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Resistance of Matter

Presentation at the Untwelling Convention in Munich, Fat Cat, May 23, 2026

Thank you very much for the kind introduction and the invitation to the *Untwelling* Convention. I am very pleased to be speaking here today at this wonderful event, on which I congratulate you! Since in my own artistic practice as a cellist I tend to work with traditional tuning systems – with welcome exceptions, such as my collaboration with Rami Olsen for example – I certainly cannot offer you any consistent technical insights regarding their systematic dismantling. You are the experts when it comes to *Untwelling*, and that is as it should be. What I can attempt is to contribute some background noise of a philosophical-differential nature to your gathering, which may motivate you in your endeavor. [2] After all, viewed from a certain perspective, the history of philosophy appears as a gigantic microtonal soundspace that perceives itself differently time and again and is deciphered in various systems. [3] Since I am here on behalf of the ARTILACS graduate research group – *Artistic Intelligence in Latent Creative Spaces*, where we explore current tensions between algorithmic rationality and contemporary aesthetics – I will take a *critical yet affirmative* look at the relationship between power and sound matter. I am very much looking forward to the questions and the roundtable discussion.

The Thesis

[4] The starting point of my lecture is a thesis put forward by the two French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in their 1980 book *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia II*, which I believe is highly relevant today. In this thesis, the two authors distance themselves from the theory of power developed by their colleague and friend Michel Foucault in a manner that is both polite and decisive, in order to propose an affirmative alternative alongside it.

[5] What is interesting here is that this important passage, in the overallly impressive book – which is conceived as a rhizomatic stratification of various plateaus – remains hidden in a sort of »niche« and thus almost escapes notice. In a certain sense, this thesis is thus inaudible. It contains – in my view – the key to understanding the entire work and can very well be related to the current political situation. The passage can be found in the 5th plateau titled »On Some Regimes of Signification« in footnote 37, on page 194 of the German edition.

[6] »The only points,« Deleuze and Guattari write, »on which we disagree with Foucault are the following: 1. For us, assemblages are not primarily assemblages of power, but of desire, since desire always forms assemblages and power is a stratified dimension of the assemblage. 2. The diagram or the abstract machine has lines of flight that are primary, which in a field are not phenomena of resistance or counterattack, but points of creation and deterritorialization.«

[7] We'll have to digest that first. It's heavy philosophical fare. I. Desire forms structures. II. Power is a stratified, that is, layered dimension of these structures. III. The »abstract machine« or the »diagram« has lines of flight that are points of a creative »deterritorialization.«

What is meant here? And what does this have to do with the topic of *Untwelling*?

[8] In Foucault's work – as many of you will know – power is conceived as »ubiquitous«, that is, omnipresent; it permeates the entire social field. There is no »outside« of power in Foucault; resistance can only be viewed as a reaction, or as a protest against a given situation. Power and resistance are inseparably linked here; resistance is always, in turn, contaminated by power.

[9] For Deleuze and Guattari, the situation presents itself quite differently. Every structure or system consists not only of stable orders but simultaneously contains forces that transcend this order and generate something new. The term »abstract machine« does not refer to a technical device, but to an invisible principle of organization and connection that transforms itself through its effects. What is meant is the way in which different elements – such as bodies, signs, affects, social practices, power relations, or sound relations – are brought into relation with one another. Through the abstract machine, »agencies« (French: *agencement*) are created: concrete configurations of different elements that function together and are never composed solely of individual things, but rather of relationships between bodies, actions, statements, affects, technical objects, social rules, or forms of power. For example, a school, a state, a work of art, or even a romantic relationship can be understood as an *agencement* because people, spaces, rules, language, feelings, and practices are interconnected there. [*Untwelling* is also a fantastic *agencement*, as evidenced, for example, by the *WhatsApp Mega-Chat* and its development.] *Agencements* stabilize certain orders, yet simultaneously contain possibilities for change. This is why Deleuze and Guattari speak of every *agencement* also possessing lines of flight. By this they mean movements through which the *agencement* changes or transforms into something new.

[10] A particular conception of the »process« is central here. Deleuze and Guattari use images such as streams, rivers, or journeys to describe it. A process for them is like a river that carves out its own bed only as it flows. [11] The path does not exist beforehand, but is created only through the movement itself. That is why he also speaks of lines of flight (*lignes de fuite*). These lines do not exist prior to the process, but are brought into being by it. Quote from a seminar in 1980: »The process is a movement of travel insofar as the path does not pre-exist, that is, insofar as it creates its own path.« *The line of flight marks thus a strangely virtual object that structures an open process.*

[12] This can be illustrated by the drawings of the French psychiatrist Ferdinand Deligny, who recorded the walking paths of autistic children, which always follow different routes and vectors of deterritorialization. Deligny's drawing makes it clear that the line of flight does not refer to a simple flight in the sense of a retreat or a refusal of reality. Rather, it is a movement through which fixed orders, identities, or social structures are broken down.

[13] The term denotes a process of escaping from stabilized systems, but not simply to disappear, but to bring forth new possibilities of thinking, living, and acting. A line of flight emerges where this order becomes unstable and something begins to move out of it. Deleuze and Guattari also call this movement »deterritorialization.« A line of flight is therefore always ambivalent. It can have a liberating effect because it opens up new forms of life or thought. At the same time, it can become dangerous or destructive because it dissolves existing certainties. Lines of flight do not necessarily lead to something better; they initially mark only the moment when something no longer remains within the old order.

Example: The Circle of Fifths

[14] A vivid example of the predetermination of sound matter by an abstract machine— which produces *both*, power effects and those of deterritorialization – is the so-called »equal-tempered« tuning, which distributes the Pythagorean comma of 1/12 across every semitone step in order to neutralize supposed »discrepancies« inherent in the sound material. The calculated distortion of »well-tempered« tuning has productive effects that have crystallized in the technology of the circle of fifths. In 12 TET, I can – in a sense, much like in globalized air traffic – reach any point from any other point without any loss of systematic coherence, albeit within the framework of transforming traffic rules. [I would also like to discuss with you later what role the kerosene consumed plays in this metaphor.] In the circle of fifths, there are no longer any barriers to the distribution of the pitch values provided by the tonal system, which circulate more or less freely.

Economics means feeding values into a cycle in order to skim them off as surplus value once they have passed through it. And so the affective gains generated by major-minor tonal harmony also appear to be the result of a predetermined, systematic legal framework. In this way, fantastic *and* cruel sound structures have emerged over the course of history. And also those of an automatic reproduction of clichés. [Tonal music, as a form of cliché, bears in many respects the traits of a capitalist war machine that reproduces social power relations en masse.]

I relate this once again to Deleuze's concept of the process. The abstract machine 12 TET may suggest contingency, but this has no truly decisive effect on its own system. Destinations are predetermined, even if they appear surprising. From the perspective of a Marxist-inspired musical aesthetics, sound matter is thus managed here as a raw material in order to be able to pledge it, accrue interest on it, and reinvest it. Major-minor tonal music is therefore a reflection of the historical epochs that shaped it. As a side note, it should be recalled here that it first saw the light of the aesthetic world at the same time as the first colonial operations. Reason enough, then, to always be wary of it and at the same time to highlight the points where the masterpieces vigorously oppose the conditions of their own sonic possibility.

[15] »The desire machines«, as Deleuze and Guattari write in *Anti-Oedipus*, »function only as disrupted ones.« In a certain sense, they reintroduce desire (the drive) into the systems for the sake of their own pacification. [16] Gilbert Simondon says: »A machine is a being that works.« [17] Anne Sauvagnargues postulates: »»A machine works by breaking itself down.« I would like to discuss the difference with you in our discourse after the talk!

It serves little purpose to criticize an abstract machine like 12 TET in abstract terms. On the contrary: functioning abstract machines are constructed in such a way that they utilize the affects directed against them productively to strengthen their own mode of operation. Capitalism, for example, needs – regrettably – criticism of capitalism itself as much as it needs air to breathe. Only through it is it able to ward off the total collapse inherent in its system. The more Schoenberg's twelve-tone music is played, the more a conservative audience longs for Mozart; experience shows that it is reluctant to be educated. The only option, then, is to *affirmatively* repurpose the abstract machines by shifting their mode of operation. A good example from the world of computers would be hacking. This refers to *guerrilla warfare* in the literal sense: a non-military practice of political struggle that, beyond the pathos, can take on cute, micro-logical (that is to say, microtonal) traits. Deleuze and Guattari themselves call this »micropolitics.«

[18] »Micropolitics,« according to Manola Antonioli, »does not simply concern small groups or marginal phenomena; it concerns the molecular transformations of sensibility, perception, affects, and everyday practices that permeate the social field and can open up new forms of collective existence.«

It is precisely here that the lascivious art of seduction of microtonal desire machines might lie – machines that both attract and repel the power of systematization, in order to make the energy released in this tension the starting point for an aesthetically motivated movement of escape. In this way, blockage is transformed into movement; control and limitation serve innovation. According to Baruch de Spinoza, power is the lowest of all potencies, because it merely pursues the desire to prevent others from realizing their possibilities. Blocking, halting, steering, and controlling—these are the means of power that are conceivably opposed to the materiality and mediality of sound, provided that sound remains in motion.

[19] Sound matter escapes. Viewed from the perspective of a transcendental materialism à la Deleuze and Guattari, it is essentially or *a priori* its own organization by fleeing. Therefore, it is actually irrelevant which abstract machine is set in motion to generate it. What counts is the multiplicity of an internal tension that derives the potential for change from the limitation itself. Once again, today's cantus firmus, from the thesis in *A Thousand Plateaus*: [20] Power is secondary. Primary is desire, the wish, the flight, the flow – the *glissando*. They need power like the air they breathe, feeding on it to wrest from it the meaning of a political flight movement. Power is external to the sound matter.

End: Glissando

[21] To conclude, I would like to present a work I created in collaboration with noise artist David Wallraff, which portrays the described movement of Lines of Flight as a *glissando*. The work is titled *Glissando II*. The three-minute track mixes analog and digital cello sounds with various electroacoustic devices, focusing on the instrumental technique of *glissando* and (a loss of) sonic control. As an »image-sonore«, *Glissando II* is intended not as an artwork but as an acoustic »study of the musical metaphors used by Deleuze and Guattari («continuous variation«, »modulation«, »universal deformation«) and of the question of how the digital meta-code might be decoded musically. Enjoy, and then we'll start the discussion. [22]; [23]