

". . . NICHT DIESE TÖNE!"

DIVISIONS ON A GROUND (FOR MICHAEL GRAEVE)

Not *these* tones, he sings to his friends, before calling for a change of tone. One tone replaces another without entirely erasing it: this is what tones do, they render previous tones *almost* nothing, not simply *nothing*, for they leave a trace.

"Tone" comes from the Greek *tónos* where it names "*that by which a thing is stretched, or, that which can itself be stretched, cord, brace, band*" (Liddell-Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1940). To think of "tone" is to think of stretching, binding, threading, joining, weaving, netting – in short, *tone is the result of a force having been applied to matter*. Therefore tone is *already* what the tradition of classical aesthetics would call *form*. It should be no surprise then that for centuries "musical form" meant the management of large scale relations of tension and resolution centred around a single tone which functions as a kind of container.

Form in this sense is always in the service of the One, even at its most fragmented. Here, there is no One to act as container, rather there is an opening, a crossing of the audible and the visible, a co-presence of conjunction and disjunction.

Music and painting begin and end in *tone*: here the space of their compossibility unfolds the impossible transference between the two. Tone holds fast in (and *as*) the space between things, just as every tone is suspended between the one-just-gone and the one-to-come, faithful to both and neither at once. Even if it is the "same" tone *it is not*: the "inner life" of tone is this differentiating repetition, this repeating differentiation of "the same".

"Tone" as tuning, equivalence, identification. An "art of tones" is an art of the *virtual geometry* the sounds represent: is this why no-longer-hearing made a different kind of music possible for Beethoven? All music listens to itself before we can: is this why it can say "no" to itself? Even in the finite ensemble of tones we call a musical work there is an ineradicable "nothing" that allows the temporal unfolding of what it presents: the difference that time makes divides what is presented within it.

So let us return to before it all begins: a solo oboe gives the tone to which the whole orchestra is tuned. That "A = A" is itself the sculpted resonance of tightly bound but flexible reeds vibrating against one another and launched into the space we share with it. The tone as "self-identical" comes *after* the toning of the sounding body: first the framework, the cord and its tension, then the striking, bowing or plucking and *only after that anything like "the whole"*.

The "immateriality" of tone, its fugitive invisibility, springs from a forgotten material force: the second-order "immateriality" of the musical work as "spirit" is itself a repetition of that forgetting. A single tone can stand in for infinity because it is the One over the nothing (the infinite counts the voids that make up the One): an attentive ear can hear the repeated "nothings" in even the single tone.

A single tone comes from tension that is *held*, the different tones a single thread can unfold in time come from differences of tension. To have "tone" is to be able to hold a note, to render invisible the repetition that sustains it. Even the single thread sings out a chord in the shimmer of overtones: the cord gives accord, an invisible geometry of time divided gives the colour of the tone.

In "classical" tonality the tone is the mediating point between the One and the multiple decided in favour of the One. In music the concept of a "tonal network" is almost a tautology: "tone" is a tightrope forcefully stretched over the un-ground between the sides of the framework. From the standpoint of "tone" therefore, the whole is neither true nor false: *it is a stretch*.

Here and now, we have *tones without ground*, or rather, an atonal "tone" that knows *there is no (One) ground*, only the opening of a space of looking and/or listening, which bleed into one another without absolute limitation. This is not the affirmative unity we find in Beethoven, for there, even in states of utter fragmentation and doubt, is the One of the achieved work.

Here *the* work (the One) is withheld. One has been subtracted from tone so there is time and space for you in what remains. What is left is the "at-least-Two" of unforeseen (dis)connection.

There are birds singing in the courtyard right now: they know nothing of "tone", let alone the One.

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