

How does one make the music come alive?

The refrain and musical creation

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I. About twenty years ago, during an extended period of working with electronic music, I asked myself: How can I make the music come alive? The reason why this question came up in that particular period, had to do with the special conditions of electronic music. Above all there are two features distinguishing electronic music from instrumental music: Firstly, in electronic music technology intervenes in a crucial way into the composing; devices have to be connected, synthesizers have to be controlled, computers have to be programmed. The technical conditions will, in one way or another, influence the organisation of the compositional work. Secondly, the musical work that is produced in the electronic music studio is in principle ready to be played over the loudspeakers. Since no musicians will perform the music, the act of interpretation, which in the instrumental music transforms the score to living performance, is lacking.

The technology appeared as an obstacle to be overcome, a sort of prosthesis between the musical imagination and the sounding result. The absence of a performance appeared as a lack of life-giving mediation, which was implied from interpretation. After a while, I however realised that what appeared to be an obstacle and an absence in electronic music, was in fact the absence of a disguise in instrumental music. When the musical ideas were to be transformed into technical operations, it became obvious how composing was about editing and assembling material, and when the finished work no longer passed an interpretation, the music seemed to be unfinished and more like a framework. Letting musicians perform a score concealed, almost like the veil of maya, the fact that composing was basically an endless rearrangement of clichés, where the arrangement itself was taken to be creative. What actually happened in the studio, was that the veil fell down.

By that, the question of life in music became a striving away from composing as a putting together, away from the idea of creation as a sort of ingenuity. The question can therefore be reformulated: How can one establish a ground for composing that does not presuppose that material should be shaped according to an idea, which is not based on the idea of organic musical work, a structure where the parts build a whole and the whole depends on the parts? By these questions I have approached Deleuze and Guattari, whose thought around life and creation may be seen as a circling around composition

versus organisation, consistence versus development, immanence versus transcendence. In 'Logic of Sensation' Deleuze point out a direction to be followed, when they say that »in art, and in painting as in music, it is not a matter of reproducing or inventing forms, but of capturing forces«. It is in this context the refrain gets essential; partly because it has to do with collecting creative forces, partly because it has a unique position in relation to music. Therefore, I will now examine how the refrain may be said to make the music come alive, and what the consequences might be for the composer.

II. Deleuze and Guattari describe how the refrain, the territorialising act, comprises three moments: in the first, one establishes a centre in chaos, an origin in the infinite heterogeneous forces of chaos; in the second, one draws a circle around the centre and organises a home, protecting oneself from the forces of chaos, and defending the creative forces; in the third, one opens the circle, letting something in from the outside, or making one's way out to join cosmic forces. These three moments show how the territorial assemblage sets up and winds up, how the refrain comprehends both a territorialising and a deterritorialising movement, a movement which goes from chaos to territory, and from territory to cosmos. The refrain functions like a quantum physics of forces, which in Deleuze and Guattari is articulated as a burden; »sometimes, sometimes, sometimes«. The movements occur by leaps; one takes a leap towards a centre in chaos, and with a leap one unites with cosmos. It is about a sort of simultaneous succession, a changing which shuffles the moments without melting them together.

This basic movement by leaps, which is circular rather than linear, gives us another way to look at musical form. Instead of a course of halts, a travel from left to right, where left is the beginning of a development, and right is the end of it, one can imagine whirls of forces and counter-forces. As a matter of fact, plateau eleven contains several clues to how such a conception of form could be developed, which in turn would exert an influence on the conditions of composition. I will therefore go a little closer into the special relationship between the refrain and the music.

III. As we know, Deleuze and Guattari frequently return to music in *Mille Plateaux*. But it is, after all, not the references to composers and musical works that is the most interesting, but rather the fact that there is something really musical in the presentation as a whole. The territory arises from a rhythmical expressivity, expressive qualities constitute counterpoints, counterpoints form melodic landscapes, the components of the assemblages become motifs, motifs become rhythmic characters. On the whole, one might say that Deleuze and Guattari are trying to expand and clarify the idea of a »music theory of life« from Uexküll, something which will eventually result in a music theory of the refrain.

The refrain is in the first place sonorous, it is in practice synonymous with the sonorous component of the territorial assemblage. This is of vital importance, since the sonorous components of the assemblages are more easily deterritorialised than the visual components. The sonorous matters of expression have a more pronounced tendency to take part in, and pass on to, other assemblages. The territorial motifs will become autonomous,

thereby behaving contrapuntally toward each other. Counterpoint in music implies that a melodic line is both free and bound, independent on the horizontal plane, dependent on the vertical plane. In this lies the embryo to the force of the transversal, which means that the refrain always carries within itself a potentially deterritorialising component. In the words from Deleuze and Guattari, the music forms its own, most powerful »machinic phylum, a destratifying transversality«, »freeing a matter and tapping forces«.

Consequently, music has a special access to the refrain. Unlike painting, which goes from soma to germ, the music goes from germ to soma. The music is connected to the source of the refrain, which results in an almost inevitable appropriating of the refrain; the music takes possession of the refrain and derives advantage from it. The creating element consists of deterritorialising the refrain, dislodging it and taking it away. It is here that the special force of music appears, when the motifs by deterritorialising gain strength and autonomy. This as opposed to painting, where a deterritorialisation tends to dissolve and weaken the visual forms.

IV. But how to do it, then? How to take possession of the refrain, and make it the content of music? By seizing it and making it remain. By encircling it through composing, which in itself acts as a refrain, by constantly returning to the three moments; establish a point with a musical fragment, gather the creative forces with contrapuntal circles, let the components proceed. In music one can almost literally stage all these activities of, as Deleuze and Guattari say, »reorganisation of functions« and »regrouping of forces«, which take place in the territorial assemblage; inserting impulses, interposing rhythms, expanding components, letting the transversal destratify the vertical and the horizontal. The composer constructs a machine to make a synthesis of the heterogenous elements, which will hold the music consistent. It is about composition, about continuously arranging, capturing, tying together. The refrain is in that sense a fragile assemblage, something which one cannot leave to its fate or treat casually. The force in the movement of the refrain will disappear as soon as one introduces chance, the movement will cease if the refrain is only presented as an artefact to be contemplated, and music that does not take care of and recognize the refrain, will not come alive, no matter how life-giving a performance might be. Deleuze and Guattari postulate an imperative of composition, when they say »composition, composition is the sole definition of art«.

Finally, the refrain is about the two core questions of composing; how to break out from the homogenous, how to articulate in the heterogenous? In that sense one might read plateau eleven as a text-book on composition, showing how the composing can escape the blocking of an infinite homogeneity, and the infinite heterogeneity of black holes. The method consists in capturing the creative forces with a movement that maintains a simultaneous opening and closing, both loosening and tightening. By that the refrain revokes the contrast between simultaneity and succession, letting us pass beyond the music as a development, beyond the music as a linear course. By composing in accordance with the refrain, we will find ourselves on the plane where forces arise and disappear; »sometimes, sometimes, sometimes«.