A Mille Plateaux manifesto

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1. INTRODUCTION

The label Mille Plateaux focuses on concepts like virtuality, noise, machinism and digitality. In the most simple case, digital music simulates something that does not exist as a reality; it generates something new. It is the result of the teamwork of numerous authorities such as the 'musician', the programmer and the authority of the software program. Today, computer digital music can be seen as screen-based music, i.e. sounds become visible and images audible, but one can often forget that there is no mutual correspondence; and that this is simply a mechanism whereby a given program secretly directs the programmer towards significant ways of performing, creating apparently absolute relationships between image and sound. On the other hand, with the increasing complexity of software, the programmer loses insight into internal communication structures. Such complex programs are full of errors and can even act on their own initiative. Programmers and musicians who navigate through today's systems function as designers. But this is less a question of the design of a program's operation surfaces but of the programming of software and the navigation by its logic. One has to discuss the medial conditions of digital music, the more user-friendly the software, the less transparent is the medium itself; i.e. the more transparent the functions of a computer or a synthesizer (say, with the use of preset sounds), the stronger the medium proves to be non-transparent. Digital music is more about opening up given program structures; internal ramifications and program hierarchies are to be discovered. The field of digital possibilities is still to be discovered. It is a medium that exclusively produces possibilities and not boundaries. On the other hand, a fixed character can be produced by the mere application of certain programs and eliminate any new field of possibilities. Program standards CAN AND MUST be transformed. In new digital music, sequencer standards are becoming more and more obsolete. A nonlinear kind of working is developing, where recorded pieces of music will be controlled by user intervention. Even though every noise can be coded in the digital domain and digital music functions within certain standards, one has to show, with productions themselves, how a potential mechanism produces features in music which are more than mere translations of binary codes, but elements of expression which only a programmer could have imagined. Sound machines which are more than just computers produce musical effects when they are controlled by proto subjectivities. As a navigator, one knows that selection, construction and reduction of sounds go together. The producer initiates potentials, effects and impulses. The unessential emerges. Clicks, glitches, so-called mistakes become sound. Sound events which are made audible by arrangement. The cut-copy-paste-funk of the most irrelevant sounds, the clicks, emerges; the movement of zero and one made audible. Clicks are a currency, the money, the law, communication and sound of the media itself. They are the introduction to the minimalism of the twenty-first century, a tool for the next millennium.

2. DIGITAL MUSIC AND MEDIA THEORY

Today, music is information and can be digitalised in the form of binary coding. In the age of technology, music is connotive with computer systems and can be described with a 'techno-aesthetic' concept to which the electronic media is everything but external. It is media-music, irrespective of whether the media is seen as constructivist, being medially technical dispositives – a distorted atopic space for transmissions, or not. We should remember the approaches to the trivalent operations of the well-known G. Guenther, the theory of the virtual by Deleuze, hybrid media theories according to M. Serres, a theory of the medial as the economics of general interchangeability, the bits which are always given doubly and allow the transferability of any information.

It is surprising that, despite the analysis of significant mediality and the large number of discourses concerning the medial visibility, the musical field is most often ignored within the media discourse. If, in the visual sector, illustration and interpretation of reality are left increasingly behind a visualisation of pure visibility, few of the media concepts consider the musical information packages and their medial constructions which, in their exuberent growth, do not (re)present reality but only themselves.

According to Clement Rosset, music is a form of language (for the neuro-biological and linguistically problematic aspects of this statement see Jourdain,

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'Das wohltemperierte Gehirn' [The well tempered brain]), a chain of significants, which lacks any reference to a significate. Music does not function as a carrier of messages but offers nothing but empty signification and resists any attempt for decoding. So it more or less allows any form of interpretation. Its only content is that of its own sound and the sound of a reality existing outside. More precisely, music should be referred to as a function which is crossing different units and forms a transversal whose expression does not refer to references or meanings. Today, we can ask the question: Who is the originator of the act, the programmer, the software or the hardware? The knowledge about mechanical processing, the internal signal control, shows that programmers have been functioning as designers for a long period of time. Designing, i.e. the development of the desktop and interfaces, replaces designing processes done in hardware. Software programming becomes the field of the designers, the hardware ergonomics loses in importance in favour of the design of immaterial parameters (icons, buttons, windows, etc.) which allow the access on the program control system while the physical materiality of the signal paths and channels is not accessible, but is also becoming increasingly less important compared with the software design processes. Input data, modifications and transformations of signals merge on hybrid surfaces which store and control the program. As long as the theoretical power implications of media music are not considered, it becomes more and more obvious to ascribe a kind of sense-context to music (see the endless discourses concerning pop dissidence), a signifier of strength which is apparent within music. This can occur either if one sees music as a project of expression of the truth of the subject or as the truth of the subversive collective power of social groups. Then, the tonally medial is translated into cynical signs which occupy a space for references which represent a secret still to be interpreted. But the relation of music to discourse is not that or interpretation to translation but that of a disjunction; what is audible does not correspond to what is actually said. In the medial dispositives, e.g. with Foucault in film or in today's network music, there is a form of non-correspondence in the visibility of the statement with respect to the tonal to the statement where, nevertheless, both are related to each other in an asymmetrical way. Deleuze refers to this as mutual attacks, of heterogeneous forms. Electronic music questions media theory; *vice versa* it develops questions which are, however, never translated into music in a linear way. Deleuze also plays with trivalency if the location of questions, confrontations and impulses is determined as a 'non-location' which is equivalent to an informal dimension of power relations which is actualising itself in forms. How far does the Foucault triangle (statements, visibility, strength – which opens the dualism to the pragmatics of the manifold) correspond to statements concerning medially technical dispositives which are able to think about the relations media–power–music in a more complex way than the current pop discourse?

Music has stopped being a mathematical science of intervals, the spaces between the tones which are categorised as harmonies as well as being a music of classifications where different frequencies are classed with their correspondence with the twelve tones. Electronic synthesis instruments sound in-between intervals and analogue media store the real infinitely variable, independent from the dictate of notation and the imperativism of analogue instruments. But only digital machines cover up meaning, disrupt sense, delete historic markings and traces. They do not distinguish, they do calculate. Everything is determined and can be calculated. Sampling already hides itself from the cut-up method which permanently confirms the unity of its system by cutting up and mixing of texts. Sampling requires a program-controlled procession of signals as an autonomously working transformation. Its software applications have diverse features like stretch, repeat, cut-copy-paste, which even make it possible to sample the programs. This makes the differentiation between data and programs in self-referential processes obsolete. Computers are working in a recursive way; i.e. the results of their calculations provide the connection device for further calculations. They optimise the unforeseeable when the original conditions of the system cannot be restored by reversal and, at the same time, non-linearity. Both are fed into the entanglements of the program routines. Cut-copy-paste are sequencer standards, commands provided by programmers as a program option. So by means of a set of finite rules of connection, a field of possibilities is generated where machines are processing in a self-confident way. Screen music is produced where the connection between the picture sound is an optional one. But it could always be a different one each time.

But for some time, the surface no longer shows pictures but models where music eliminates the aesthetic connotation and becomes purely operative. The only way that music is able to grow is metastatically. Clicks and cuts are its symptoms, omnipresent and without reference. Here we can hear the in-between, the leaps which link loops, the transitions, and even where clicks simulate the essence of the medium, the continuous beat, they are always more phrase than metrum where the predictable order of emphasis gives way to a permanent shift of emphasis. Clicks and cuts are conjunctions as permanent ecstasy and . . . and . . . and . . . they refer to something else. Their medial implication consists of permanent ability to be connected. They are working without context and their potential can only develop as the context of an event, e.g. a musical event, a consistent coupling with musical forms like clickhouse, click-techno, R&B click, glitchfunk, neuronenhouse, etc.

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Clicks and cuts work as the 'either or' or maybe as the 'other' as well. Their vagueness is the vagueness of the digital media which is represented in the trivalent topology of the computer. In the binary logic of connections, there is not only the on and off modus but also the switch which transfers the connection states. It is the non-representable symbol, the medium or the Ab-Ort which makes the one and zero state possible. Clicks and cuts: everywhere connections, shifts, transfer, transductions, trans ... Interface policy and music mutate to transfer policy and music. The concept of the 'inter' which maintains the separation between man and machine disappears in the proliferation of transactions where the authority of the artist neither acts nor navigates interactively. It is connected with its subjected machine components and with the technological components of the machine, and so it is its duty to step into processes. Only in browsing do entanglements of loose elements to fixed couplings still work if differences are made: the musician watches and clicks. The mouse click is the disturbance which excites the nerve cells. This disturbance remains equal in intensity or changes by beats. According to Foerster, clicks are the vocabulary of the neurones. Disturbances from the outside reproduce in the form of electric impulses along the nerve fibres. If a microphone is fixed near an axon and is connected to loudspeakers over an amplifier, the disturbances are heard as clicks. But, in Foerster's opinion, the physical cause of the excitement is not included in the actions of the nerve cells, but only the intensity of the disturbance which caused its action. Signals which are carried to the brain do not reveal a colour or a sound but only a click. Clicks do not express meanings or essences but only intensity and connections. The perception of a sound or a colour assigns meaning to the neuronal processes which are without meaning; it constructs and interprets but keeps on referring to complex neuronal states. In coupling and de-coupling musical forms the artist authority discovers a superficial place. This place is exposed to permanent variation by the time and space constellations of medial imperatives. Music no longer generates its forms out of itself but out of elements of all systems. Music becomes graphic, becomes information, policy makes music, music videos make music, hacking becomes music, etc. Everything works without contamination in the madness of connection between machines, semantics and strategems. The work becomes a network. In a moment where the Internet boom will weaken and electronic music is oscillating between being produced offline, being published on the Internet and MP3 file sharing, one actually is very far from producing 'network sounds' or to process immanent network music which is operationalised, distributed and exchanged on the Internet. MP3 now only satisfies the collector's passion. In the future, data file packages will be saved less and less on ones own hard drive but will only be available on the Internet. Then, the crucial point will no longer be the copying, but the question of the technological ways of accessing. Streaming. What oral communication, as a permanent flow of feedback, naturally implies, seems like being re-introduced in the so-called 'telematic interactivity', in the technological complex of mass media which are characterised by partiality and one-way-communication.

New technologies allow the manipulation and transformation of texts, non-existent objects like real objects. However, they are real virtual objects. They lose their fictional status, as it happens, with the mass media. But their status is a completely different one to oral communication. Receiver and sender remain separated, the user has a certain relation to machines which neither communicate nor produce any sort of significance. The output of a machine depends upon its internal program routines; the process of a reciprocal understanding follows a different logic than with oral communication. Without referring to the recursivity and triviality of computers, Guattari attributed a proto-subjectivity to the machine. The connection of this proto-subjectivity with human subjectivity components cannot be compared to the models of oral communication with respect to oral interaction. The history of its transcriptions and translations is a history of transactions rather than of interactions. The independency of the poles, non-intentional subjects and objects, becomes less and less important in comparison to the different ways of connecting. The liquefaction of musical material, which is digitally coded in network music, makes any neo-Adornist discussion on material matters obsolete. Instantaneous data processing refers to superficiality of the work, to its multiplication in edits, re-edits, versions, variables, re-mixes, postponements, etc. The data packages are temporalised; their permutation is allocated to a code which provides an ability for it to be connected and compatible with other operations. In tele-topological networks, computer music is processed by meaning and sense effects only in terms of connectable or non-connectable options. Then, every track is more a temporary interruption of the ability to be connected rather than a fixed regular work. As a result, permanent innovation is required in the form of interrogating the track for external connections. Music, as a system of relations, stimulates thought in a new way and activates patterns to perceive music and reveal meaning from the outside. Simultaneously, media systems in networks magnify less sense effects than sense destruction, meaningless carriers of meaning. Music is open to meaning. Where machines are transferring news and signals which are already information about other machines, meanings are immediately encoded parts as spaces between the different kinds of information. It may be interesting to discuss how one can move from the issue of 'material' to the issues of a program-controlled transformation of the material for the reformations of musical material; program controlling

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which first generates the material in transjunction with subjective components.

The minimalism in contemporary electronic music, which makes microscopic reductions, invents most simple patterns which are repeated and varied: minimalism, which processes the inner life of sounds and music objects, had to be given up in favour of a super contextualisation, in favour of the production of polyvalent structures. This also corresponds to the formations of the medial because the form is only given as a reference horizon to other forms.

Translated by Judith Funk

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