

Rhizomed, Remixed, Recomposed

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Abstract

By following the idea Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari published 1977 in their book *Rhizom* I am going to talk about electronic variations of former non-electronic music. An exciting example for those kind of musical joint ventures is the CD series by the German Gramophone Society called *Recomposed*. The third release, after Matthias Arfmann in 2005 and Jimi Tenor in 2006, is produced by Carl Craig from Detroit and Moritz von Oswald from Berlin. For their 'recomposition' they have chosen Modest Mussorgsky's *Pictures of an Exhibition* and *Bolero* and *Rhapsody Espanola* by Maurice Ravel, all three played in 1987 by the Berlin Philharmonics, conducted by Herbert von Karajan. While Matthias Arfmann and Jimi Tenor recomposed "piece by piece", so that every original was transformed into a new version, Carl Craig and Moritz von Oswald built a completely new composition in eight movements with two interludes, just with samples from the three originals. So this is the first release of the series, that is a real 'recomposition' and not just a remix or an electronic variation. Maybe a kind of a collage?

How can we describe that kind of production in a sociological and aesthetical way? What are the difference between a variation and a collage, between a remix and a recomposition? And what is rhizomed? In use of the idea by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, statements by Carl Craig, Moritz von Oswald and the interviewers, and of course critics and reviews I try to explain the complex connections between the persons and the music they make, from composer and player to conductor, recorder and recomposer. The six central principles of a 'rhizome' by Deleuze and Guattari - connection, heterogeneity, multitude, significant break, cartography and decalcomania - should help by explaining.

1. The Idea (Marcus S. Kleiner & Achim Szepanski)

The three title words point to the connection of two thematic fields:

- musical arrangements as are remixes and recompositions.
- the description of these arrangements via the philosophical concept 'rhizome'. (Deleuze and Guattari 1977)

I came across the concept of 'rhizome' while reading *Soundcultures*, published by Marcus S. Kleiner and Achim Szepanski in 2003.

2. Rhizomed (Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari)

The philosophical concept 'rhizome' was introduced in 1976 by Gilles Deleuze (1925-1995) and Félix Guattari (1930-1992) as an alternative idea to the 'tree of knowledge' by Platon. In this paper the tree explains a remix; the rhizome explains the recomposition.

'The term is borrowed from botany and describes a richly branched, subterranean structure in specific plants which is made up of roots and shoots. According to the authors, the concept "rhizome" should, above all, replace the schematic thinking in tree structures. In contrast to trees and roots, a rhizome connects one arbitrary point with another arbitrary point.' (Kleiner and Szepanski 2003, pp. 14-15¹)

Deleuze and Guattari list six criteria to describe the rhizome:

- 1. Connection: Every point of a rhizome can be and must be connected to every other point of the rhizome.
- 2. Heterogeneity: Unlike a tree structure, the rhizome is not organised hierarchical or central but anti-hierarchical and decentralised.
- 3. Multiplicity: The essence of the rhizome is not the points but the lines, connecting them. 'Multiplicity is defined by the outside.' (Deleuze and Guattari 1977, p. 15)

- 4. Insignificant Break: A rhizome can be destroyed at any arbitrary point, it will then grow further along its own or along other lines (de-territorialisation and re-territorialisation).
- 5. Cartography: A rhizome is a map, an original. Paradoxical linkage to:
- 6. Decalcomania/Transfer Picture: A rhizome is a transfer picture, a negative, a copy.

In a musical context this could be interpreted as follows:

- 1. All sounds and non-sounds are points which can be connected to become music. Notes, sounds, noises and silence are points which, combined, result in music.
- 2. All points (notes, sounds, noise, silence) are, potentially, equal in value. (Nonetheless, hierarchies are possible, i.e. centres of tonality, dominant sounds etc.).
- 3. It is not the points that matter but the rhizome; not the notes but the opus. The note *c* is meaningless in isolation. It is only in combination with itself or other notes that a *c* can turn into music. Music, and the question whether or not combined sounds are music, is defined from the outside.
- 4. An existing connection (opus/rhizome) can become a starting point for a new connection (opus/rhizome). Classical music can thus be transformed into electronic music and vice versa. 'Increase of valence, true becoming.' (Jäger 1977, p. 151).

A musical opus is original and copy at the same time because, among others, of (un)intended overlaps of some connections between the points. Thus, the outside defines the genre, style etc.

In terms of the rhizome, a composition or production (a score or CD) is a map instructing the interpreter on a possible connection of specific notes and play and instructing the listener on a possible connection of notes, sounds and noises. Genres and styles also refer to

connections between points.

3. Remixed (Matthias Arfmann & Jimi Tenor)

A remix of music might be described as a tree structure whereas a recomposition resembles a rhizome. When an original composition is followed by one or more remixes this might be interpreted as the germination of branches from a trunk. In the manner of recomposition, Matthias Arfmann (2005) and Jimi Tenor (2006) wrote new versions of originals from diverse composers for the new CD serie of Deutsche Grammophon Gesellschaft *Recomposed*. While these first two CDs from this series actually are remixes, just with additional beats and sounds and small changes of arrangement, the third CD is a real 'Recomposition'.

4. Recomposed (Carl Craig & Moritz von Oswald)

I am going to start with quotation by Peter Imig from the CD-Booklet:

'Deutsche Gramophon's archives have been opened up to create a new CD series, 'Recomposed', with exciting recordings of the classical repertory reprocessed using, on the one hand, sampling and remixing techniques and, on the other, additional electronic instruments and rhythms. On the basis of a dialogue between western composers and present-day artists, a new musical cosmos has been created, a dialogue between the old and the new and between the classical and popular music. Well-known melodies and harmonic turns of phrase from 'Old Europe' have been translated into a contemporary global context and recomposed.' (Imig 2005, p. 14)

This 2005 definition of recomposition by Peter Imig accompanied the release of the first CD of the before mentioned series *Recomposed*. Here, an original composition is followed by a remix. Carl Craig and Moritz von Oswald, however, break with the concept of *one* remix following *one* original and rather link

different points from three different compositions. In the resulting recomposition not every point tells his origin.

'In contrast to trees and roots, a rhizome connects an arbitrary point with another arbitrary point.' (Kleiner and Szepanski 2003, p. 15)

'In other words: Being a rhizome means producing stems and fibre which look like roots, or better, which intrude into the stem and use it in a new and uncommon way.' (Deleuze and Guattari 1977, p. 26)

The points are meaningless, what counts are the (new) lines. Craig and von Oswald *recomposed* a totally new opus of eight movements and two interludes by re-using the audio tracks from Modest Mussorgsky's *Pictures of an Exhibition* (02/1986) as well as Maurice Ravel's *Bolero* (12/1985) and *Rhapsody Espanola* (02/1987), all three recorded by Herbert von Karajan and the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra.

Pictures of an Exhibition was written in 1874, one year before Ravel was born. Ravel later turned the original, a piano cycle, into an orchestral setting which Craig and von Oswald use as the source for their 'Recomposition'. Craig and von Oswald work with the ideas of the score, with points rather than with sounds. Score lines are cut through, references are destroyed and only fragments are used: timbres, rhythms, melodies, chords.

'It was very important for us to use original multi-track tapes to isolate different instruments. [...] You can isolate elements from this material, that had not at all been audible in the original recording. [...] So, you can also place rather secret individual parts of the orchestra in a totally different way.' (Boehme 2008, p. 16)

Intro & Movement 1

'As a structural basis for the whole album Craig and von Oswald use the repetitive scheme of "Bolero". This enables them to connect the highly suggestive atmospheres of "Pictures" and "Rhapsody" with "Bolero"s rather dancing nature. [...] As for the Bolero, which starts after a short

introduction, this means that the melody is removed. What remains is the rhythm of the snare [...] and the chords. With this clever move the composers avoid trashy associations.' (Boehme 2008, p. 15)

However, the original composition is not only opened up and reduced but also the remaining elements are varied. There are changes to the original composition: you can find, among others, loops, changes in tune and pitch, in tone and rhythm as well as transpositions.

'The rhythm, a $\frac{3}{4}$ beat dominated by triplets, is not slavishly reproduced but the drum plays some deviant rhythmic accents kept, however, in low profile. Additionally, the uniform chords of the harp are gently shuffled time and again. On this basis the composers add a short stuttering trumpet motive from Mussorgsky "Samuel Goldenberg und Schmuyle". This motive is replicated so often that it nearly stumbles over its own rhythm. The fragile composition changes smoothly from a $\frac{3}{4}$ to a 4/4 beat in which the original sounds slowly disappear behind electronic effects.' (Boehme 2008, p. 16)

Movement 2

As a first rhythmic addition, synthetic hi-hats rupture the orchestral frame (3:45). The sound of the trumpets is filtered and manipulated with delays and other effects. Also, effects of spacious variation are employed.

Movement 3

A low acid bass line is added (1:34). The alienation of the original material increases until the original sound is no longer present. The music now is more inspired by the music before.

Movement 4 & Interlude

The music is now purely electronic. According to the booklet, movement 4 is a lifted single which opens out into an interlude in the style of the introduction and which consists of drones, clusters and clouds. This is the final stage of the metamorphoses from the original to a detached new composition.

The following two movements are also

recompositions, but they can be seen as independent tracks.

Movement 5

Mixed by Carl Craig & Kelvin Sholar, a pianist from Craigs Innerzone Orchestra.

Movement 6

Mixed by Moritz von Oswald & Daniel „Topo“ Gioia, Congas / Percussion.

5. Conclusion

'It was important for us to use multi-track tapes because we wanted to generate new pieces of music from the original elements; no adaptations or revisions but really new compositions.' (Sivers 2008, p. 33)

The first six titles from the CD form a musical unit. The intro is followed by four movements which reconstruct the way from an electronically unaffected originals moving in a loop (movement 1) to pure electronic music (movement 4) via a transposed second movement which could as well have been produced without electronic tools and an adaptation with electronic effects (movement 3). This metamorphosis culminates in the interlude. Movements five and six are independent, although they merge into one another.

Carl Craig und Moritz von Oswald did not want to remix classical music in the style of the 21st century but they looked for inspiration within classical music. This process is comprehensible in their production.

Not only their production but also the underlying developing process might be described by the philosophical concept 'rhizome'. Various sounds and points of inspiration are combined and result in an independent new composition, a map, a rhizome, perceived as a new piece of music from the outside. It is possible to acoustically follow the 'increase of valence, (the) true becoming' (Jäger 1977, p. 151) while listening to the CD.

'The structures of Bolero reminded us of the structures we liked to work with:

Repetitive patterns, appropriate to create something around them. Rhythm is important to us. That's why we decided to make use of Bolero. We did not want to

sample and remix the original material but we searched it for inspiration for new tracks.' (Hartmate 2008, p. 46)

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¹ If not stated differently: Translation of all quotes by Annett Nestler.