Compositional Mnemotechnics as Diagrams:

I

A musical score is an instruction set for the production of certain events, which are often also actions, and for the production of the duration coterminous with them.

However, the score of a work is not a means to an end. The score is a mnemotechnic object that exists within, is informed by, and informs, a history of practices (of composition, interpretation, performance, notation; but also engraving, graphics, software design, etc.) and a history of the work itself (a history which will - ideally - continue to be constituted through performances).

A performance is an actualisation of the work that is the score, but it is not a realisation of the score. The score is the work as potential; it is a diagram for any number of actualisations.

I need to draw a distinction between score and transcription. The former precedes performances which constitute a history of the performance of the work, although the score will almost certainly be modified in light of and in engagement with that history. A transcription is a separate tracing of an event. John Cage's first version of the score for *4'33"* (1952) is - in light of this distinction - a score, but the second version (also 1952) - made immediately after and in response to the first performance of the work - is a transcription. The original tape for reproduction of Gottfried Michael Koenig's electronic work *Funktion Grun* (1967) is a score, but were someone to record a particular diffusion of that work in a concert, it would be a transcription.

So, 'score,' in this paper, refers to a particular kind of mnemotechnic object the initial inscription of which precedes actualisations of its content. It does <u>not</u> describe a particular kind of media or format for inscription.

II

A history of a compositional practice could consist in describing a series of attempts to construct a duration which can exist as a temporal object for consciousness. Any such duration would consist of events (at least one event - a beginning) having their own durations, and any event could be diagrammed as an abstract relation of specific forces (events are how intensities - the positive aspect of such a relation - insist in us). I'm proposing that this is substantially what both 'conventional' and 'graphic' music notation (but not purely verbal or textual scores), as well as other mnemotechnic practices like sound recording - does.

Why 'object for consciousness'? To engage with any instantiation of music - to experience (that is, to perceive as a subject) the unfolding in time of events understood as musical, including the imaginative experience of the same, as, for example, when reading a score or remembering a piece - is to have one's subjectivity produced in and by and through that music's un-negotiable temporal flow forward. An irreducible block of nowness, coagulating as living memory. When I say consciousness, I mean the structure of that engagement, which has both a dynamic and an historical aspect. So 'object for consciousness' should not be taken to imply a passivity of the temporal object-event, but it cannot simply be said that the event structures consciousness either, because consciousness has its - profoundly social - histories.

III

The concept of the diagram I am using here has its genesis in Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (first published: 1975), and was subsequently taken up and developed in the work of Deleuze and Guattari (for example in *A Thousand Plateaus* (f.p. 1980)) and in Deleuze's 'non-collaborative' works. A significant exposition of the diagram in relation to artistic practice - one which I draw on shortly - can be found in his *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation* (f.p. 1981).

For the sake of completeness, I should add that Deleuze's diagram is also informed by the concept of the diagram in the semiotic theories of Charles Sanders Peirce, for whom diagram and image are subtypes of the iconic sign, but Deleuze diverges so greatly from this in his development of the concept that I need pay it no further attention in the context of this paper.

In *Discipline and Punish* the term 'diagram' is actually only used twice, but those instances are crucial as the diagram becomes a concept grounding arguments in what remains of the text, I quote:

> the Panopticon must not be understood as a dream building: it is the diagram of a mechanism of power reduced to its ideal form; its functioning, abstracted from any obstacle, resistance or friction, must be represented as a pure architectural and optical system: it is in fact a figure of political technology that may and must be detached from any specific use. It is polyvalent in its applications [Foucault 1991, 205]

How does Deleuze develop this?

> The diagram or abstract machine is the map of relations between forces, a map of destiny, or intensity [. . .] the diagram acts as a non-unifying immanent cause that is coextensive with the whole social field: the abstract machine is like the cause of the concrete assemblages that execute its relations; and these relations between forces take place 'not above' but within the very tissue of the assemblages they produce. [. . .] the immanent cause is realized, integrated and distinguished by its effect. In this way there is a correlation or mutual presupposition between cause and effect, between abstract machine and concrete assemblages. [Deleuze 1999/(f.p. 1986), 32]

The distinction between abstract machine and diagram is rather subtle (and sometimes the terms are elided, as in the previous quote), but put concisely: the diagram is the functional aspect of the abstract machine: "There is a diagram whenever a singular abstract machine functions directly in matter" [Deleuze and Guattari 1999, 142].

A little more about abstract machines. For Deleuze, a machine is just any structure understood dynamically. Abstract machines are structure understood dynamically at some level of disengagement from a particular instance. They become operative within actual instances of material organization, actual conjunctures, but they can be thought as a net of intensities separately from the conjuncture they will act in. [The abstract machine is] "independent of the forms and substances, expressions and contents it will distribute." [Deleuze and Guattari 1999; 141]

In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari describe abstract machines as an aggregate of "unformed matters and nonformal functions" [ibid. 511], which they term phylum and diagram respectively.

An example of a formed matter might be wire, an example of an unformed matter might be

conductivity. It's easy to miss what is happening here conceptually. Deleuze could be interpreted as simply re-naming a quality an unformed matter, but really matter is being understood differently: as event. To speak of quality, we assume a something which has that quality, but this is just another ideological model, materially real and productive itself, certainly, but not - in regards to the matter it wishes to represent - materially accurate. For Deleuze, substance is the expression (and this implies no agency) of unformed matter in some conjuncture, and conductivity is no more a quality of wire than the flash is a quality of lightning (the critique of ontology which Deleuze develops being profoundly indebted to Nietzsche).

That is all I'm going to say about unformed matter, what of unformed function - the diagram - and form?

Diagrams initially abstract from a field of forces through a material intervention in that field (practice motored by those forces, or sedimentation concretising some share of them). For example, Deleuze writes of two figures in a painting extracting a diagram from an "invisible force of coupling," [Deleuze 2005; 45] thus rendering that force visible. He also describes Bacon's orientation of the aleatory play of forces that are the 'blank canvas' through a practice of 'random' mark-making in order that the practice of painting may proceed:

> [the marks] work by extracting the visual whole from its figurative state, in order to constitute a Figure that has finally become pictorial. [. . .] *A probable visual whole (first figuration) has been disorganized and deformed by the free manual traits which, by being reinjected into the whole, will produce the improbable visual Figure (second figuration).* The act of painting is the unity of these free manual traits and their effect upon and reinjection into the visual whole. By passing through these traits, figuration recovers and recreates, but does not resemble, the figuration from which it came. [. . .] [the traits] are not sufficient in themselves, but must be 'utilized.' They mark out possibilities of fact, but do not yet constitute a fact [. . .] The diagram is indeed a chaos, a catastrophe, but it is also the germ of order or rhythm. [. . .] it 'unlocks areas of sensation.' [quoting Bacon in interview] The diagram ends the preparatory work and begins the act of painting. [Deleuze 2005; 68-72]

This gives a good insight into what 'the diagram' is, but also note a significant difference between the practice of producing a painting, the practice of producing the musical score, and the function of the diagram in each. For Bacon, the diagram is what allows the labour of painting to proceed by creating orientations for the development of the image: the painting is its realisation (the passing "from the possibilities of fact to the fact"). (Although realised works of visual art can and do function as diagrams, this is a separate and new process, with a new abstract machine and diagram, and not a material transformation of that work in itself). With the score, its completion is at the diagrammatic stage; it can *never* be realised in the way Bacon's painting might be, it can only - and it is intended to - enter into further assemblages, most obviously performance, which would be constituent of a series of actualizations and a history of that work of music which is the virtual force of the diagram.

Consider a sound recording. Not necessarily a musical one, the Watergate tapes were what I had in mind when writing this paragraph. A recording is not a passive inscription. Rather, with a recording there is encoded, or inscribed, on a substrate, certain intensities, existing as virtualities in so far as the tape (or cd, or file etc., ...) is not being played. When the recording is played, it is played in a particular conjuncture (which, of course, cannot strictly be said to pre-exist the event of playback itself). Even if everything constituent of the conjuncture other than the event of playback could

somehow be determined, nothing will be left unchanged by that event; those intensities unfold in series as a function of a techno-social assemblage; certain virtualities become actualized, not in a relation of resemblance, as if the present were written in the past, but in a way specific to the set of coeval and coterminal fields (each with their own diagrams) constituent of the conjuncture. The actualisation of the virtual is also the passage from the possibilities of fact to the fact, from the virtual to the sensuous. And this is how an abstract relation of forces passes from the domain of the virtual to the domain of the social, lived, world.

The present in which the diagram is actualised is 'loaded' (like dice can be 'loaded') with its trailing and resonant history, the diagram establishes an arbitrary and immanent geometry of this resonant field by interfering with it and creating zones of intensity ("The diagram, the agent of analogical language, does not act as a code, but *as a modulator*" [Deleuze 2005; 84]); the diagram establishes the immanence, not of events, but of virtualities in this conjuncture of which it is now a component. Actualisation, then, is some transformation, some labour in and on this conjuncture, that connects existential domains as its very action: "this operation that relates geometry to the sensible, and sensation to duration and clarity, is already just that: it is the outcome, the result." [Deleuze 2005; 79]. It is perhaps necessary to note that no particular quality of outcome is predictable given the complexity of the conjuncture, but also that it is the only ground for any outcome at all. The diagram in so far as it exists as diagram is pure potential. "What history grasps in an event is the way it's actualized in particular circumstances" [Deleuze 1995; 170]

IV

In an article which considers some of the difficulties of establishing a performance practice for Luigi Nono's later works, Veniero Rizzardi writes:

> Nono does not take the side of the ephemeral, but essentially aims at making the reasons of the present vibrate into the music and the specific, concrete individuals that make it. On the matter of reception, this can collide with the tendency to consider the musical composition as something essentially permanent, therefore open to the possibility of being reproduced as such. But when separating the idea of the composition from its objectification as a score, then the life and the permanence of the musical work may not come together, as it conventionally happens through the interpretation. [Rizzardi 1999, 54]

Considering the score as diagram represents one possible angle of attack on some of these issues, whilst working toward what I think Rizzardi very acutely understands as Nono's aim. Rizzardi correctly notes a tendency to consider a composition as "essentially permanent", and also to somehow understand the score as an objectification of the composition. But what Nono wanted, which was for a performance to be the production of some set of events new and specific to circumstances rather than reproduction of some idealised aesthetic objects, offers a different understanding of what a musical work is, one that is grounded in an understanding of music production as a constitutive social practice, a creative re-engagement with histories, as labour - the necessary transformation of a world, rather than as work: the exploitation of labour-power to extract a surplus value of benefit to a propertied class [a somewhat reductive formulation of the labour/work distinction, because that's all time permits today...]. In such a vision. life could never for an instant be conflated with permanence, nor could the score be understood as an objectification of ideas apparently 'existing' elsewhere.

Labour needs to be understood as a creation of - and the creation of connections between - existential domains; it is the connectivity of a becoming-subject to a wider and heterogeneous world

which they will transform and be transformed by. Diagrams are problems with which the subject engages, transformer of and transformed by that particular field of force.

Each diagram constituting a score is itself a site for change in the discourses its field of forces bear on - for example - a history of performance practice on a given instrument, a disciplined body invested and delimited by that history received as pedagogy and as representation, an instance of that instrument similarly invested, a history of notational practice. Engagement with the score can thus be understood as primarily productive not of 'sound' but of social relations (which are also technical relations) and temporal epistemes, the latter most likely being *constituent as sonorous material*. A given event in a score is an injunction (Nono might've said 'a provocation') to world a play of forces, and the point is to perform that tension.

To augment those examples somewhat, here is Aaron Cassidy writing about his work "The Crutch of Memory":

> There are several layers of indeterminacy in the work: it can be played on any bowed, non-fretted, instrument with at least four adjacent strings [. . .]; each performer chooses a *scordatura* (based on a series of general guidelines given in the score), which might additionally change from performance to performance; the exact location of the seven nodal points of the left hand position are left unspecified; and the size and shape of the performer's hand will determine the impact of the finger spacing widths. Each of these combines to create a scenario in which actual sounding results from instrument to instrument, from performer to performer, and even from performance to performance will differ quite dramatically, particularly in terms of pitch, harmony, and even melodic contour. [. . .] Yet quite crucially, despite the range of possible differences of sonic result, I would contend that each performative iteration of the piece is still fundamentally *the same piece*, and in fact this is true no more or less than in a fully determinate work. The piece's ontological identity - its haecceity - is so thoroughly intertwined with (and dependent upon) the physical actions prescribed in the score that the differences in resulting sound are largely immaterial. This is not to say that the sounds do not matter. Quite to the contrary, the issue is that the sounds - whatever they are - are *fundamentally* linked to their concomitant physical action. The piece's essence (I hope) is such that the individual performative gestures are already imbued with clear musical significance. [Cassidy 2008, 22]

I would take issue with Cassidy's essentialism here, with his appeal to ontological identity. My understanding of haecceity is also somewhat different: it is the given-ness of the thing at a particular instant, how it is as a locus of unique and transient conditions affecting it. However, this criticism serves to emphasise rather than work against his argument that the action of the performer, that which actualises the lines of force which are the virtuality of the diagram of an event in the score - the notated gesture - is formally determined but not reproductive.

In his well known paper on learning Ferneyhough's *Bone Alphabet*, percussionist Steven Schick captures the relationship between the diagram and its actualisation thus: "Meaningful gesture is [. . .] a kind of Richter Scale of the musical tectonic forces underlying the composition." [Schick 1994, 152]

The idea that a musical score is somehow a representation of sound and merely a means to its reproduction negates the potentiality of the score as a diagram for an unlimited series of different actualisations and its status as a social object (an object that finds its expression in a concrete assemblage of production, not in a metaphysics of exchange value). In part this arises because we

inhabit a culture defined to the greatest extent by commodity transactions and the relations they produce (thus also a 'culture of transcription'). One can become so used to experiencing music reified as a sonorous (commodity) object that it is difficult to consider the score as being other than a mould for its reproduction.

But materially speaking, in the score no image of the moment is given, and no expression adequate to the diagram can be found outside of the act of transformative engagement with(in) it. Musicality and imagination exist and find their continued purpose in this transforming.

Bibliography:

Cassidy, Aaron 2008: *Determinate Action/Indeterminate Sound* in *Facets of the Second Modernity: New Music and Aesthetics in the 21st Century, Vol. 6*, pp. 17 – 32. Eds. Mahnkoph, Cox, and Schurig. (Wolke Verlag, Hofheim.)

Deleuze, Gilles 1995: *Negotiations*: 1972 - 1990, Trans. Martin Joughin (Columbia University Press, New York)

Deleuze, Gilles 1999: *Foucault*, Trans. and Ed. Sean Hand (Continuum, London)

Deleuze, Gilles 2005: *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, Trans. Daniel. W. Smith (Continuum, London)

Deleuze, Gilles and Guatarri, Felix 1999: *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia Volume II*, trans. Brian Massumi (The Athlone Press, London)

Foucault, Michel 1991, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (Penguin Books, London)

Rizzardi, Veniero 1999: *Notation, oral tradition and performance practice in the works with tape and live electronics by Luigi Nono* in *Contemporary Music Review* Vol. 18, part 1, pp. 47 -56. (Harwood Academic Publishers, London)

Schick, Steven 1994: *Developing an Interpretive Context: Learning Brian Ferneyhough's Bone Alphabet* in *Perspectives of New Music*, Vol. 32, No. 1, pp. 132-153 (University of Washington, Seattle)

--

Chris Halliwell 2013
www.erasurestrategies.com