ORPHEUS MANIFESTOS

Artistic Research: For a Minor Science

Paulo de Assis

O/I
Orpheus Instituut
Advanced studies and research in music

To mark the thirtieth anniversary of Orpheus Instituut, this series of manifestos reimagines knowledge through music as an essential form of understanding. The eight statements, written by the institute's principal investigators with rigour, humour, and artistic verve, situate musical knowing in the spaces between music-making and reflection. They trace the entanglements between performers and technologies, and the confrontation between archived fragments and virtual entities. Musical understanding here emerges as a makers' knowledge, built upon recursive feedback between minds, bodies, interfaces, and sound. What artistic research in music generates remains multifaceted, provisional, and alive: it can always be produced differently.

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Artistic research does not exist to map an existing grid for an existing audience: it exists to summon a practice not yet in the world

Artistic Research: For a Minor Science

Paulo de Assis

> There is a kind of science, or treatment of science, that seems very difficult to classify, whose history is even difficult to follow. What we are referring to are not "technologies" in the usual sense of the term. But neither are they "sciences" in the royal or legal sense established by history.
> —Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*

The concept of the *minor* was first proposed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in relation to the work of Franz Kafka, before being carried across the arts (into theatre and cinema) and, later still, into science itself. In every register it names not a domain, a genre, or a marginal position, but an operation: the continuous variation by which a concrete practice constructs objects and entities without necessarily obeying pre-existing rules and axioms. The minor is *relational* (there is no minor in the abstract, only the minoration of some given medium, idiom, or institution); it is a *becoming* and not a being (the major is an empty standard that no one inhabits, "the majority is no one, the minority is everyone" [*Gilles Deleuze from A to Z*, "G as in Left"]); and it is *productive*, not derivative (it is rooted in open-ended experimentation rather than in pre-given assumptions). To call something minor is therefore not to call it small, residual, or preparatory. It is to name a direction of becoming, a way of keeping the presumed constants of an apparently settled form in a continuous state of variation. For the major is not the origin from which the minor

departs; on the contrary, the major is the minor captured and made to stand still: a variable frozen into an invariant and then mistaken for a law.

For artistic research, the minor offers a productive, generative, bottom-up, and hands-on approach to creative yet research-based activities. The danger to artistic research does not come from the disciplines around it. It comes from within, from our own recurring temptation to harden our practice into a major science, to seek constants, theorems, and the security of a measurable rigour, and so to trade a power of variation (*puissance*) for a power of the norm (*pouvoir*). Against that temptation this manifesto affirms the opposite, and the pages that follow unfold this affirmation through Deleuze and Guattari and a handful of their readers, claiming that artistic research is, and is most alive when it knows itself to be, a minor science—a practice of experimentation rather than representation or interpretation, opening at once onto a collective it does not yet have, and summoning a people, and a music, not yet in the world.

WHAT IS A MINOR SCIENCE?

In the twelfth chapter of *A Thousand Plateaus*, the "Treatise on Nomadology," Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari introduce the notion of a *nomadic* or *minor* science, a kind of science that seems very difficult to classify and whose history is difficult to find. Contrary to the *major* science of the great history of science, of the great Royal Societies or Academies, perpetuated in textbooks and grounded on stable rules, theories, formulae, and axioms, *minor* sciences are local, are often practice-based, follow decentralised modes of knowledge production, and are sustained by processes of continuous change, never-ending becoming and non-negotiable heterogeneity. Instead of being theorematic or axiomatic, minor science remains contingent and problematic. It does not want to establish permanent rules or theorems, but to develop a space of practice for a specific problem. Whereas the theorem belongs

to the stabilised rational order, the "problem" is affective, and it is inseparable from the changes, metamorphoses, and continuous transformations of dynamic systems. Before discussing some historical examples of minor sciences—such as the operative geometry of cathedral-builders in the twelfth century, the construction of bridges in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and ancient metallurgy and jewellery—Deleuze and Guattari trace minor science back to Lucretius's atomic physics and Archimedean hydraulics and geometry. They reach back this far because these are the first sciences of becoming: against the Parmenidean ontology of stable being—perpetuated in Plato's forms and Aristotle's essences and substances—Lucretian atomism and Archimedean geometry think a matter in continuous variation, and it is in these sciences that Deleuze and Guattari locate the earliest differential ontology, together with the differential epistemology it demands.

Strongly inspired by Michel Serres's *The Birth of Physics* (1977), they establish four fundamental characteristics that distinguish minor from royal science. The first of these characteristics concerns the model of matter. Nomad science is hydraulic: it takes fluids as primary and treats solids as nothing more than a special case of flow, a momentary slowing or coagulation of something that remains, in its essence, in movement. Royal science inverts this priority. It works from a solid model in which matter is given stable boundaries, and where fluids, far from being primary, are admitted only once they have been reduced to laminar flow—channelled, contained, made to behave within the limits that solid form prescribes. What is at stake is not merely a choice of examples but a decision about what counts as the elementary state of the real: turbulence and flux for the one, bounded solidity and fixity for the other.

The second characteristic follows from the first and concerns ontology. If matter is fundamentally fluid, then being is a matter of becoming, heterogeneity, and continuous variation, a world in which nothing simply persists as identical to itself. Royal science, by contrast, presupposes an ontology of the stable, the identical, and the constant: a world in

which the same is always returned to itself, in which variation is an accident to be corrected rather than the very texture of what exists. Here the contrast is between a reality grasped as ongoing transformation and a reality secured against change.

The third characteristic concerns the mode of the figure, the figure in the geometer's sense, and it is here that the distinction between the *problematic* and the *theorematic* becomes decisive. In minor science the figure is problematic: it is approached through the affections that befall it—the deformations, ablations (cuttings-away, subtractions), and projections that transform it—so that the figure is inseparable from the events that act upon it. Royal science treats the figure theorematically: it is defined by its essence and demonstrated from principles, fixed in advance of any accident and indifferent to the operations that might deform it. Deleuze and Guattari's own example is the circle: the circle is a fixed and ideal essence, but roundness is not—it is vague and fluent, and it is what a vase, a wheel, and the sun have in common. The *problem* belongs to a figure caught in its becoming; the *theorem*, to a figure withdrawn from time.

The fourth characteristic concerns the mode of operation, and it gathers the previous three into a contrast between two gestures. Minor science proceeds by *following*, by what Deleuze and Guattari call *itineration*, an ambulant practice that tracks singularities and traits of expression as they emerge in the matter-flow itself. This is the gesture of the artisan, who does not impose a form from without but follows the material to where its own variations lead. Royal science proceeds instead by *reproducing*: it works through *iteration* from a fixed viewpoint, repeating a model identical to itself. This is the gesture of the architect, the engineer, and the mould, of a form conceived in advance and then stamped upon a matter held inert beneath it. In this sense, royal science is the science of the mould; nomad science is the science of modulation.

It is crucial to register that royal science is not, in Deleuze and Guattari's account, "bad science," nor is it a science whose findings can be

dismissed; it is, on the contrary, *the* science of the State, very productive within the regime it both serves and instantiates. The central point of the distinction lies in the demonstration that royal science *captures* nomad science continually, that it has a history of doing so, and that the recovery of what nomad science can do requires an analysis of this capture. Royal science extracts the problematic operations of the ambulant artisans of metallurgy, hydraulics, fortification, perspective, but also painting, dancing, writing, and composition (the very figures who developed the techniques that royal science later formalised), and reinscribes them as theorematic results.

As an example of such operations, the philosopher Manuel DeLanda, in *Deleuze: History and Science*, treats metallurgy as the paradigmatic case. The metallurgist-artisan does not impose a form upon inert metal but *follows* the singularities of the material—melting points, hardness, sharpness, crystallisation patterns—exploiting what matter itself does. Royal science, by contrast, presupposes a metal already abstracted into a passive substrate, and treats its operation upon that substrate as the deliverance of form from without. The reversal that Deleuze and Guattari propose is therefore not a stylistic preference but an ontological regrounding: matter is itself active, traversed by singularities and affects, and what calls itself the imposition of form is in fact a *reciprocal capture* between material and frame whose energetic and intermediary dimension Aristotelian hylomorphism cannot register.

MINOR LITERATURE, MINOR THEATRE, MINOR CINEMA

Five years before *A Thousand Plateaus*, in their 1975 book on Kafka, Deleuze and Guattari had introduced the preliminary notion of *minor literature*. This is not an impoverished, residual, or marginal literature. It is the expression of a speaker who speaks as a foreigner in their own language. It articulates a subversive power of a major tongue within itself. A minor literature "doesn't come from a minor language; it

is rather that which a minority constructs within a major language" (Deleuze and Guattari 1986, 16). Kafka's German is the paradigm: a Prague Jew writing in the dominant language of the empire, deforming it, impoverishing it, making it stutter and intensify. His knowledge of Czech and his exposure to Yiddish literature and Hebrew texts distanced him further from his native tongue and led him to a subtly unsettling way of using German. As Ronald Bogue puts it, Kafka observes the proprieties of standard German but does so "with a detached fastidiousness and an ascetic impoverishment of materials that render the language uncannily foreign while remaining technically correct" (Bogue 2005, 114).

Bogue also notes that the term goes back to a diary entry of 25 December 1911, which closes with a sketch of the characteristics of small literatures, where Kafka considers the small literary communities of East European Yiddish writers and Czech authors in Prague. Kafka's own word was *klein*, "small"; it was his French translator who rendered it *mineure*, and Deleuze and Guattari built the concept on that translation. In such minor literatures, Kafka observes, there are no towering figures like Shakespeare in English or Goethe in German who dominate the landscape and thereby discourage innovation or invite deferential imitation. One of Kafka's main achievements was to develop a minor language within a major language, creating the kind of tensional, liminal space that Deleuze and Guattari selected to characterise a mode of writing that is extraordinary because it is "minor."

Thus, the minor is not a marginal corpus set beside the great works; it is an intensive, deforming use of the major medium, an operation performed upon the great medium itself. This is the political power of the minor. Every language imposes power relations through its grammatical and syntactic regularities, its lexical and semantic codes. Yet those relations are inherently unstable, for linguistic constants and invariants are merely enforced restrictions of speech acts that, in fact, are in perpetual variation. In this context, Deleuze and Guattari

discuss linguistics, referring to the debate between Noam Chomsky and William Labov. According to Chomsky, language has constants or universals that allow it to be defined as a homogeneous system. Variations are deviations to be reduced to the invariants. For Labov, on the other hand, variation is not external to language but constitutive of it: "every system is in variation and is defined not by its constants and homogeneity but . . . by a variability whose characteristics are immanent, continuous, and regulated in a very specific mode" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 93–94). Thus, a major usage of a language limits, organises, controls, and regulates linguistic materials in support of a dominant social order, whereas a minor usage of a language induces disequilibrium in its components, taking advantage of the potential for diverse and divergent discursive practices already present within language. In this sense, the minor is the revolutionary condition of greatness itself; what we call major literature is, in its most generative moments, always something a minority did to the major language.

This logic of the minor does not stay in literature and linguistics; it spreads across the arts, and everywhere it spreads it takes the same form: dynamic systems, differential repetition, liquid states, continuous variation, becoming-something. Deleuze carries the minor into theatre in "One Less Manifesto" (1979) and into cinema in *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* (1985). Glossing that book, Constantine Verevis sets out the first trait of a minor cinema: it does not represent an oppressed and subjected people but "anticipates a people yet to be created, a consciousness to be brought into existence" (2010, 168). Deleuze himself writes: "Art, and especially cinematographic art, must take part in this task: not that of addressing a people, which is presupposed already there, but of contributing to the invention of a people" (1989, 217). Elaborating on the subtractive technique of the Italian theatre director Carmelo Bene, Deleuze admires a new kind of theatre "that experiments not simply with language, but with all the dimensions of drama—voice, gesture, movement, sound, costume, setting and stage" (Bogue 2005, 117). Bene's method is not abridgement but amputation

with a criterion: what he subtracts are the elements of power. From Shakespeare's *Richard III* he removes the entire royal and princely system, every male character but Richard, and what existed only virtually in the play, the women's own tales of war, comes forward.

As for a "minor cinema" Deleuze refers to a practice that refuses both the representational logic of "first cinema" (Hollywood, imperial) and the authorial-subjective logic of "second cinema" (European auteur cinema). Constantine Verevis reads Deleuze's account as implicitly recalling the founding manifesto of Latin American filmmakers, Solanas and Getino's "Towards a Third Cinema" (1969). First cinema is objective and representational, the imperial cinema of big capital. Second cinema is the authorial cinema of the bourgeoisie, analytical, subjective, highly symbolic or crudely realist—the French and Italian cinemas of the 1960s. Third cinema, by contrast, is political or minoritarian: an attitude concerned neither with representation nor subjectification but with life experimentation, the creation and exhibition of local difference. It is broadly concerned with the expression of new cultures and of social change, and is therefore an open category, unfinished and always incomplete. The minor filmmaker speaks not for a constituted community but toward one not yet assembled, and minor cinema produces a multiplicity of conditions rather than a new unity, a proliferation of local differences instead of a homogenising image. Like Kafka's minor literature, a minor cinema is interested neither in representation nor interpretation, but in experimentation. It is a creative act of becoming. Representation reproduces an existing object; interpretation reproduces an existing meaning; experimentation *produces*. Certainly, experimentation can be understood as an investigative procedure that seeks to explain how assemblages function by analysing the elements that compose them and the links between those elements (an assemblage being any compound in which the parts interact with each other to produce a certain effect). But experimentation is also a practical dismantling of assemblages and the creative production of new combinations of elements. This is the "minor" power of assemblages.

FROM MINOR LITERATURE TO MINOR ART AND MINOR SCIENCE

In the aftermath of Deleuze and Guattari, a handful of thinkers developed and expanded this topic. Anne Sauvagnargues, in *Deleuze and Art*, gives the concept of the minor its most rigorous reconstruction. The minor and major, she stresses, "are obviously not states or essences, but variations that initiate a becoming that causes a norm to meet up with an anomic variation" (Sauvagnargues 2013, 96). They are not two fixed camps, not two territories with a border between them, but directions of becoming, a tensor. Sauvagnargues makes the mechanism exact by returning to Deleuze and Guattari's own formulation: "A constant is not opposed to a variable, it is a treatment of the variable that is opposed to the other treatment, that of continuous variation" (108). There are no constants in themselves and variables in themselves; there are only two ways of treating the variable—one that arrests it into a constant, the royal gesture, and one that releases it into continuous variation, the minor gesture. Crucially, Sauvagnargues also installs great caution with using the notion of the *minor*. "Even if all language is an exercise in minoration, not every speaker is a poet" (108): the minor is the condition of invention, but invoking it guarantees nothing, and calling one's practice *minor* does not make it inventive. Art "should, then, refrain from purporting to be minor in a moralizing gesture, claiming the heroic position for itself" (113). Minor science, or minor art, or artistic research should claim no heroism. It simply indicates a direction, a treatment, a way of standing toward the material.

The expansion of the concept of *minor* to the sciences is exemplified in Manuel DeLanda's *Intensive Science and Virtual Philosophy* (2002, 180), where he states that his "account of classical physics, which is clearly at odds with the Royal and legalistic image which that field has of itself, may be seen as an account *from the point of view of minor science*." Often replacing the term *minor science* with "problematic epistemology," DeLanda positions the concept against the "axiomatic or theorematic" image of

thought that the physical sciences hold of themselves. A "problematic epistemology" is an epistemology of objectivity without general laws, of "distributions of the singular and the ordinary" (5). In the place of species, genera, and individuals, he talks about populations of singular cases that result from genetic and epigenetic topological unfoldings. There is no idea of "the zebra" from which millions of real-world zebras derive, there are only millions of hyper-specific, topologically distinct single bodies of concrete animals that share common traits to the observer. DeLanda does not describe minor science from the bank of the river; he is in the current. He shows that minor science is a practice one performs, more than a label one applies.

Rosi Braidotti, in *Posthuman Knowledge*, carries the concept furthest into the question of practice. For her, minor science is not merely an alternative description of how knowledge already works but a mode of knowledge production to be actively built, one that operates through concrete practices that resist the dominant paradigms rather than simply diverging from them. The minor here becomes a programme for alternative epistemologies and methodologies, grounded in creativity, experimentation, and collective engagement rather than in the solitary mastery of the royal scientist. And it is never only a question of method: Braidotti binds minor science to an ethics, advocating practices that foster inclusivity, diversity, and accountability, and situating them as essential equipment for navigating the posthuman condition. Where Sauvagnargues gives the minor its mechanism and DeLanda shows it being practised, Braidotti insists on what it is for. She presents minor science as a situated, collective, and ethically answerable way of producing knowledge in a world that can no longer be explained nor explored (nor governed) from the royal centre.

An interesting, albeit paradoxical, attempt has been made by Brian Hulse to transpose the concept of the minor to music theory. In "Thinking Musical Difference: Music Theory as Minor Science," he starts by considering three great pillars of music theory (Schenkerian analysis,

pitch-class set theory, and metric analysis) as examples of royal science applied to sound. Schenkerian analysis reproduces every surface onto a pre-given deep structure, the *Ursatz*, watching the musical flow from the bank of a form decided in advance. Pitch-class set theory strips sounding music of everything that is not reducible to a discrete, countable pitch-class, and operates in a fully striated space, where difference is admitted only as a generic, measurable value: the interval, the cardinality, the set-class. Metric analysis imposes upon the temporal flux of music the striated grid of the bar, the beat, the regular subdivision, converting the smooth time of sounding into the counted time of measure. In each case the operation is the royal one: the theorem is substituted for the problem, the pre-given form is imposed upon a matter treated as passive, and all difference is reduced to a generic metric value. This is hylomorphism in the analysis of music—form decided in advance, matter inert beneath it, the connection between them no longer visible. Against such practices, Hulse proposes a minoritarian music theory that follows the sonorous flux rather than striating it in advance—an analytic praxis attentive to repetition, intensity, and the virtual depth of tone. His brief reading of mm. 6–13 of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony makes the alternative palpable: rather than reducing the passage to pitch-class relations or harmonic functions, Hulse hears the short-short-short-long figure as a singular intoning event, saturated with timbre, duration, quality, and resonance, and tracks the diagonal "repetition-ensembles" through which rhythm and contour bind into a contrapuntal temporal zone irreducible to any pre-given grid. The attempt is paradoxical because the analytical gesture itself—using monumental works, naming figures, tracing ensembles, diagramming diagonals—already belongs to royal science: Hulse's own examples are reterritorialised the moment they are written down, and it is hard to see how music theory could be anything else than royal science par excellence. It is precisely here that artistic research, rather than music theory, opens the way out: not analysing music from the outside, but operating from inside its flux.

As should already be clear to the reader, the *minor* is positive, not oppositional. The minor is not a lesser science, not an apprentice science, not a science still maturing toward the royal model: it is the creative, problematic, *following* science from which real invention comes. The distinction between royal and minor is therefore not a hierarchy with minor practices at the bottom, awaiting promotion. It is a difference of kind, two ways of standing toward the world, one axiomatic (major), the other problematic (minor). My claim is that artistic research belongs, constitutively, to the minor side of that cut. Artistic research is most productive and most alive when it differentiates itself from the major, the royal modes of research. It is a contemporary *minor science*, a nomad science, in the precise and technical sense Deleuze and Guattari gave those terms.

What is at stake in recognising this is not academic positioning. It is the affirmation of artistic research as something other than a junior, well-behaved imitation of the disciplines it was supposed to challenge. Approaches like *applied musicology*, *historically informed performance*, *period re-enactment* and the like can be legitimate in themselves, but when used as if they were doing the work of artistic research they become tactical, naive, or sometimes even opportunistic gestures that are instantly captured and happily subsumed under royal science. The power of artistic research as minor science resides in its capacity to escape routines, habits, and common opinions. It enables the emergence of unpredictable modes of individuation. The minor operates against and within the major apparatus; it does not escape the apparatus but produces a line of flight from within it, generating new connections, new assemblages, new subjectivities, new haecceities.

When I say that artistic research must differentiate itself from royal science, I do not mean that art history, musicology, film studies, analysis, and art theory in general occupy one sealed territory and artistic research

another. The *royal* and the *minor* are two treatments of shared artistic processes and matters, two directions one can take. Artistic research enables first and foremost a "problematising" approach that increases the number of variables and creates multiplicities as results, whereas well-established arts-related disciplines look for consolidation and unity. However, it would be equally problematic to state any form of creative or intellectual superiority of the minor over the major. Sauvagnargues's caution holds: the minor is the condition of invention, but invoking it guarantees nothing, and calling one's practice minor does not make it inventive.

Two questions remain, and they answer each other. What kind of rigour does artistic research, as a minor science, have? And what is it for? The first is seldom asked neutrally: it carries the suspicion that artistic research has no rigour worth the name. To that suspicion the minor has a precise reply: its rigour is not metric, and this is not a confession of weakness but the statement of its strength. Royal science holds a monopoly on a single definition of rigour, rigour as measurability, as the reduction of a phenomenon to countable, repeatable, striated values, and it is in the name of that monopoly that artistic research is so often criticised. But there is another rigour, the one DeLanda named and Michel Serres traced to its source in the fluid physics of Lucretius: the *anexact yet rigorous*. Artistic research is precise, demanding, disciplined, answerable to its material with an answerability no less severe than the analyst's. But its exactitude is the exactitude of *following* a singular matter, not of measuring a generic one. It is held to account by the material itself; it is serious in the way the minor is serious. And what it is for is named in the line I have carried through this whole manifesto: a minor science, like a minor literature and a minor cinema, "anticipates a people yet to be created, a consciousness to be brought into existence."

Artistic research does not exist to map an existing repertoire onto an existing grid for an existing audience. It exists to summon a consciousness not yet in the world (new ways of hearing, of making, of being a

musician) and, with them, those—not yet existing—who will inhabit those ways. Let us stop trying to turn artistic research into a royal science. The pressure that captures us is not, in the first place, exerted from without; it is a temptation we carry within—the wish to be measured and found rigorous on the major model, to harden our problems into theorems, to exchange the minor science we already are for a major one we can only ever imitate. Let us recognise that this drive to legitimate ourselves is itself the mechanism of our capture, and that to pass those tests we would have to cease being what we are. Let us claim the minor science that artistic research already is: the heterogeneous science, the problematic science, the anexact-yet-rigorous science from which, in music as everywhere else, real invention has always come. Let us build the institutions, the pedagogies, and the practices adequate to a science whose task is not to reproduce the music that exists but to summon the music, and the musicians, who do not yet exist. And let us name, without smoothing it, the tension we inhabit: that for thirty years Orpheus Instituut has kept a minor science alive *from within* the funded institution. Not an institution congratulating itself, but a place that has held open, against the pressure of its own conditions, the conviction that music could be otherwise.

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State of the Art

Artistic research is a contemporary minor science: the creative, problematic, following science from which real invention comes. Its task is not to reproduce the music that exists but to summon the music, and the musicians, who do not yet exist.

Paulo de Assis is a Senior Research Fellow at Orpheus Instituut, Ghent, and Principal Investigator of the ERC Advanced Grant "Posthuman Music: Creative Practices After AI and Blockchain."

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