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Book Author(s): BRENT ADKINS

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1837: Of the Refrain

The eleventh plateau continues the discussion of the refrain with which Deleuze and Guattari concluded the previous plateau. While the discussion there focused primarily on the musical deployment of the refrain, here they wish to pursue a generalized account of the refrain. “In a general sense, *we call a refrain any aggregate of matters of expression that draws a territory and develops into territorial motifs and landscapes* (there are optical, gestural, motor, etc., refrains)” (TP 323, emphasis in original). We can see already that the refrain is a complex of ideas, some of which have already been discussed, others of which are discussed at length here for the first time. Philosophically, the issue of the refrain responds to the longstanding problem of *consistency*. Deleuze and Guattari contend that assemblages achieve consistency through the refrain. This is a paradoxical claim, since as we’ve seen, the refrain is also “the most deterritorialized component, the deterritorializing vector” (TP 327). In the previous plateau this was called the “diagonal,” the line that does not connect two points but runs in the middle. In order to grasp the paradoxical nature of the claim here, let’s consider Plato’s theory of the forms as a solution to the problem of consistency. For Plato what makes all beautiful things consistent with one another is the form of the beautiful. That is, we recognize relative beauty because it participates in absolute beauty, which we recollect. On Plato’s model, it is the relatively beautiful things that are mobile and changeable. Physical objects may lose or gain their degree of beauty over time. In contrast to this, the form of beauty is immobile and changeless. Thus, that which determines consistency determines it precisely by its immutability. Not surprisingly,

this is the dominant way of thinking about consistency in Western thought. It is arborescent and depends on the discontinuity of that which makes consistent and that which is made consistent. Deleuze and Guattari's solution attempts to think consistency through the continuity of that which makes consistent and that which is made consistent.

Another way we might think about this problem of consistency is by means of set theory. Set theory also seeks to consistently group things, but as Bertrand Russell shows set theory produces its own set of paradoxes. These paradoxes arise when we begin to ask questions about whether the set is a member of itself. In the classic case of the regimental barber, who shaves all of those who do not shave themselves, it does not seem that he can consistently belong to the set of regimental barbers. Either he shaves himself and thus is not shaved by a regimental barber, or he is shaved by another regimental barber and thus fails in his duty as a regimental barber. The regimental barber occupies a paradoxical position with regard to the set that he supposedly defines. He both belongs and does not belong to it. Deleuze analyzes the status of paradoxes of this type at length in *The Logic of Sense*, where he embraced them as necessary for the production of meaning. In the same way in the context of *A Thousand Plateaus*, consistency is generated by the paradoxical element rather than thwarted by it.

In order to understand how the refrain generates consistency, though, we need to look more closely at the concept of milieu. A milieu is not a territory, though it can become a territory if it achieves consistency. We already make this distinction in a certain sense when we distinguish between territorial and non-territorial animals. The problem is that we only define "non-territorial" negatively. Milieu provides a positive term for the directionality of non-territorial animals. When this directionality becomes dimensional the animal is territorial. In order to illustrate this, let's look at the white-tailed deer. The white-tailed deer does not have a territory but it does have a milieu. This deer gets its name from that fact that it displays the white underside of its tail when fleeing danger. The deer's milieu is constituted by the direction given by the periodic repetition of this component (the white tail). Deleuze and Guattari call this periodic repetition "rhythm." The rhythm "codes" or gives shape to variables of the deer's life. "Thus the living thing has an exterior milieu of materials, an interior milieu of composing elements and composed substances, and intermediary milieu of membranes and limits, and an annexed milieu of energy sources and

action-perceptions” (TP 313). It is crucial to distinguish at this point between rhythm and meter. Rhythm differs from meter by virtue of the fact that rhythm continually produces difference. In the case of the fleeing deer, the periodic display transports the deer from one milieu to another, from an external milieu of danger to one of safety. Rhythm not only codes but at the same time transcodes, whereas meter only codes. We can see the same transcoding at work in the wasp and the orchid example that Deleuze and Guattari have used throughout *A Thousand Plateaus*. In the terms they’ve introduced here, the wasp’s milieu and the orchid’s milieu are both transcoded by the other’s.

Milieus are not territories; they are sub-territorial. That is, milieus when territorialized become components of a territory. “There is a territory precisely when milieu components cease to be directional, becoming dimensional instead, when they cease to be functional to become expressive” (TP 315). The shift from milieu to territory is thus marked by two shifts from direction to dimension and from function to expression. We’ve already discussed the way in which milieus are directional in the case of the white-tailed deer. What would it mean, though, for that directionality to become dimensional? In the case of the white-tailed deer, it would mean that the display of the tail no longer simply defines a direction (away from danger), but defines a space. Furthermore, the tail becomes expressive (and not merely functional) when it is no longer tied to a type of action (flight), but “acquires a temporal constancy and a spatial range that make it a territorial, or rather territorializing, mark: a signature” (TP 315). In the case of the white-tailed deer, then, it would become territorial if it showed its white tail all the time, not just in times of danger.

The shift from milieu to territory also returns us to the issue of the refrain and consistency. As we saw above, issues of consistency are concerned with grouping disparate items in a single group. Not only does this generate paradoxes, but it is often the case that consistency is conceived in spatial terms. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine a set that is not thought on the model of a container and its contents. Container/contents images quickly become concerned with a logic of interiority and exteriority. The spatial relation between interior and exterior results in a geographical conception of their relation. At the same time, the need to maintain the integrity of the border between interior and exterior results in a political conception of their relation. What sets Deleuze and Guattari’s conception of consistency apart from traditional conceptions is that

its articulation in terms of the refrain does not result in a spatial account of consistency. Furthermore, and precisely because the account of consistency is not spatial, territory is not thought of as fundamentally geographical or political. Of course, there are geographical and political conceptions of territory. Deleuze and Guattari's point is that these conceptions presuppose the refrain rather than ground it.

A brief look at Kant is instructive here, since he so clearly thinks consistency and territory in geographical and political terms. As we've already seen, Kant's account of consistency follows from his denial of the continuity thesis. Consistency is provided by the way that an ontologically discontinuous form is applied to content. As a result, Kant's critical work can be seen as dealing with different aspects of the same border dispute. The concern of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, then, is ensuring that the categories of the understanding remain within the bounds of possible experience. That Kant thinks these bounds in geographical and political terms becomes explicit in the Preface to the A Edition where he likens the dispute to a battle between the forces of civilization and marauding nomads.¹ Furthermore, at the end of the Analytic, Kant famously uses the image of an island surrounded by unnavigable, stormy seas.² In response to the Pantheism Controversy, Kant wrote an essay entitled "What does it mean to orient oneself in thinking?" In the *Critique of Practical Reason*, the issue is the practical deployment of reason as distinct from its theoretical deployment. In the *Critique of Judgment*, Kant is concerned with the distinction between determining judgment and reflective judgment. Finally, in both "The Conflict of the Faculties" and *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* the issues of geographical and political territory are front and center.

How, then, does the refrain allow us to think consistency without resorting to a geographical and political conception of spatiality? Indeed, is it possible to think consistency without resorting to spatiality at all? Deleuze and Guattari respond to these questions with a series of vignettes at the beginning of the plateau. The first vignette concerns a child afraid of the dark. He sings to himself to "orient himself with his little song as best he can" (TP 311). There are two important points to note here. First, there is orientation, but it is not orientation with regard to a geographical or political boundary. The child does not orient himself with regard to a pre-existing set of boundaries, as in the Kantian schema. Rather the orientation takes place in spite of the boundless chaos that encroaches from every

direction and threatens to envelop him. Second, the orientation is sonorous not spatial. Lines are not drawn, there is only a rhythm that creates a “calming and stabilizing . . . center in the heart of chaos” (TP 311). This rhythm creates what above we referred to as a milieu. It has direction but not dimension.

The second vignette finds us at home. Home is not merely the “momentary determination of a center” but the organization of a space. Here we move from milieu to territory, from direction to dimension. Even at this point, though, Deleuze and Guattari continue to emphasize the sonorous component to this organization. A home is not primarily defined by its material components. That is, the walls of a house do not make it consistent. Rather, sound provides some of the consistency. There is a set of sounds that combine to give a home consistency. Sounds of cooking, talking, singing, YouTube videos playing on the computer, Lego bricks clicking and being shuffled. Furthermore, the home feels violated when it’s invaded by sounds from the neighborhood, car alarms, the thumping bass from passing cars, neighbors getting increasingly loud as they drink on a sunny afternoon.

The forces of chaos are kept outside as much as possible, and the interior space protects the germinal forces of a task to fulfill or a deed to do. This involves an activity of selection, elimination and extraction, in order to prevent the interior forces of the earth from being submerged, to enable them to resist, or even to take something from chaos across the filter or sieve of the space that has been drawn. (TP 311)

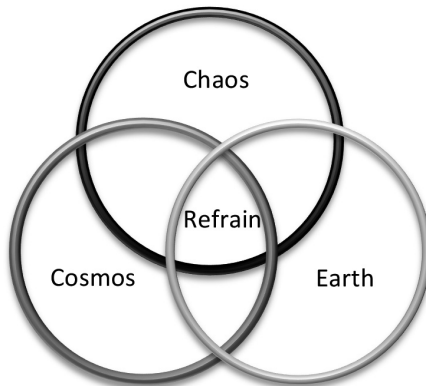
Going home is the territorialization of the stable center created by rhythm. The stable center is given dimension and consistency at home. Home is both an extraction from chaos and the preservation of what is extracted. In addition to calling this organized space a “territory” Deleuze and Guattari also refer to it as “earth” or the “natal.”

The third vignette concerns leaving home. The territory opens on to something new. Children grow up; they leave home. They take with them some of the sounds of home, but these sounds combine with new sounds. These new combinations create new rhythms, and new milieus are formed, which may become new territories. “One ventures from home on the thread of a tune. Along sonorous, gestural, motor lines that mark the customary path of a child and graft themselves onto or begin to bud ‘lines of drift’ with different loops, knots, speeds, movements, gestures, and sonorities” (TP 311–12). At this point the process begins all over again. Or,

rather, the process is continuous. Rhythm protects from chaos, a circle selects some aspects to create a territory. The territory opens on to the new, the future, what Deleuze and Guattari here call the “cosmic.”

These three vignettes correspond to the three aspects of the refrain. The refrain is a territorial assemblage that is found at the intersection of chaotic, terrestrial, and cosmic forces. It is tempting to think, especially given the way that the vignettes are laid out, that the aspects of the refrain are moments in a progressive development. Deleuze and Guattari are explicit, though, that all three aspects are part of the refrain and usually appear simultaneously rather than successively. This idea becomes clearer if we think of this in relation to what we’ve already seen in *A Thousand Plateaus*. As we saw in “Geology of Morals” strata always have two sides or two tendencies. One side faces the plane of consistency and the other side faces the plane of organization. Or, all strata have a molecular and a molar side. That is, a side open to both intensity and extensity. The refrain has these tendencies as well. It is extracted out of chaos, but it simultaneously faces the territorial and extensive forces of earth and the deterritorializing and intensive forces of the cosmos. We can even understand the refrain within the basic framework of this book. A refrain, as an assemblage, will have two opposed tendencies, one toward stasis and one toward change. Earth and cosmos play the role of these two poles with regard to the refrain. A refrain, in these terms, is then a consistent (rhythmic) selection of chaos that tends toward both stability and the new (see Chart 7b). The consistency generated by the refrain, however, clearly does not

Chart 7b



presuppose a political or geographical conception of boundary. There's no sense that the territory marked by the refrain is either permanent or needs to be permanent. There's also no sense that the territory is hermetically sealed. All of the territories are laid out on a plane of consistency. Different territories might be organized around different refrains, but these different territories do not differ ontologically but sonorously, gesturally, according to differing speeds. Territories are open to one another not closed off from one another.

Deleuze and Guattari's discussion of the refrain thus identifies three components of any assemblage. Later, as we'll see, I think there's a fourth aspect to refrains that takes it beyond assemblages. This is the cosmic component, which I call "extra-assemblage." The first is the infra-assemblage, which is sub-territorial, the components that go to make up an assemblage or territory. In this plateau, Deleuze and Guattari articulate the infra-assemblage in terms of rhythm and milieu. The deer's flight, which we discussed above, is an action that moves the deer from one milieu to another. In this case the deer moves from a milieu of watchful grazing (no white tail), through a milieu of fear (white tail), to a milieu of safety (no white tail). The passage through these milieus is a rhythm, in this case the rhythm of the white tail being shown and concealed. "Rhythm is located between milieus" (TP 313). There is no meter or cadence to the rhythm of the tail. It does not repeat predictably. Rhythm is an event, a haecceity, singular points at which direction changes.

The second component of the refrain is the infra-assemblage. Here we move to the territory proper. "The territory is in fact an act that affects milieus and rhythms, that 'territorializes' them. The territory is the product of a territorialization of milieus and rhythms" (TP 314). Deleuze and Guattari illustrate the difference between the milieu and the territory by looking at the difference between territorial and non-territorial animals. They reject theories in which the territory is primary and say, rather, that "territorialization is an act of rhythm that has become expressive, or of milieu components that have become qualitative" (TP 315). In non-territorial animals rhythms are functional not expressive. As we've seen in the example of the white-tailed deer, the white tail is functional. The display of the white tail only occurs to fulfill a specific function, such as alarm. A rhythm "becomes expressive . . . when it acquires temporal constancy and a spatial range that makes it a territorial, or rather territorializing, mark: a signature" (TP 315). The territorializing mark

can be sonorous, as in the case of bird song. It can be visual, as in the case of distinct markings on display all the time. The territorializing mark can even be olfactory, as in the case of specially scented urine and feces. The territorialization of rhythms and milieus converts them into expressive components of the territory. It is, of course, not the case that in this shift from function to expression the functional aspect is eliminated. The functional role remains; it is, however, subordinated to the territory.

Because territories form as a selection of the forces of chaos and at the same time as a way of keeping those forces at bay, they produce a relation between an interior and an exterior. This is not a politically or geographically determined interior and exterior. As we've already seen, the relation is the result of a becoming-expressive of rhythm. "*In effect, expressive qualities or matters of expression enter shifting relations with one another that 'express' the relation of the territory they draw to the interior milieu of impulses and exterior milieu of circumstances*" (TP 317, emphasis in original). The interactions among internal milieus within a territory constitute what Deleuze and Guattari call "territorial motifs." The relations that these internal milieus enter into with regard to external circumstances they call "territorial counterpoints." Territorial motifs and counterpoints generate two aspects of a territory. A territory is, on the one hand, the minimum "critical distance between two beings of the same species" (TP 319). This critical distance is expressed through marking(s). That is, the territory is an expression of marks, whether these marks take the form of particular colors on a male bird, or urine at strategic points throughout the territory. At the same time, and on the other hand, a territory is also "the coexistence of a maximum number of different species in the same milieu" (TP 320). This maximum differentiation is achieved through specialization. A bear and a bird may share the same milieu because in their markings they constitute very different territories. The bird's territory is marked sonorously, while the bear's territory is marked through scent and scratching tree trunks.

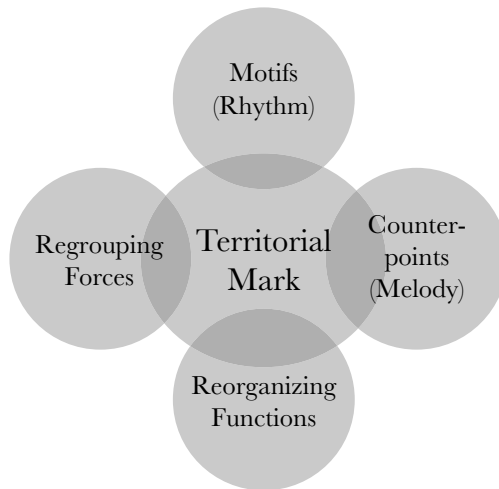
In addition to the two aspects of a territory, the minimum distance and maximum diversity that follow from territorial motifs and counterpoints, territory has two effects: "*a reorganization of functions and a regrouping of forces*" (TP 320, emphasis in original). "Reorganization of functions" is another way of talking about functions becoming expressive. What Deleuze and Guattari are highlighting here is the way in which the becoming expressive of functions does not mean that they cease to be functions, rather that

these functions are gathered (achieve consistency) such that they territorialize. As an example, we can follow Deleuze and Guattari in their discussion of specialized or professional refrains. A market is a milieu that is territorialized by professional refrains. Each seller shouts out what he or she is selling. These refrains mark a territory sonorously. These sonorous marks produce the two aspects of territory that we just discussed. The territory is defined by the minimum distance from rivals and the maximum diversity of professionals at the same time. The functions of the professionals are thus territorially reorganized.

The “regrouping of forces” “relates not to occupations but to rites and religions” (TP 321). What Deleuze and Guattari have in mind here takes us back to the second vignette. Home not only reorganizes functions (cooking in the kitchen, sleeping in the bedroom), but it also regroups forces. Home selects some forces out of chaos, bundles them together, and at the same time protects them from chaos. Home creates a division between the interiority of the hearth and the exteriority of the elements. Is it any wonder that we find religion ensconced in the home? Of course, we don’t only find religion in the home (and here Deleuze and Guattari verge on a general theory of religion). We find religion wherever “the territory groups all the forces of the different milieus together in a single sheaf constituted by the forces of the earth” (TP 321). Religion presupposes and ritualizes the “intense center” found at the heart of every territory. A ritual is nothing other than an attempt to channel forces. “There is always a place, a tree or grove, in the territory where all the forces come together in a hand-to-hand combat of energies. The earth is this close embrace” (TP 321). Furthermore, since this regrouping of forces is nothing other than a selection of forces from chaos, the intense center is paradoxically inside and outside the territory. It is inside the territory insofar as it is the consistency of these various forces. It is outside the territory insofar as it is the boundary between the interior and the exterior, between home and chaos.

The territorializing mark thus produces consistency in four simultaneous ways: 1) it develops motifs (rhythmic faces); 2) it develops counterpoints (melodic landscapes); 3) it reorganizes functions; and 4) it regroups forces. Chart 8 shows how we might schematize the relation. If we return to the example of sellers in a market we can see all of these at work at once. A seller marks himself through his clothes, voice, and wares as a silversmith. His voice expands to constitute his territory. His calls are a rhythm. Setting

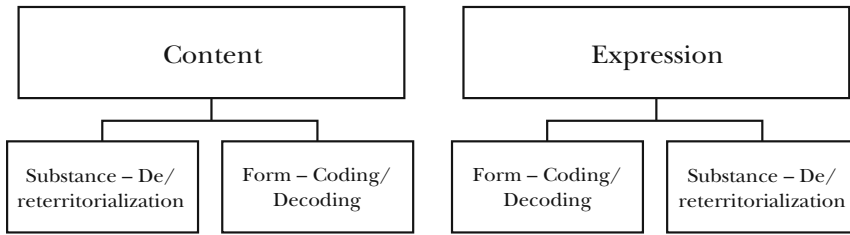
Chart 8



up and taking down his shop is a rhythm. The work he performs is a rhythm. A rival silversmith is greeted with an even louder call. The rival silversmith is a counterpoint to the rhythm. The rival silversmith is external to the silversmith's territory. This externality in relation to the silversmith's rhythm forms a melody, a landscape of expanding and contracting territories as the silversmith confronts his rival. At the same time, the silversmith will welcome the tailor or the grocer. Their territories overlap and constitute the territory of the market, which has its own motifs and counterpoints. As we've already seen, the silversmith has reorganized his functions so that they are expressive. He is "the" silversmith. The silversmith gathers and groups forces of fire, metal, and dexterity in order to create his wares. This is his earth, the forces he extracts from and protects from chaos. Regrouping these forces is accompanied with ritual. When must the fire for the crucible be lit? How hot must it be? How does one know when it's hot enough? How does one know when the metal is pure enough to work? How long must the metal cool before it can be worked? These questions are all answered through ritual. He also groups these forces such that their product can be sold. The market itself is a regrouping of forces, in this case economic forces. The analysis here is scalable, but we'll wait until the next plateau to discuss how the state fits in here.

At this point Deleuze and Guattari return to the issue of coding. As we saw in both the "Geology of Morals" and "Postulates of Linguistics," coding is a way of talking about the formal aspect of a

Chart 9



stratum (or “consistency” in the language of this plateau). Of course a stratum is always double-articulated into content and expression, which are themselves in variable relation with one another. If we look again at the chart from the previous plateaus we see that the processes of territorialization and coding are separated along the substance/form axis (see Chart 9). We can use this distinction to think about two separate issues: speciation and the innate/acquired dichotomy that usually informs behavioral discourses. One of the ways that speciation occurs is through reproductive isolation. That is, part of a species’ territory gets divided such that contact between two groups is diminished or prevented. In such a scenario a new species might develop. Notice, though, that speciation by reproductive isolation is a function of territorialization (as opposed to mutation, which would be a function of decoding).

Territorialization is precisely such a factor that lodges on the margins of the code of a single species and gives the separate representatives of that species the possibility of differentiating. It is because there is a disjunction between the territory and the code that the territory can indirectly induce new species. Wherever territoriality appears, it establishes an intraspecific *critical distance* between members of the same species; it is by virtue of its own disjunction in relation to *specific differences* that it becomes an oblique, indirect means of differentiation. (TP 322)

Territory and code are thus found on the margins of each other. In the case of territorial species one of the ways that they’re coded is genetically. That is, DNA is one of the milieus that is gathered in a territory. At the same time, the functions of those various milieus (e.g., hunting, mating, sound, and color) become expressive, which creates the minimum critical distance between same-sex members of the same species. In this intraspecies distance (rhythm and melody) arises the possibility of change. “It is less a question of evolution than of passage, bridges and tunnels” (TP 322).

Within this context we can also see how the innate/acquired dichotomy can be recast in terms of code and territory. From Deleuze and Guattari's perspective, asking what is "innate" already presupposes too much. In particular, it presupposes an answer to the question of consistency, an arborescent answer. The innate/acquired dichotomy presupposes a rigid boundary between an organism and its environment, rather than supposing that an organism is a "selection of the exterior" and that the environment is a "projection of the interior."³ The coding of a milieu (the innate) is inseparable from a movement of decoding, just as territorialization (the acquired) is inseparable from a movement of deterritorialization. Milieus pass into territories through decoding, and territories pass into other territories (or as we'll see, beyond them).

The infra-assemblage thus concerns milieus as components of a territory, functional rhythms. The infra-assemblage gathers these components as a consistent aggregate. Here the functional rhythms become expressive in two ways as motifs and counterpoints. Furthermore, with regard to forces an assemblage regroups and reorganizes them. Assemblages, however, are not found in a vacuum. They are always in relation to other assemblages. This is the level of the inter-assemblage. Of course, all of these levels are operative at once. Indeed, as we've seen, it's impossible to talk about one level without talking about the others. These inter-assemblage relations may be either intraspecies or interspecies. An example of an intraspecies inter-assemblage is courtship. A male stagemaker bird (*Scenopoeetes dentirostris*) attracts a mate by cutting leaves with its toothed beak and displaying the pale underside of the leaves on the ground. Through the rhythm and melody of the leaf-cutting the male bird establishes a new territory adjacent to the old territory and at the same time induces a female bird to join him. Both the male and the female pass from one assemblage to another, from unattached birds to mated pair. Inter-assemblage relations can also move between species. The clearest example of this is parasitism, as when a cowbird lays its eggs in the nest of a mockingbird.

For Deleuze and Guattari the key to inter-assemblage relations is what they call a "machine." "A machine is like a set of cutting edges that insert themselves into the assemblage undergoing deterritorialization, in order to draw the variations and mutations [*pour en tracer les variations et mutations*]" (TP 333, translation altered). A machine thus opens up an assemblage to other assemblages. The leaves of the stagemaker bird are thus a courtship machine that opens on to a mating assemblage. The cowbird's egg in the mockingbird's nest

is a machine that opens the mockingbird mating assemblage onto a new interspecies assemblage. Food is a machine that allows bacteria to colonize the human gut and thus create a new interspecies assemblage.

It is also possible for a machine to open “beyond all assemblages” to the absolutely deterritorialized, the Cosmos. This is the fourth aspect of the refrain. Whereas infra- and inter-assemblage deterritorializations are relative deterritorializations (that is, they are immediately reterritorialized), cosmic deterritorializations are extra-assemblage deterritorializations (that is, they are not reterritorialized). With this possibility in mind we can understand the opening vignettes in their full complexity. The child’s song in the first vignette is the move from chaos to milieu. The second vignette is the move from milieu to territory that establishes an intense center that is both a selection and protection from chaos. The intense center of home, earth, the natal forms both the interior and the exterior of the territory. It is the deterritorializing edge. The deterritorializing edge is the opening that concerns the third vignette. As we’ve just seen, though, the opening is very complex. On the one hand, the opening makes two kinds of relative deterritorializations possible (infra- and inter-assemblage). On the other hand, the opening also makes absolute deterritorialization possible, a cosmic deterritorialization (extra-assemblage). As always, though, there is no guarantee that a deterritorialization will produce the new. It is always possible that “instead of opening up the deterritorialized assemblage onto something else, it may produce an effect of closure, as if the aggregate had fallen into and continues to spin in a kind of black hole. This is what happens under conditions of precocious or extremely sudden deterritorialization . . .” (TP 333–4). As Deleuze and Guattari have continually reiterated, deterritorialization is never risk free. Suicidal collapse is always a possibility.

The three vignettes are all aspects of the refrain. Thus, the interrelation between chaos, earth, and cosmos allows Deleuze and Guattari to classify refrains in four ways:

- 1) territorial refrains that seek, mark, assemble a territory; 2) territorialized function refrains that assume a special function in the assemblage . . . ; 3) the same, when they mark new assemblages, pass into new assemblages by means of deterritorialization-reterritorialization . . . ; 4) refrains that collect or gather forces . . . sometimes bring on a movement of absolute deterritorialization . . . They cease to be terrestrial becoming cosmic . . . (TP 326–7)

We've already seen this distinction between relative and absolute deterritorialization in "Several Regimes of Signs," where the issue was the formation of a subjectivity that escaped the despotic formation. What Deleuze and Guattari add to the discussion here is an explicit application of these ideas to the biological stratum, particularly birds. More importantly, though, they show how this account solves the problem of consistency in a seemingly unlikely way. What could be more transient, more inconsistent, than a child singing in the dark? Yet, Deleuze and Guattari argue that already at this point we have the rhythmic interplay between chaos and order out of which consistency might grow. They note that this is where ancient cosmogonies begin, as well. But, this is a very different view of consistency, a rhizomatic view of consistency, rather than an arborescent view of consistency. Consistency does not pre-exist any more than territories pre-exist. Consistency is also not dependent on presupposing a theory of natural kinds, which proposes to "carve nature at the joints." Consistency is the result of territorialization. It is not imposed externally as a conceptual scheme; it is the result of the self-organization of assemblages. Consistency is "the becoming-expressive of rhythm" (TP 316).

The rhizomatic view of consistency has several implications. The first is non-linearity. If consistency is not imposed arborescently, then consistency does not have a discontinuous origin. "There is no beginning from which a linear sequence would derive, but rather densifications, intensifications, reinforcements, injections, showerings, like so many intercalary events" (TP 328). A machine (a leaf) is inserted (intercalary event) into an assemblage (a bird species), which opens the assemblage onto a new assemblage (courtship pair). The consistency achieved here is the consolidation of a great range of heterogeneous elements. It is also fragile and subject to mutation, a rhizome not a tree. The second implication of the rhizomatic view of consistency is that "there must be an arrangement of intervals, a distribution of inequalities, such that it is sometimes necessary to make a hole in order to consolidate" (TP 328). In order to think about this implication we can return to our previous discussion of intensities, particularly the egg. The egg white is composed of different zones of intensity, protein gradients that, under the right conditions, will convert to the discrete extensities of various body parts. In its intensive form, though, the egg is nothing other than a "distribution of inequalities" in this case of proteins. The third implication of the rhizomatic view of consistency is "a superposition of disparate rhythms, an articulation from within of

an interrhythmicity, with no imposition of meter or cadence" (TP 328–9). Think again, here, of the second vignette, home. Home is no longer a single song that holds chaos at bay; it is the overlapping of numerous different rhythms, singing, television, cooking, homework, etc. None of these rhythms conform to a cadence, though. They expand and contract throughout the day, and yet there is a *consistency* to these rhythms. They are consolidated as a single territory, but this territory has nothing to do with externally imposed form. This is the consistency of hylozoism not hylomorphism, a rhizomatic not an arborescent consistency.

Of course, this is not the first time we have seen the term "consistency." Prior to this plateau, though, it was always used in the phrase "plane of consistency." In our previous discussions we saw that the plane of consistency was opposed to the plane of organization, an opposition that paralleled the opposition between rhizome and tree. Furthermore, we saw that this opposition was an epistemological rather than an ontological distinction. That is, the two planes were tendencies toward which any assemblage might tend, the tendencies toward stasis and change. What Deleuze and Guattari propose in the wake of these two tendencies is a "perceptual semiotics" in which we rethink "things" in terms of the tendency toward change. Such a perceptual semiotics does not eliminate the tendency toward stasis but makes it a complex and temporary effect of the tendency toward change. There is no ontologically discontinuous form that might guarantee stasis. There is only the continual outworking of becoming itself. In this plateau the outworking of becoming has been articulated in the sonorous terms of the refrain, not because consistency is always sonorous, but because beginning with rhythm (as the coding of chaos), moving toward the gathering of rhythm around an intense center (territorialization/earth), and perhaps moving beyond the intense center on a new rhythm (absolute deterritorialization/cosmos), allows Deleuze and Guattari to think consistency independently of politics and geography and commensurate with the creation of the new. Their use of "consistency" in this plateau, then, is entirely in keeping with their use of "plane of consistency." They make this explicit when they refer to the "plane of consistency" in this plateau.

Thus it is not surprising that the distinction we were seeking was *not between assemblages and something else but between two limits of any possible assemblage*, in other words between the system of strata and the plane of consistency. We should not forget that the strata rigidify and are organized on the plane of consistency, and that the plane of consistency is at

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work and is constructed in the strata, in both cases piece by piece, blow by blow, operation by operation. (TP 337, emphasis added)

This is perhaps the most succinct statement in *A Thousand Plateaus* of the basic thesis of this guide. Deleuze and Guattari do not see their task as one of sorting assemblages into “good” rhizomatic assemblages and “bad” arborescent assemblages. Rhizome and tree, consistency and organization, change and stasis—all of these oppositions are the two opposed limits of any assemblage. Perceptual semiotics consists in seeing the ways in which different assemblages construct and map out this opposition.

MUSIC AND THE REFRAIN

In the previous plateau Deleuze and Guattari broached the notion of musicality in relation to the refrain. For the most part their discussion of musicality in this plateau has been focused on birdsong. There are occasional references to music, but they do not turn to fully orchestral music until near the end of the plateau. For convenience sake they divide the history of Western music into three basic stages—classical, romantic, and modern—and argue that these three stages (while not discrete) can be characterized by their respective relations to milieus, territory, and cosmos.

To put the stages in the terms we have been just discussing, the classical period is characterized by the coding and stratification of milieus. Beneath the formal constraints of the classical period, though, lies an engagement with chaos. “What the artist confronts in this way is chaos, the forces of chaos, the forces of a raw and untamed matter upon which Forms must be imposed to make substances, and Codes in order to make milieus” (TP 338). Even at this level of complexity and accomplishment, classicism is the attempt to stabilize chaos for a brief moment. It is the child’s refrain.

Romanticism in contrast to classicism is characterized by the process of territorialization. Its focus is the earth, home, even if home is inaccessible in the misty past or yet to be achieved in a utopian future. The artist is no longer charged with wresting order from chaos, a divine charge. Rather, the artist has the heroic charge to found, even in defiance of God. Faust and Prometheus come to mind. Deleuze and Guattari even mention here the relation between Protestantism and Catholicism. Protestantism is the founding of a territory in opposition to the milieus of Catholicism. In this context, Luther’s “Here I stand” at the Diet of Worms becomes a

heroic founding gesture.⁴ Romanticism thus finds its focus in the heroic individual and his or her relation to a territory, but as a result “what [German] romanticism lacks most is a people” (TP 340). Musically, then, this generates a conflict between the singular voice of the hero and the instrumentation of the earth. But, German romanticism is not the only form that romanticism takes. In other forms (Slavic and Latin), “everything is put in terms of the theme of a people and the forces of a people” (TP 338). Musically, this generates the conflict between the earth and the people, and depending on one’s focus results in differing conceptions of orchestration. Deleuze and Guattari have Wagner (forces of earth) and Verdi (forces of a people) in mind here as examples of this opposition, but they also acknowledge that some composers, such as Berlioz, manage “to pass from one pole to another in [their] orchestration” (TP 342).

Modernism in contrast to both classicism and romanticism is characterized by an opening “onto the forces of the Cosmos” (TP 342). Deleuze and Guattari explain that the issue here is technique, not a gradual unfolding and progression, as in Hegel’s conception of absolute spirit. The technique of classicism is one of coding milieus. As such, this technique establishes a form/substance relation. This is the stratification of chaos in milieus. The technique of romanticism establishes a “continuous development of form and the continuous variation of matter” (TP 342). This is territorialization of milieus and the establishment of the earth as intense center. Modernism’s technique “is now a direct relation *material-forces*. A material is molecularized matter, which must accordingly ‘harness’ forces: these forces are necessarily forces of the Cosmos” (TP 342). The movement that Deleuze and Guattari are trying to capture here is the movement from the molar to the molecular, from the extensive to the intensive, the movement of absolute deterritorialization, where “the essential thing is no longer forms and matters, or themes, but forces, densities, intensities” (TP 343). In painting this means rendering nonvisual forces visible. In music it means making nonsonorous forces sonorous. In philosophy it means elaborating “a material of thought in order to capture forces that are not thinkable in themselves” (TP 342). All of these are examples of the cosmic refrain.

Let’s look briefly, then, at what Deleuze and Guattari identify as a cosmic refrain in philosophy, Nietzsche’s “eternal return.” They call it “a little ditty, a refrain, but [one] which captures the mute unthinkable forces of the Cosmos” (TP 342). The eternal

return appears first in Nietzsche's *The Gay Science* and then in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, which was composed around the same time. In *The Gay Science* the idea of the eternal return is posed as a thought experiment. The purpose of the thought experiment functions analogously to Kant's categorical imperative. That is, both are tests. What they are testing, though, is radically different. Whereas Kant's test is a way of seeing whether or not one's will is in conformity with reason, Nietzsche's test is a way of seeing whether or not one affirms life. Nietzsche's test works this way: Imagine that a demon comes to you and says that you will live this life over and over again in exactly the same way with no changes. Would you consider this a curse or a blessing? It is only insofar as you would consider this a blessing that you would affirm life. Before we look at this as a cosmic refrain, let's think about it as simply a refrain. As we've seen, the refrain is a way of accounting for consistency. In what way might we think of the eternal return as providing consistency? To begin with, the idea of the eternal return is reflective, it forces one to gather one's life together as a whole and ask if one has any regrets. Second, the whole that's gathered is a heterogeneous whole, warts and all. The test of the eternal return is not to see one's life as an unbroken string of unalloyed goods. The test is to gather the mundane and the sublime, the noble and the ignoble, to see if one can affirm all of this unreservedly. The willingness to live the exact same life repeatedly, eternally is the seal of one's affirmation. It confirms that life *as such* is a blessing, not simply the parts that seem the most beneficial. Third, there is a rhythm to this refrain that is not a cadence. Nietzsche begins the discussion this way, "What if some day or night a demon were to steal after you in your loneliest loneliness . . ." ⁵ The demon arrives unannounced and unlooked for. It arrives not regularly, but in concert with one's affective states. There is a rhythm here, an affective cycle, but there's no regularity to it.

Even if we grant that the eternal return is a refrain, though, in what sense is it a cosmic refrain? How does it "capture forces that are not thinkable in themselves"? How does it go beyond milieu and territory into absolute deterritorialization? The eternal return tries to think life as such. That is, life as a deterritorialized flow. The demon's description of what returns is a heterogeneous consistency: "pain . . . joy . . . this spider . . . this moonlight between the trees." ⁶ What we have here is a direct relation between material and forces that goes beyond the form-substance relations of milieu and the continuous variations of territory. Another way we might

see the absolutely deterritorialized nature of this refrain is to note that it speaks exclusively in terms of non-subjective affects. It speaks not only in terms of thoughts and sighs, but also of spiders and moonlight. According to the demon one is a “speck of dust” in an “eternal hourglass.” The sand flows, life flows. The refrain of the eternal return puts us in contact with an outside, the destratified, deterritorialized Cosmos that is molecularized life.

By way of conclusion Deleuze and Guattari introduce one last image to help us think about the refrain and the problem of consistency: the glass harmonica. A glass harmonica is a rotating set of nested glasses that produce different tones when touched by moistened fingers. It creates an ethereal, otherworldly sound that was rumored to make people go mad. No doubt Deleuze and Guattari want to suggest all of these facets given their view of madness. They write:

So just what is a refrain? *Glass harmonica*: the refrain is a prism, a crystal of space-time. It acts upon that which surrounds it, sound or light, extracting from it various vibrations, or decompositions, projections, or transformations. The refrain also has a catalytic function: not only to increase the speed of the exchanges and reactions in that which surrounds it, but also to assure indirect interactions between elements devoid of so-called natural affinity, and thereby to form organized masses. (TP 348, emphasis in original)

Notice that Deleuze and Guattari also play on the visual aspects of the glass harmonica. Not only does it produce sound, but it also refracts light. The refrain, then, produces the consistency of heterogeneous elements (glass, finger, water, sound). As we’ve seen, there are different refrains (milieu, terrestrial, and cosmic), and each produces a different kind of consistency.

Furthermore, what has remained implicit throughout this plateau but is made explicit here is the relation between the refrain and time. Time itself is a rhythm, but not a cadence. But, the time of a deer fleeing a predator is very different from the time of a revolution, and these times are different from the time of the eternal return. Deleuze and Guattari say it as directly and plainly as possible: “the refrain fabricates time . . . Time is not an a priori form; rather, the refrain is the a priori form of time, which in each case fabricates different times” (TP 349). Not only have they managed to rethink consistency without resorting to politics or geography, they also rethink time without making it the ground of being, as in Heidegger, or without reproducing the antinomy of space and

time. It all begins simply enough, a child singing in the dark. This is just enough rhythm to hold back chaos for a little while.

NOTES

1. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Aix.
2. Ibid., A235/B294.
3. Deleuze, *Spinoza's Practical Philosophy*, p. 125.
4. There is some debate about whether Luther actually said these words. The very fact, though, that they are so widely attributed to Luther, and are emblematic of his defiance of the Catholic authority, suggests that if Luther did not see himself as a romantic hero, he was subsequently made into one.
5. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, §342.
6. Ibid.