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The restlessness of the virtual

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I‘m very happy to be here today. I studied at HfMT for a long time, starting with Cello and followed by music theory and composition. I currently hold a scholarship from the graduate program ›Aesthetics of the Virtual‹ at the *University of Fine Arts, Hamburg* (HFBK), where I‘m working on an artistic-scientific dissertation on Gilles Deleuze and musical aesthetics. Its working title is *Resonances of the Virtual. The Profile of Movement and the Profile of Time in Music*. In it, I‘m attempting a critical rereading of Gilles Deleuze‘s two cinema books from a musicological point of view. I would like to begin the following lecture with some general thoughts on the ›virtuality‹ of artistic research and end with one of my own works called *Virtual Box with Music*.

In the last years, techniques or dispositifs of the ›virtual‹ have risen in importance in the fields of the humanities, the arts and scientific discourse. In philosophy, as much as in gender studies, media theory, the arts or technology-based practices, the concept of the ›virtual‹ has found widespread use even though its divergent meanings have yet to be fundamentally examined or addressed in terms of the tensions between them. The concept of the virtual itself is thus stricken by a certain ›virtualisation‹, revealing itself in the multiplicity of actualisations that constantly shift around the core of a concept never representable in its entirety.

It is precisely these ›displacements‹ that we try to approach by means of artistic and scientific research in the graduate program ›Aesthetics of the Virtual‹. In our work, we refer the term ›Aesthetic‹ not only to ›fine arts‹ but to its original sense of *aisthesis*, which is as much the perception of the world as its coming-into-appearance. Accordingly, the topics explored by participants of the program are diverse, while broadly centred around three ›orders‹ of the virtual that structure the different projects and investigations.

A ›first order‹ virtuality concerns digital computer technologies, for instance the virtual cartographies of *Google earth*. A ›second order‹ virtuality addresses particular ›techniques of the virtual‹ that include virtual warfare or strategies of visualisation in societies of control. Finally, a ›third order‹ of the virtual examines the concept itself and its relationship to the register of the ›Real‹ in regard to its implications for philosophy, specifically ontology.

Such an ›ontology of the virtual‹, which is also the context for my research, is particularly close to the thought of the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze. Contrarily to popular use of the term, the virtual is fully real in Deleuze. He frames it as a creative and productive force, though requiring, as Henning Teschke insists in his book *Sprünge der Differenz*, quote »separation from any order of the actual [...]«, end quote. This idiosyncratic understanding of a virtual that is real but not actual, is emphasised by Deleuze in his book *Difference and Repetition*. **(*Citation DW)** Quote:

> The virtual is opposed not to the real but to the actual. The virtual is fully real insofar as it is virtual. Exactly what Proust said of states of resonance must be said of the virtual: ›Real without being actual, ideal without being abstract […].‹ end quote.

Maybe what Deleuze is suggesting, in this case with reference to Marcel Proust‘s novel *In Search of Lost Time*, can be concretised briefly using the example of resonance. Resonances occur when a potential is brought to vibrate. When the string of a cello resounds, its frequency travels through space and can enter into a shared vibration with another string of the same instrument. In this manner, rhythmical energy is added to a physical body, setting it into a resonating motion that makes it vibrate at a particular frequency, increasing in intensity. A short film to illustrate this point: It shows the tuning of my cello for Johann Sebastian Bach‘s *Suite für Violoncello solo* in c-minor, notated in Scordatura: **(*Video)**

One can clearly see how the top string begins to vibrate when the bow draws across the lower strings, even though it remains untouched by the bow. The attack on the C string actualises the virtual potential of the upper string *g*, which is to produce resonances. **(*Resonance I)** Here, the resonance itself, meaning the vibrating *g*-string is ›actual‹ and observable. On the other hand, the *potential* of the string to produce resonances is – according to Deleuze – ›virtual‹. It is ›real‹

even when the strings are not ›actually‹ vibrating or remain, as they do now, at home in my cello case.

(*Resonance II) Much like the different strings on an instrument can enter into relations of resonance, there are different ›planes‹ of thought that respond to their own constitutive forces, but that can set one another in vibration in manifold ways. **(*Citation WP)** In their book *What is philosophy?* Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari write: »chaos has three daughters [...] these are the Chaoids – art, science and philosophy – as forms of thought or creation.«

The ›planes‹ of art, science and philosophy are thought by Deleuze and Guattari to be *de jure* (wich means trough the transcendental use of their faculties) radically distinct from each other. Art is not science and philosophy not art. Nevertheless, the authors suggest that they can *de facto* produce different types of ›interferences‹ by exceeding themselves towards the other plane. Such an ›interference‹ appears for instance when, quote *What is Philosophy?* »a scientist tries to create functions of sensations [...] like [...] in theories of colour or sound [...] or when an artist creates pure sensations of concepts or functions as we see in the varieties of abstract art […].« End quote. **(*Interference)**

Following Deleuze and Guattari‘s interpretation, the virtual potential of science can therefore exceed itself towards art when actualised in forms of artistic thought. But any such actualisation must in turn modify it in regards to the virtual potential that grounds it. This, again, can express itself in form of interferences with philosophy and so on and so forth. It is these kinds of interferences that draw artistic and scientific research into permanent restlessness. What resonates here is the fundamental difference between art and science, and their chaotic timbres that can never be fully represented or conceptually grasped. **(*Exhibition)**

I have drawn one some of the aforementioned aspects in an installation for the annual exhibition of the HFBK in 2015. This was quite an unusual exhibition, as all members of the graduate program (including the teaching staff) were, on request of the school‘s president Martin Köttering, prompted to design a common packing box to present their respective works to the public. The metaphor at work was rather obvious: as a ›new arrival‹ to the program, everyone was to bring along something special in their packing box. **(*Packing box)**

I admit that the idea or rather ›requirement‹ of the packing box didn‘t appeal to me from the start. It was too communicative for me, or rather too loaded with predetermined ›meaning‹. But the virtual does not communicate. As Deleuze says, it produces. The question is not what the virtual ›is‹, »but how it functions« [quote from Deleuze]. Allow me to outline how I handled the dilemma of the ›presupposing packing box‹.

What I had in mind from the start was a sound installation, the centre of which would be a sound sample prepared by myself. My dissertation is about the interplay of movement, time and music, I therefore chose the *Sarabande* from Johann Sebastian Bach‘s *Suite für Violoncello solo* in c-minor BWV 1011, in which all three aspects play a part. **(*Sarabande)**

The *Sarabande* from the 5th Suite is a musical ›memento mori‹, that calls for the contemplation of the laws of time and of one‘s own finitude.

[=> Soundexample I]

Bach‘s cello suites are a good instance for the problems touched on by the virtual, since a conceptual harmonic four part that can only be ›thought‹ is folded into the solo voice of the cello, resonating in this manner throughout any interpretation of the piece. This harmonic potential is – like Proust and Deleuze say – ›real without being actual, ideal without being abstract‹. I have, for a while now, been working with my former professor and friend Reinhard Bahr on a project not yet accomplished, but in which we attempt to combine a thorough bass version of Bach‘s six solo suites, suitable for cello lessons, with a philosophical commentary relating to Deleuze‘s book *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*.

Accordingly, Reinhard and I tried to actualise the virtual harmonic potential of the Bachian *Sarabande* by preparing a chorale version of the piece with recourse to Baroque principles for thorough bass. I recorded this version via the technique of *Over-Dubbing*. [At the image you can see Reinhard’s beautiful handwriting, thank you again for your support!] **(*Choral version)**

[=> Soundexample II]

My reservations towards the metaphor of the ›box‹ one one side, while on the other the obligation to use it for the exhibition – both were brought into resonance

by myself when I converted the box into a musical instrument that self-destructs while playing. **(*Parmesan grater)** I pulverised the cardboard with a parmesan grater and recorded the rhythmical sounds – all the while listening to the *Sarabande* over headphones.

[=> Soundexample III]

The result was a 50 track recording of noise-like ›grating‹ that complemented the rendition of the *Sarabande* by musically ›dusting‹ over it. **(*Tracks)**

[=> Soundexample IV] (***Photos)**

The production of the noisy grating drone may have torpedoed the scientific work put into the *Sarabande*, since the interplay of voices was practically inaudible over the noise. This acoustic (re)virtualisation introduced a moment of anti-production into the work that voraciously consumed a diligently accrued scientific surplus. This tension between production and anti-production is nevertheless – at least that is my assumption – a crucial element of artistic research. For what is always central to it, is to render audible the production noise caused by a virtual difference that can only be discerned as the undisciplined resonances of a bewildering restlessness.

Thank you for your attention.