives the montage at the beginning of Bruckner's symphony a sublime character in the sense of Kant's *Critique of Judgement*. It layers temporal opposites atop each other in order to draw symphonic power from its disjunctive synthesis.

At the beginning of Bruckner's 7th Symphony, the orchestral act is divided into three essential cinematographic operations which can be characterized in line with Deleuze as follows: Through musical *cadrage*, the relatively closed systems are defined, which encompasses everything that can be set in motion musically. The musical *setting* determines the musical movement that occurs in the relatively closed systems between elements or parts of the orchestral ensemble. Finally, musical *montage* determines the variable whole that is expressed in and through musical movement. These three levels result in sites for the cinematographic analysis of musical movement. They must always be thought of together in order to be changed at the same time, depending on the question at hand.

The imprecise ›attempts to transfer‹ cinematographic terminology to Bruckner's symphonic works, which are still strongly oriented towards Deleuze, are challenging to reaffirm the vocabulary acquired within the framework of other analytical studies. It becomes clear that the operations of musical *cadrage*, setting and montage, are often thematized compositionally in relation to their aesthetic operationality. For example, in the composition *Corrosion of Confirmity – working class children* by the Hamburg composer Andrej Koroliov – a trio for piano, clarinet, violoncello and ›additional instruments‹, which premiered here at the HfMT in 2007 – for example, the tendency can be discerned to take the cadrage itself – and thus its operative functionality – to its limits.

The adornian ›material status‹ that Koroliov cadrates in the score titled ›accessories‹ [»Zubehör«] appears to be unsystematically compiled. The clarinetist, for example, is supposed to have "2 polystyrene plates, 3 blocks of wood and a small slate table" in addition to her instrument, but can alternatively place a "small tam-tam on the table and scrape it in the middle with a wooden or metal handle" The score not only asks the cellist to tune "all strings *about* 50 cents lower". The musician is also instructed on the graphic circumstances under which she is to strike either "very high (undefined pitch)", "on and directly at the bridge", or "on the back of the cello". Finally, the pianist is immediately given an enitre arsenal of additional tools to play with, for example a "plastic credit card", a "child's glockenspiel", "two polystyrene plates", and a "whistle", which is always used when the impression cannot be avoided that the other members of the ensemble have gone too far in their improvisation. The work on the material provided – once released by motor activity – leads, especially towards the end of the piece, to long blocks of so-called ›freelance work‹, in which each part of the ensemble, more or less independently, can explore the possibilities of the instruments at hand.

The sensomotoric band that guarantees the unity of musical cadrage, setting, and montage in the Bruckner piece is obviously torn apart by Koroliov. At the same time, the instrumental sensomotoric is overemphasized. Individually, the chains of action appear quite coherent, only their musical coordination clearly fails because it can no longer be related to a common organisational centre. In Koroliov's work, an aesthetic "we" (a group) emerges, which, due to technical problems, does not act together yet ›para-acts‹ with one another. Where work becomes play and play becomes work, movement becomes a *tertium comparationis*.

I'm coming to the end, now. The problem of musical cinematography could be outlined on the basis of a speculative philosophical (re-)search movement. It refers to an essentially unconsciously advancing technique of difference in the virtual, the motor effects of which can be analytically exposed and understood in concrete individual musical cases. Musical cinematography is distinguished by the fact that it inscribes movement in a temporal manner into musical bodies and other resonating recording surfaces in order to reproduce it in a more or less consistent way through various mechanisms of technical reproduction. As an *artistic field of research*, musical cinematography maybe could open the horizon for a *kinetic ontology of music*, which

could create space for a creative expansion of musical and theoretical practice in the future.

Thank you for your attention.