

Gilles Deleuze

Deleuze and Boulez at IRCAM, On Musical Time

Conference, 23 February 1978

Translation and transcription, Charles J. Stivale [cf. *WebDeleuze for alternative transcript and translation by Timothy Murphy*]

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IYfhwRmyw9Y>

[The text presented here for scholarly purposes corresponds to the recording of the public session of the IRCAM event, and not to the text published, and deliberately revised by Deleuze (we believe), in Two Regimes of Madness, ed. David Lapoujade, trans. Ames Hodges and Mike Taormina (Paris: Minuit 2003; MIT/Semiotext(e), 2006), pp. 156-160, under the title "Making Inaudible Forces Audible". We should also note that at this moment, Deleuze in the process of developing the themes presented here for his collaboration with Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus, notably pp. 262, 267, 298, 545 note 87, and especially, in the plateau on refrains, pp. 316-319]

[The IRCAM event was a five-day colloquium, the first four evenings in closed sessions and the fifth as a public event, with the participation of Roland Barthes, Gerald Bennett, Lucian Berio, Pierre Boulez (organizer), Michel Decoust, Gilles Deleuze, Michel Foucault, Jean-Claude Risset, and several members of the IRCAM team. The recording opens with several panels explaining the purpose of the seminar, concluding: One of the questions raised by Boulez at the end of his analyses seems to be the following: is it possible to speak no longer about music but to speak starting from music? ... Is it possible to grasp music not as an object but as a force (capable of generating its own movement)? Or, which might be entirely the same thing, what is Deleuze as non-musician doing here at a conference on music?]

Deleuze: Yes, the question is, why are we non-musicians here?

About this question, I'd like to make an opening comment about the method used, which is that Pierre Boulez selected five works, five musical works: the relations between these works clearly have no relation of filiation or dependence. Moreover, there is no progression or evolution from one work to the next one. It's rather as if the five works, let's say – selected partially in haphazard fashion, but only partially – created a cycle, and that in this cycle, they entered into reactions in relation to each other. In other words, in this cycle an aggregate of virtual relations is constructed between these works, and in these conditions, a special profile of musical time could emerge, a special profile of musical time valid only for these five works. We might well imagine that Pierre Boulez would choose four or five other works -- I'm saying that at random, in my language – by Bartok, a work by Bartok, one by Stravinsky, one by Varèse, one by Berio. We would then have another cycle, reactions from one work to another, virtual relations. From this

cycle, another profile of musical time, equally special, could be discerned, or a special profile of another variable that that of time.

So, I am saying that what seems quite interesting to me and for us in this method is that it's not at all a method of generalization. It does not concern starting with works selected as examples and raising them toward an abstract concept of time about which we might say, "there, that's musical time". It concerns starting with limited cycles, determined in certain conditions, and extracting special profiles of time, allowing on this basis for superimposing these profiles and creating a veritable cartography of variables.

And perhaps this method addresses music and a thousand other things. In the precise case of the cycle chosen by Boulez, it seemed that the special profile of time did not at all attempt to cover entirely the question of musical time in general; the special profile that we discerned was a rather strange thing: based on a pulsed time, how a kind of non-pulsed time emerged, with this non-pulsed time quite able to return into a new form of pulsation. In fact, work number 1 (Ligeti) [*Concerto de chambre* by György Ligeti] showed how a non-pulsed time arose through a certain pulsation. Works II, III, and IV Les oeuvres II, III et IV [*Dialogue du vent et de la mer* by Claude Debussy, *Modes de valeur et d'intensité* by Olivier Messiaen, *Éclat* by Pierre Boulez] developed or showed different aspects of this supposed non-pulsed time. The final work V (by Carter) [*A Mirror on which to dwell*, Elliott Carter] showed how, starting from a non-pulsed time, we could rediscover a new form of pulsation, original, special, innovative.

So, the question would be to know, if we had sufficient time, what does this non-pulsed time exactly consists of, this kind of floating time, which corresponds more or less to what Proust called "a little time in the pure state"? The most obvious, the most immediate character is that a so-called non-pulsed time is a duration, that is, it is a time freed from measure, whether the measure is regular or irregular, whether simple or complex. So, it seems to me that a non-pulsed time puts us first and foremost in the presence of a multiplicity of heterochronous, qualitative, non-coincident, non-communicating durations. Henceforth, we clearly see the musical problem, or something other than musical, namely, how will these heterochronous, heterogeneous, multiple, non-coinciding durations be articulated? Since, as it would seem, we have deprived ourselves of recourse to the most general, classic solution, which would consist in entrusting to the Spirit the task of imposing a common measure or a metric cadence common to all these vital times, since, from the start of the problem, musical or otherwise, this solution is blocked off, then in which direction is one to go?

So, I don't know, even if it means going into another domain altogether, I think that, currently, when biologists talk about vital rhythms, they encounter similar questions. They too reached the conclusion that heterogeneous rhythms could be articulated by entering under the domination of a kind of unifying form. And the articulations between vital rhythms, if necessary of the same periods, for example, a 24-hour rhythm, they do not seek them at all on the side of a higher form which would unify them, nor even on the side of a regular or irregular sequence of elementary processes. They looked for them elsewhere. They look for them at a sub-vital, infra-vital level, in what they call -- they have a very pretty name for that, let it be the first technical word, but precisely it is not musical -- they call it a population of molecular oscillators that will somehow go through, that will be able to go through very heterogeneous systems and very heterochronous

rhythms like oscillating molecules, put into coupling, which then would go through systems and completely heterogeneous durations. Notice that the setting into articulation here does not depend on a unifying or unifying form, neither metric, nor cadence, nor any regular or irregular measure, but on the action of certain couples, certain molecular couples, or even of a molecular population released through different layers, different rhythmicities.

Let's assume that. It is not by metaphor that one can say, I believe, that one of the great discoveries of relatively recent music was precisely the discovery, rather than of pure notes and tones, that they substituted the notion of sound molecules, and of sound molecules in coupling, capable of crossing layers of rhythmicity, layers of quite heterogeneous duration. Here then, it seems to me, would be or what could be the first determination of a non-pulsed time.

[A voice comes from the audience, someone wanting to ask a question; the moderator, Pierre Boulez says, "Not yet. I think it's better for Mr. Deleuze to make his presentation before..." The person seems to insist on asking something quickly, and Boulez has to answer firmly, "Listen, please, don't interrupt him, so let Mr. Deleuze finish his talk first".]

The intervener: Why are you using such a complicate language which grasps nothing at all about... *[the words are lost in the noise of the other audience members asking him to be quiet]*

Deleuze: I'm going to tell you... *[Pause, applause from some audience members regarding the attempt to silence the questioner, who continues speaking]*

Boulez: So, go ahead and leave if you've not understood anything!

The intervener: *[Inaudible comments]*

Boulez: Listen, sir, I believe that we've now heard quite enough. That's quite enough.

The intervener: *[Inaudible comments]*

Boulez: If it's in order to state these kinds of banalities, really there's no point in insisting on continuing. *[Applause, diverse reactions; pause]*

A woman questioner: *[Protesting the use of the term "banalities"; different additional comments]*

Deleuze: So, I believe... I am going to show that I have understood, completely understood what he has just said because my second point is very, very, very, very simple, very simple. *[Pause]* I believe it to be so, but I sense that I'm going to be interrupted *[Deleuze points to several audience members]* because it's going to be too simple. *[Laughter]* I am saying, as a second possible character of non-pulsed time, I think it would have a very close relationship with the phenomena of individuation because phenomena of individuation themselves have very variable relations with time. We all know one type of individuation, it's the most common, it's even the one... it's the regime of the one under which we live, which occurs at the same time by forms, by specification of a form and assignment of a subject, namely me, another, someone; there is a

form, and this form is assigned under conditions which produce individuations, which create individuations. We also know that there are much more paradoxical individuations, I mean, of another type, which do not correspond to the form-subject aggregate, which are much more the types of individuations of a place, a landscape, a day, an hour of the day; if I say, “what an awful 7:05 p.m.” – here I am speaking concretely [*Deleuze looks at his watch on the table*] – “what an awful 7:05 p.m.” A landscape, an hour, etc. There is a certain type of individuation here which will not even be the combined play of a form and a subject. It is an individuation of the landscape type, or of an event or a time, or almost a temperature.

I have the feeling that the problem of individuation in music, which is certainly very, very complicated, is more of the type of these second paradoxical individuations than of the type of the first. For example, what is called the individuation of a phrase, of a short phrase in music? And in what sense does musical individuation in its linkage with time relate more to this second, much more bizarre type than to the first type operating by form and subject? I would almost like, starting from the lowest level, the most rudimentary or the easiest level in appearance, it happens that music can remind us of a landscape; it happens that music can evoke a landscape. The famous case is of Swann in *In Search of Lost Time*, hearing Vinteuil's little phrase, and it evokes for him the Bois de Boulogne. It also happens that sounds evoke colors, either by association or by phenomena known as synesthesia. It even happens that motifs in operas are linked to characters, for example, a Wagnerian motif which is supposed to refer to a character. I don't think we can say that this mode of listening to music, one might say that it is insufficient, but to say that it is null or without interest, that would be unfair. Maybe even at a certain level, at a certain level of relaxation, you have to go through that.

But why go through it? It's because, at a more relaxed level, it is not the sound which refers to a landscape, but it is the music itself which envelops a landscape distinctly of sound which is interior to it. I think, for example, even with the ambiguity of levels, that in Liszt there is this aspect, how sound can refer to an exterior landscape and, at the same time, how a soundscape becomes interior to Liszt's music. The same could be said for the notion of color. We could consider the sound-color relationship sometimes as a simple association, but also we can consider that the durations, the rhythms, the timbres a fortiori, are in themselves colors, properly sound colors which come to be superimposed on the visible colors and which do not have the same speeds, nor the same passages as the visible colors.

One would say the same, it seems to me, of a third notion, the notion of character. One can consider in opera certain motifs in association with a character, for example, as in a first hearing of a Wagner opera. But Boulez has shown very well how the motifs in Wagner are not only associated with an external character but are transformed into an autonomous life in a non-pulsed floating time in which they themselves become, by themselves, characters interior to the music. These three very different notions of soundscape, audible color, rhythmic character seem to me precisely the products by which a non-pulsed time produces its individuations of a very, very particular type.

So, I want to end with an even more general and very quick remark. It is that we are urged from all sides no longer to think in terms of matter-form to the very extent that for the hierarchy which would go from simple to complex, matter-life-spirit, we have ceased to believe in it in all

domains. One can even think that life would instead be a simplification of matter. We might think that the vital rhythms, as I alluded to earlier, do not find their unity or their unification in a spiritual form, but on the contrary, in molecular couplings. So, all this matter-form hierarchy – more or less rudimentary matter and more or less scholarly sound form – isn't that what we have finally stopped hearing and what composers stopped producing?

And what has taken its place? Perhaps instead, what happened was the idea of very elaborate sound material. It is no longer a question of a rudimentary matter which would receive a form; that is no longer the couple. The coupling is between a very elaborate sound material, and on the other hand, *forces* which by themselves are not sound, not forms, but forces which by themselves are not sound, and which become sound or audible through the material that makes them appreciable. Here, I could indeed, to continue with something that was said earlier, I could think for example of the section from Debussy which is titled "Dialogue du vent et de la mer", in which a highly elaborated sound material is seized as if by two forces. In example three, I believe, which was the work from Messiaen in the cycle proposed by Boulez, the sound material was also there to make audible a force which is not audible in itself, namely time, duration, and even intensity which in itself is a sound phenomenon. Similarly, in Boulez's work, "Éclat", all the highly elaborated sound material with the extinction of sounds occurred to make perceptible and audible two times, themselves non-sound, one defined as the time of the production in general and the other as the time of meditation in general.

So, if you will, for the couple of relatively simple matter and sound form which would inform this matter, it seems to me that more and more we have emphasized, we have substituted another coupling between a material that is highly elaborated as a material and imperceptible forces which become perceptible only through this material and which become appreciable only through this material. And it is then in the sense that, at the limit, one could say the music is not only, it is not *only* the concern of musicians insofar as music does not have sound as its exclusive or fundamental element. Its element is the aggregate of non-sound forces that the sound material elaborated by the composer will make perceptible in such a way that we can even perceive the differences between these forces, all the differential play of these forces.

So, here, I tell myself, at the limit, what results is the real innovation in music, but it was already true: all this work of very, very elaborate material in the service of non-sound forces, it penetrated all of traditional music. There is no need to make a dividing line. It would rather be appropriate to say that there was an immense upsurge at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century which did not necessarily pass through atonal music, nor through serial music, which passes rather through all these creative endeavors to liberate chromatism, to liberate oneself from temperament, and which yielded inventions in all directions both of the molecular type, inventions also in making forces perceptible which by themselves are not sonorous, within the elaboration of a complex sound material.

And I ask myself, finally, in a way, are we not all faced with somewhat similar tasks? I could also say of philosophy, for example, that in a certain way, one could ask, what is classical philosophy? It's... we give ourselves a kind of rudimentary matter of thought, like a flow of thought, and then doing philosophy would be to inform this matter, that is, to establish thought-forms, forms of thought, which philosophers call concepts or categories. But, from time

immemorial, philosophers have also proceeded differently. That is, they sought to elaborate a thought material, not a simple material, a very complex thought material in order to make thinkable forces which are not thinkable by themselves. So, it's a bit like saying in music, there is no absolute ear. The problem is to have an impossible ear, to make forces audible through a complex material, forces which would not be audible in themselves. In philosophy, it is not a question of an impossible ear, but of an impossible thought, that is, to make forces thinkable by a very complex thought material, forces which would not be so otherwise. In that sense, I think we have, we have so much to learn from music because it's very, very much ahead of us. [*End of recording*]