



**Sounding the Virtual:
Gilles Deleuze and the Theory
and Philosophy of Music**

*Edited by
Brian Hulse and Nick Nesbitt*

Sounding the Virtual: Gilles Deleuze and the Theory and Philosophy of Music

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Contents

<i>List of Figures</i>	vii
<i>List of Music Examples</i>	ix
<i>Notes on Contributors</i>	xi
<i>Introduction</i>	xv
<i>Brian Hulse and Nick Nesbitt</i>	
1 The Image of Thought and Ideas of Music <i>Christopher Hasty</i>	1
2 Thinking Musical Difference: Music Theory as Minor Science <i>Brian Hulse</i>	23
3 A Deleuzian Noise/Excavating the Body of Abstract Sound <i>Sean Higgins</i>	51
4 The Sound of Repeating Life: Ethics and Metaphysics in Deleuze's Philosophy of Music <i>Michael Gallope</i>	77
5 <i>Enforced</i> Deterritorialization, or the Trouble with Musical Politics <i>Martin Scherzinger</i>	103
6 Gilles Deleuze and the Musical Spinoza <i>Amy Cimini</i>	129
7 Intensity, Music, and Heterogenesis in Deleuze <i>Jean-Godefroy Bidima</i> <i>Translated by Michael Wiedorn</i>	145
8 Critique and Clinique: From Sounding Bodies to the Musical Event <i>Nick Nesbitt</i>	159
9 Logic of Edge: Wolfgang Rihm's <i>Am Horizont</i> <i>Judy Lochhead</i>	181

10	Music and the Difference in Becoming <i>Marianne Kielian-Gilbert</i>	199
11	Transformation and Becoming Other in the Music and Poetics of Luciano Berio <i>Bruce Quaglia</i>	227
12	Line, Surface, Speed: Nomadic Features of Melody <i>Ildar Khannanov</i>	249
	<i>Bibliography</i>	269
	<i>Index</i>	279

List of Figures

6.1	Sound particles plotted in Xenakis's time-slice screens	140
6.2	A book of screens (life of a complex sound)	141
8.1	Coltrane changes	177
9.1	<i>Am Horizont</i> , map of opening passage	189
9.2	<i>Am Horizont</i> , opening of Edges phase, showing pitch register and timbral quality	190
9.3	Schematic map of <i>Am Horizont</i>	190
9.4	<i>Am Horizont</i> , mm. 24–26	191
9.5	<i>Am Horizont</i> , detailed map of the Edges phase	192
9.6	<i>Am Horizont</i> , detailed map of Cotton phase	193
9.7	<i>Am Horizont</i> , mm. 30–32, the Fall	194
9.8	<i>Am Horizont</i> , detailed map of the Edges/Remembering phase	195
9.9	<i>Am Horizont</i> , mm. 45–49, conclusion of Edges/Remembering phase	196

List of Music Examples

1.1	Chopin, Scherzo for Piano in E Major, Op. 54 (mm. 1–65)	15
1.2	Chopin, Scherzo for Piano in E Major, Op. 54 (mm. 1–5)	18
2.1	Beethoven, Symphony No. 5, first movement (mm. 6–13)	34
4.1	Wagner, <i>Das Rheingold</i> , Act I, Scene 1 (mm. 749–750)	93
4.2	Wagner, <i>Das Rheingold</i> , Act I, Scene 2 (mm. 769–770)	94
10.1	J.S. Bach, Suite No. 1 in G major, BWV 1007, Menuet II	210
10.2	Stravinsky, <i>Tango</i> for piano (right- and left-hand rhythms), a. mm. 9–12; b. mm. 17–25	218
12.1	Bashkirian prolonged song “Hairullakai,” verse 1	252
12.2	Frédéric Chopin, Ballade No. 2, Op. 38, mm. 183–185	264
12.3	Frédéric Chopin, Mazurka, Op. 68 No. 4, mm. 1–8	265

Chapter 5

Enforced Deterritorialization, or the Trouble with Musical Politics¹

Martin Scherzinger

Perhaps one day this century will be known as Deleuzian. (Foucault)

This chapter examines the way modernist music, notably that of French composer Pierre Boulez, claims residency in and serves as an important conduit for the politically oriented philosophical writings of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. By situating the philosophers' work in the historical context of a modern European tradition of philosophical engagement with music, with special emphasis on the socio-critical aspirations of this tradition, the paper assesses the political valences of their central arguments in the current context of postmodern capitalism. The paper argues that certain failures and fissures produced in the process of inter-semiotic transposition between music-theoretical arguments and philosophical tropes has consequences for the politics implied by their amalgamation. In short, by transforming and eliding constitutive elements of Boulez's project, Deleuze and Guattari posit a political praxis that fails to note a central aspect of capitalism's efficient functioning in our times. Is the reality of Foucault's characterization in the epigraph finally more *Boulezian* than *Deleuzian*?

Musicalized Philosophies in Historical Perspective

Philosophy in the continental tradition has long granted the figure of music pride of place. For early Romantics, music was considered ineffable, beyond the logic and grasp of representational language. In the shadow of an imagined failure of language, music was paradoxically granted the capacity for elevated epistemological claims qua music. Already in Kant, whose views about it were otherwise outmoded, music

¹ This essay elaborates and expands upon arguments made in two recent articles: "Musical Modernism in the Thought of *Mille Plateaux*, and its Twofold Politics," *Perspectives of New Music*, 46/2 (Summer 2008) and "Music in the Thought of Deconstruction/Deconstruction in the Thought of Music," *Muzikološki Zbornik / Musicological Annual* 41/2. Special Edition *Glasba in Destrukcija / Music and Deconstruction* (2005), 81–104. Sections have been reproduced here with permission. I would like to thank Nick Nesbitt and Brian Hulse for their astute readings of and insightful comments on previous drafts of this paper. These have deeply enriched the argument.

had the capacity to “agitate the mind *more* diversely and intensely” than poetry, which, for Kant, was the highest form of the arts.² While unable to conceptualize, lacking the capacity to expand the power of judgment, music was nonetheless able to express “the aesthetic idea of a coherent whole of an unspeakable wealth of thought, and to express it in conformity with a certain theme that is the prevalent affect in the piece.”³ Concepts, for Kant, could be raised to the level of ideas when they transcended their “natural determination” by way of the imagination.⁴ Poetry, which shared with music the ability to “set the imagination free,” could offer us “from among the unlimited variety of possible forms that harmonize with a given concept, though within that concept’s limits, that form which links the exhibition of the concept with a wealth of thought to which no linguistic expression is completely adequate, and so poetry rises aesthetically to ideas.”⁵ Interestingly, to rise aesthetically to ideas, concepts had to be illuminated by the very “unspeakable wealth of thought” that characterized both poetry and—even more so—music. What distinguished poetry from music in Kant’s comparison was poetry’s capacity to harmonize its “unspeakable wealth of thought” within the limits of a given concept. It is unclear why Kant did not consider music’s “prevalent affect” in terms of its analogously conceptual dimensions. Instead, music exhibited the imaginative play so crucial to idea formation, but ultimately refused to be reined in by determinate thought. Music was thus downgraded to “mere entertaining play”; patterned air.⁶ And yet Kant’s recognition of music’s unbounded wealth of thought opened the door to a radical revision in the nineteenth century of music’s metaphysical aspirations.

It was precisely its *unspeakable* wealth, detached from all conceptual determination, which became music’s greatest advantage in the imaginary of nineteenth-century metaphysics. This idealization of music took many forms. For Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder, for example, music hovered angelically above the debased workings of the actual world. Likewise, for Søren Kierkegaard, music best exemplified the boundless erotic striving of the pure unmediated life force. Arguably, the quasi-religious appeal to notions of genius and inspiration in the age of Romanticism were an attempt to detach the art of music from the realm of ordinary signification. August Wilhelm von Schlegel’s account of the “origin and spirit of *romanticism*” rested on a religious dimension that “aspired to a higher perfection than that which could actually be achieved by the exercise of [one’s] own faculties.”⁷ Romantic art required the intervention of a “superior wisdom” if

² Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. J.H. Bernard, Hafner Press, 1951, p. 198 (italics mine).

³ *Ibid.*, p. 199.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 196.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 197.

⁷ Peter le Huray and James Day, *Music and Aesthetics in the Eighteenth and Early-Nineteenth Centuries*, Cambridge University Press, 1988, pp. 196–8 (italics Schlegel’s).

it were to transcend the limited perfection which Schlegel attributed to the art of the ancient Greeks and offer us instead (via “contemplation of the eternal”) insight into “our real existence.”⁸ For Gottfried Johann Herder, too, the defining moment in the emancipation of music from outside constraint (from “spectacle, dance, mime, and even from the accompanying voice”) was “religious awe”—a condition best approximated by voiceless, gesture-free, wordless and pure “sounds.”⁹ Far from a condition of self-identical autonomy, then, the artwork required this extra “something [to] free [it] from all external control.”¹⁰

Paradoxically, the exemplary Romantic artwork was thus incomplete in itself, even giving an “appearance of imperfection” in Schlegel’s language, and the necessary supplemental dimension (or “mysterious alliance”) could not be captured in ordinary terms.¹¹ In short, the aesthetics of autonomy were deeply implicated in a new principle of anagoric transformation on the levels of both composition and reception, and it was music’s apparent insufficiency that secured its autonomy. Even in Eduard Hanslick’s late nineteenth-century formalist aesthetics, apparently shorn of religious dimensions, we read about the metaphysical and symbolic significance of music in its “reflection of the great laws of the world.”¹² Interestingly, references of this sort were omitted in subsequent editions of *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen*, so that Hanslick’s later musical work began to exist in an abstract realm of self-sufficient signification. But the logic of the argument—the effort to avoid music’s reduction to ordinary referential terms—remained the same.

How did the metaphysical elevation of music in the nineteenth century function philosophically? In his *The World as Will and Representation* Arthur Schopenhauer posits music as the closest of all possible analogies to the endlessly striving will. Far from figuring music’s inability to conceptualize as a weakness, Schopenhauer diminished the very role of concept-formation to the “objectification” of the will, and thereby raised the value of music’s peculiarly independent expressive mode to new metaphysical heights. By granting the will a foundational metaphysical status, Schopenhauer shifted the traditional theory of truth-by-correspondence to one of truth-by-revelation, best embodied in the flow of music. In Schopenhauer’s view, “music does not, like all the other arts, exhibit the Ideas or grades of the will’s objectification, but directly the will itself.”¹³ Music’s very separation from the world of representation elevated its self-generative power to disclose truth: “Far from being a mere aid to poetry, music is certainly an independent art; in fact,

⁸ Ibid., p. 198.

⁹ Ibid., p. 192 (italics Herder’s).

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 192 (italics mine).

¹¹ Ibid., p. 198.

¹² Mark Evans Bond, “Idealism and the Aesthetic of Instrumental Music at the Turn of the Nineteenth Century,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 50/2–3, 1997, p. 415.

¹³ Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, Falcon’s Wing Press, 1958, p. 448.

it is the most powerful of all the arts, and therefore attains its ends entirely from its own resources.”¹⁴ Even in the context of texted compositions (where “words are and remain for the music a foreign extra of secondary value”), music had the capacity to express “the most profound, ultimate, and secret information”; it illuminated “the real and true nature” of the feelings and actions presented by the musical drama. Music, in the final analysis, had privileged access to the fundamental truth of our lives, for in its temporal unfolding one could “hear ... the secret history of our will and of all its stirrings and strivings with their many different delays, postponements, hindrances, and afflictions.”¹⁵ Schopenhauer degraded the referential abstractions that characterized language and prized instead the “delays and postponements” that characterized music. It was music’s endless deferrals that became portals for understanding our essential nature.

In his early works, Friedrich Nietzsche too would subordinate the epistemological status of language against that of music. The concepts of language are “the separated shell of things; thus they are strictly speaking *abstracta*”; in contrast, music “gives the innermost kernel which precedes all forms, or the heart of things.”¹⁶ For Nietzsche, language is reductive and abstract, while music is generative and creative. Hence, language cannot capture the spirit of music: “Language can never adequately render the cosmic symbolism of music, because music stands in symbolic relation to the primordial contradiction and primordial pain in the heart of the primal unity, and therefore symbolizes a sphere which is beyond and prior to all phenomena.”¹⁷ In agreement with Schopenhauer, then, Nietzsche argued that words rendered musically, and even feelings expressed in music, were distracting “externalities” to music’s essence: “What we call *feeling* is, in relation to th[e] will, already permeated and saturated by conscious and unconscious representations and hence no longer directly the subject of music.”¹⁸ On the *Ode* in Beethoven’s ninth symphony, Nietzsche polemically claimed that the “music blinds us totally to images and words and *we simply do not hear anything of Schiller’s poem*.”¹⁹ Against Schopenhauer, on the other hand, Nietzsche was suspicious of our ability to access, even by way of musical analogy, the workings of the will. And yet, although we “can never get beyond representations,” Nietzsche distinguished “two major species in the realm of representations,” one of which

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 451.

¹⁶ Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, Vintage Books, 1967, p. 102.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 55.

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 111, 112.

¹⁹ Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, “On Words and Music,” (trans. Walter Kaufmann) in Carl Dahlhaus, *Between Romanticism and Modernism: Four Studies in the Music of the Later Nineteenth Century*, trans. Mary Whittall, University of California Press, 1980, p. 113 (italics in original).

recapitulates the will's primordial "becoming and willing."²⁰ On *this* species of representation, Nietzsche wrote, "The primordial manifestation, the 'will' with its scale of sensations of pleasure and displeasure, gains an ever more adequate symbolical expression in the development of music."²¹ For the early Nietzsche, then, music's origin remained "beyond all individuation," and the will remained music's proper "subject."²²

It was music's non-individuated Dionysian strain, representing the rapturous frenzy that destroyed the veils of *maya*, and thus liberated us from conventions, images, rules and constraints, which Nietzsche granted profound philosophical agency in his *The Birth of Tragedy in the Spirit of Music*. Music's "most powerful" function lay in its capacity to "invest myths with a new and profound significance," for it prevented myths from lapsing by degrees "into the narrow limits of some alleged historical reality."²³ Music's ability to disclose truths was thus achieved in negative terms. It revitalized myth by inhibiting its historical tendencies toward ossified factuality. Following the example of Socrates, philosophy had long neglected music's creative impulse in favor of a rationalist dialectic. Just as music once gave "birth to myth" it could once again revitalize it: "Th[e] dying myth was now seized by the new-born genius of Dionysian music; and in the hands it flourished once more with colors such as it had never yet displayed, with a fragrance that awakened a longing anticipation of a metaphysical world." By musicalizing philosophy, Nietzsche sought to reinvigorate its creative and critical potential. Music illuminated the mythical dimension of the orthodoxies by which we lived; it served as a discursive site for speculation on the limits of philosophy, knowledge, and meaning. A central metaphor for that which resisted epistemological certainty, music in this kind of philosophical discourse thus functioned as a kind of discourse of the unsayable *par excellence*.

The negative privilege accorded music in nineteenth-century German metaphysics is no longer obvious in current writings grounded in philosophical tropes of negation. While some German philosophy in the first half of the century still engages music—ranging from Ernst Bloch's reflections, which emphasized the open-ended and refractory qualities in music, to Theodor W. Adorno's negative dialectics, which prominently explore the role of truth-formation (via relentless self-abnegation) in musical experience—the explicit reference to music has receded in most post-structuralism. And yet post-structuralism bears some prominent resonances with these predecessors. As it is with the nineteenth-century philosophical figure of music, deconstruction, for example, exposes the slippery movement of conceptualization, and menaces the poles of ossified historical oppositions. Deconstruction, like music, marks a philosophical limit. Following Hegel's dialectical method of marking the non-identities grounding

²⁰ Ibid., p. 108.

²¹ Ibid., p. 109.

²² Ibid., pp. 110–11.

²³ Ibid., p. 75.

all conceptualization, the deconstructive account emphasizes the structural irreducibility of that which is excluded from discourse. Like Schopenhauer's music, for example, deconstruction emphasizes the detours and delays that condition the world of representation. And like Nietzsche's music, for example, deconstruction at once resists the closure of ordinary discourse and revitalizes its horizon of possibility. Music's resistance to the grasp of self-evident perception dramatizes what deconstruction sets out to demonstrate.

Though it has generally been canceled out of post-structuralist thought, music sometimes reappears in a way that is in keeping with this historical legacy. Roland Barthes's discussion of the "grain" in the operatic voice, for example, draws on the historical idea that music—its visceral materiality—escapes the scope and authority of predicative language.²⁴ Likewise, Julia Kristeva's non-representational theory of language is distinctly musical; here the "tone" and the "rhythm" of the pure signifier reverberates as if in musical space.²⁵ Derrida too elaborates the already-discussed notion of the *supplement*, which marks the absent, yet necessary, term constituting the possibility of conceptualization, through an investigation of Jean Jacques Rousseau's discussion of melody in the *Essai sur l'origine de langue*.²⁶ And yet these references to music are rarely about music itself. They are about a theory of language-as-music. To maneuver somewhat crudely through the historical genealogy, one might say that Schopenhauer vividly divided the (debased) world of abstract language from the (elevated) world of dynamic music; that Nietzsche drew this distinction into the workings of language itself (reconfigured in terms of its Dionysian and Apollonian tendencies); and that Derrida collapsed these modalities of representation altogether, effectively drawing musical dynamism into the nature of language as a general economy.

Arguably, the most ekphrastic deployment of music for philosophy in the twentieth century is the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. The second volume of their *Capitalisme et schizophrénie* is practically a study in inter-semiotic transposition, amalgamating the conceptual and sensual modalities (gestures, images, rhythms, sounds) of modernist music and those of philosophy. The book's informing context may have been the uprising in Paris a decade earlier, but its informing technical principle was a new electronic instrument, a piano-keyboard-based musical apparatus popularized at the time of the book's writing in the 1970s, commonly known as the *synthesizer*. For Deleuze and Guattari, this relatively easy to use (and then newly affordable) technological invention becomes a metaphorical model for a way of thinking that replaces Kant's outmoded a priori synthetic judgment. The synthesizer operates on the basis of *amalgamation*, creating a variety of sounds by generating and blending signals of different frequencies.

²⁴ Roland Barthes, "The Grain of the Voice," *The Responsibility of Forms: Critical Essays on Music, Art, and Representation*, Hill and Wang, 1985, pp. 267–7.

²⁵ Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, Blackwell, 1983, p. 188.

²⁶ Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. A. Bass, University of Chicago Press, 1982, pp. 141–4.

In the words of the philosophers, the synthesizer “places all of the parameters in continuous variation, gradually making ‘fundamentally heterogeneous elements end up turning into each other in some way.’ The moment this occurs there is a common matter. It is only at this point that one reaches the abstract machine, or the diagram of the assemblage.”²⁷ Elsewhere, they describe how the synthesizer “unites disparate elements in the material, and transposes the parameters from one formula to another.”²⁸ In short, the synthesizer becomes a philosophical entry point into the “immense mechanosphere” characterizing a new era: “the age of the Machine.”²⁹

For the philosophers, the advantage of thinking on the model of the musical synthesizer is that philosophical discourse disentangles itself from the dialectics of “form and matter,” opting instead for the synthesis of “the molecular and the cosmic, material and force,” an unpredictable mode of thinking that blends traditionally stratified zones of conceptual inquiry into a destratified *plane of consistency*. “Philosophy is no longer synthetic judgment; it is like a thought synthesizer functioning to make thought travel, make it mobile, make it a force of the Cosmos (in the same way as one makes sound travel).”³⁰ Deleuze and Guattari label thought mobilized by metamorphoses of this sort a *rhizome*: “the rhizome connects any point to any other point, and its traits are not necessarily linked to traits of the same nature; it brings into play the very different regimes of signs, and even nonsign states.”³¹ Like the musical synthesizer, the rhizome is a proliferating machine intermingling diverse signifying practices no less than non-signifying ones—“artificial” perhaps, but qualitatively new. Indeed, *Mille Plateaux* gains considerable traction precisely on its preoccupation with the latter “nonsign states,” exemplified by music and sound. Thus Deleuze and Guattari unite changing mechanical techniques of sonic production and reproduction and (to a lesser extent) sonic reception with modern modes of knowledge formation, culture, and social organization. Theirs is the synthesizing hermeneutics of an abstract machine.

Musical Modernism in the Thought of Deleuze and Guattari

For all its concern for “ghetto languages,” for a “minor” music, and so on, *Mille Plateaux* is finally less concerned to use either popular music or the actual music of minorities as sites for articulating the philosophical ambiguities of the collective than it is with a political/aesthetic technique: “making [the major

²⁷ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. with a foreword by Brian Massumi, The Athlone Press, 1987, p. 109.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 343.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 343.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

language/music] minor ... (the opposite of regionalism)."³² Even in matters of the political collective, the philosophers reserve their highest praise for the high modernist music of Pierre Boulez, whom they regard as "a genius for passing from one pole to the other in his orchestration, or even hesitating between them: a sonorous Nature *or* People."³³ Boulez's malleable orchestral technique is thus figured as an exemplary metaphor for the becoming of the Dividual. This emphasis on technique alone probably permits Deleuze and Guattari to overlook the often disarmingly patronizing tone of Boulez's actual understanding of the behavior of collectives. On the topic of African "tribes," for example, Boulez vividly contrasts group mentality with individual musical thought: "The tribe of epigones ... hurl themselves greedily on a chosen method, obviously having no notion of either its origin or its suitability since they isolate it from all guiding logical thought; they use it according to standard models and having exhausted its more obvious charms, incapable of grasping its internal rigour, they must find a new oxygen supply at all costs: the ant-heap waits for the shock which will galvanize it into moving house again. Such a practice, to put it crudely, suggests a brothel of ideas, and can hardly be considered composition."³⁴ Here Boulez contrasts the instinctual behavior of the animalistic mob with the rigorous thought of the reasonable composer. In Boulez's lexicon, the latter embodies the unique subject position necessary for the production of an aesthetics grounded in creative deviations from standardized models. Although Boulez's casual cultural attitudes are quite different from those of Deleuze and Guattari, their politics is not, for political praxis in *Mille Plateaux* ultimately rests on analogously creative lines of flight from stratified modes of thought. Recall that in *Mille Plateaux* politics are intertwined with "technical musical" matters, and are "all the more political for that."³⁵ In the final analysis, politics here is less concerned with the basic organization of social relations (in its civic, governmental, corporate, academic, etc., dimensions) than it is with technical aspects of contrarian modes of thinking and doing per se.

In light of the value placed on the compositional techniques of a relatively rarefied brand of European musical practice in *Mille Plateaux*, the ubiquitous 'applications' in recent times of Deleuzian philosophy to heavy metal, electronic dance music, improvisational jazz, and so on, should give us pause. Instead of offering yet another example of rhizomatic music, then, I will turn now to Deleuze and Guattari's specific use of modernist musical aesthetics in *Mille Plateaux*, particularly the music and writing of Pierre Boulez. Even the philosophical figure of the synthesizer derives its argument less from the actual instrument (or from the then emerging popularity of a new movement in popular music, known as 'new romantic'—Duran Duran, Spandau Ballet, etc.—which granted the

³² Ibid. pp. 103, 105.

³³ Ibid., p. 342.

³⁴ Pierre Boulez, *Boulez on Music Today*, trans. S. Bradshaw and R.R. Bennett, Harvard University Press, 1971, p. 21.

³⁵ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 340–41.

keyboard synthesizer pride of place onstage), than it does from Boulez's writings on musical modernism nearly two decades earlier. In "...Auprès et au loin," for example, Boulez discusses refinements of our perception of timbre with reference to a "hyperinstrument," understood here as a kind of synthesizer-to-come; an instrument consisting of "electronic sinusoidal sounds," or of "conjugations of existent instruments."³⁶ In short, it was Boulez's imagined synthesizer, at least as much as the actual musical instrument, that had the capacity to "assemble modules, source elements, and elements for treating sound (oscillators, generators, and transformers), by arranging microintervals," in the philosophical work of *Mille Plateaux*.³⁷

For Boulez, the synthesizing potential of these new electronic media have the potential to liberate sound by realizing what scores alone cannot. In his discussion of rhythm in "Directions in Recent Music," for example, he asks, "if, then, we want to introduce a notion of total freedom of the rhythm, what can we do but address ourselves to the machine?"³⁸ Boulez's embrace of the technical promise of the electroacoustic machine is elegantly expanded into a philosophical trope in *Mille Plateaux*, now figured as an abstract machine: "The abstract machine exists enveloped in each stratum, whose Ecumenon or unity of composition it defines, and developed on the plane of consistency, whose destratification it performs (the Planomenon)."³⁹ As it is with Boulez's synthesizing machine, the abstract machine opens philosophical thought to concrete new forms; it deterritorializes strata to generate a plane of consistency (or body without organs). For Deleuze and Guattari, planes of consistency elude the traditional dichotomy between form and content, elaborating instead "an increasingly rich and consistent material [like 'reinforced concrete'] the better to tap increasingly intense forces."⁴⁰ Deleuze and Guattari thereby proffer a theory of subjectivity on the model of a machine (synthesizer, concrete mixer), a kind of mélange of flesh and technics (Cybernetic Organism? Body Beyond Organs?) set adrift from the stable coordinates of a unified identity; a synthetically expanded subjectivity, nomadically pursuing multiple becomings that constitute qualitatively altered modes of possibility. In the words of Ian Buchanan, the abstract machine "enables the assemblage to become other than it is"; in short, "deterritorialized."⁴¹ Not surprisingly, Deleuze and Guattari's distancing from the dialectics of form and content in the name of transcendental empiricism echoes

³⁶ Pierre Boulez, *Notes of an Apprenticeship*, trans. H. Weinstock, Alfred A. Knopf, 1968, p. 197.

³⁷ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 343.

³⁸ Pierre Boulez, *Notes of an Apprenticeship*, p. 213.

³⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 73.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 329.

⁴¹ Ian Buchanan and Marcel Swiboda (eds), *Deleuze and Music*, Edinburgh University Press, 2004, p. 14.

Boulez's conviction that "in music there is no opposition between form and content, between abstract on the one hand and concrete on the other."⁴²

To demonstrate and dramatize the workings of deterritorialization, Deleuze and Guattari draw on Boulez's discussion, first, of how modernism abolished the strict distinction between music's 'vertical' and 'horizontal' aspects and, second, of how modernism opened into new non-metric temporalities.

When Boulez casts himself in the role of historian of music, he does so in order to show how a great musician, in a very different manner in each case, invents a kind of diagonal running between the harmonic vertical and the melodic horizon. And in each case it is a different diagonal, a different technique, a creation. Moving along this transversal line, which is really a line of deterritorialization, there is a sound block that no longer has a point of origin, since it is always and already in the middle of the line ... and no longer forms a localizable connection from one point to another, since it is in 'nonpulsed time': a deterritorialized rhythmic block that has abandoned points, coordinates, and measure, like a drunken boat that melds with the line or draws a plane of consistency.⁴³

While this passage refers obliquely to the compositional techniques of Anton Webern (especially his distributions of pitch fields), on the one hand, and Olivier Messiaen (especially his manipulations of duration), on the other, it is Boulez's peculiar modernist reading of these composers' respective innovations that interests Deleuze and Guattari. In fact, Deleuze and Guattari's words closely follow the logic of Boulez's discussion of polyphony in his *Penser la musique aujourd'hui*. Boulez writes, "From now on the two dimensions of classical (horizontal and vertical) polyphony are linked by a kind of diagonal dimension, whose characteristics figure in each of them, in varying degrees."⁴⁴ For Boulez, "Polyphony can also be described as the diagonal distribution of structures: 'parts' or 'voices' no longer exist, strictly speaking: a morphological ... organisation of a durational block ..."⁴⁵ As it is for Deleuze and Guattari, Boulez describes the blending of vertical (harmonic) with horizontal (melodic) dimensions of musical composition into a "sound block"/"durational block," whose parts, for Deleuze and Guattari, "no longer ha[ve] a point of origin," and, for Boulez likewise, "no longer exist." As if to elaborate a philosophical paraphrase of Boulez's "cross-polyphony" (as found in his early works; *Polyphonie X*, for example) Deleuze and Guattari here construe philosophical thought in analogous musical terms: 'Deterritorialization' in *Milles Plateaux*, one might say, incorporates Boulez's 'diagonal' polyphonic thinking.

Deleuze and Guattari's creative paraphrase of Boulez takes the figure of the 'diagonal' still further, analogously positing the *interval* as that which remains in

⁴² Boulez, *Boulez on Music Today*, p. 32.

⁴³ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 296.

⁴⁴ Boulez, *Boulez on Music Today*, p. 119.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

the wake of the etiolated vertical/horizontal dimensions. With Webern in mind, for example, Boulez repeatedly discusses the emergence (and hence the autonomy) of the interval when harmony and line are linked by a diagonal dimension: “Independently of any dimension, intervals are developed among themselves in a context whose coherence is assured by complementary chromatic principles.”⁴⁶ Boulez is here referring to the carefully crafted internal symmetries Webern embeds in the partitioning of row forms. In his Concerto for Nine Instruments, Op. 24, for example, the row (B, B_b, D, E_b, G, F_#, A_b, E, F, C, C_#, A) comprises four 014 trichords, which can reappear in different orders under various transformational operations. For Boulez, Webern’s achievement is of immense historical and philosophical importance: “Webern was the only one ... who was conscious of a new sound-dimension, of the abolition of horizontal-vertical opposition, so that he saw in the series only a way of giving structure to the sound-space ... That *functional redistribution of intervals* toward which he tended marks an extremely important moment in the history of the language.”⁴⁷ For Boulez, Webern’s “way of thinking,” which “transcends notions of vertical and horizontal” introduces a qualitatively new conception of the musical *interval*, understood as a movement, which ultimately issues forth “a new mode of musical *being*.”⁴⁸ Deleuze and Guattari likewise emphasize how, in “smooth space” (a musical space free of striation, more about which below), the interval becomes ubiquitous; “everything become[s] interval, *intermezzo* ...”⁴⁹ Smooth space enables a qualitative shift in perception: instead of mapping a trajectory from fixed points, here “the stop follows from the trajectory; ... the interval is substance ... the line is therefore a vector, a direction and not a dimension ...”⁵⁰ For Deleuze and Guattari, the interval inhabits a kind of “middle, between things, interbeing, *intermezzo*,” producing a line that “breaks free of the vertical and horizontal as coordinates ... a block-line passes amid [*au milieu des*] sounds and propels itself by its own nonlocalizable middle [*milieu*].”⁵¹ The very movement outside of points and localizable coordinates forms a sound block, which, analogously with Boulez, ushers a qualitatively new mode of being: “The sound block is the *intermezzo*. It is a body without organs ...”⁵²

By way of Boulez’s text, then, Webern’s new conception of the musical interval, unleashed by his unique twelve-tone practice, is performatively mapped here onto a theory of rhizomatics. The interval becomes the interbeing; musical movement becomes the body without organs. This is a noteworthy philosophical revision of Webern’s compositional endeavor as it had been assessed in light of dialectics a few years earlier. For Theodor W. Adorno, the problem with

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 28.

⁴⁷ Boulez, *Notes of an Apprenticeship*, p. 149 (emphasis added).

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 227 (emphasis in original).

⁴⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 478.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid., pp. 25, 297.

⁵² Ibid., p. 297.

Webern's finely constructed rows is that they produce motivic unity automatically: "The ripest fruits of canonic imitation fall, as it were, of their own will into the lap of the composition."⁵³ The pre-compositional situation of Op. 24, for example, destroys the conditions for the possibility of dialectically driven development: the motivic unit, already mirrored on all sides, lacks the distinctiveness to issue an authentic synthesis with an independent formal logic. The music, altogether too consistent, becomes static. Adorno writes: "Thematic working-out extends itself over such minimal units that it virtually cancels itself out. The mere interval—functioning as a motivic unit—is so utterly without individual character that it no longer accomplishes the synthesis expected of it."⁵⁴ Adorno emphasizes the shrunken dimensions of motivic activity by drawing attention to the unexceptional sound of Webern's motifs. In Adorno's hearing, the abundance of thirds and minor seconds (interval classes 4, 3, and 1) in the music of Op. 24 would count as a willed denial of other motivic possibilities. By compressing the music's field of motivic play to fewer intervals than that of the music of the past, Webern's motifs sound impoverished and mechanical, indeed like "mere intervals." In so doing, Webern's pre-composition forecloses the genuinely historical antithesis between harmony and line required for dialectical overcoming. In contrast, for all their resistance to pre-compositional structures, to "any idea of pretraced destiny," Deleuze and Guattari paradoxically detect in the Webernian musical interval a destratified line of flight, a de-linking from punctual coordinates and an opening into a plane of consistency.⁵⁵ (Not surprisingly, *Mille Plateaux* freights a stinging critique of dialectics).

Mille Plateaux creatively adopts serial musical structure as a philosophical trope for thinking identity across strata—creating planes of consistency. Stratified systems resemble traditional tonal musical forms; they are coded whenever "horizontally there are linear causalities between elements; and, vertically, hierarchies of order between groupings; and, holding it all together in depth, a succession of framing forms ..."⁵⁶ Deleuze and Guattari unsubscribe from the very dialectical *agon* between succession and simultaneity upon which Adorno insists. In contrast, "consistent, self-consistent aggregates" resemble high modern serial music; they "consolidate ... heterogeneous elements ... as if a machinic phylum, a destratifying transversality ... freeing matter and tapping forces."⁵⁷ Deleuze and Guattari label conceptual spaces that transcend the hierarchies implied by dialectical oppositions (vertical, horizontal, etc.) *nomad*, or *smooth*. They offer a number of "models" to elaborate the contrast between "the smooth" and "the striated": technological, musical, maritime, mathematical, physical, aesthetic.⁵⁸

⁵³ Theodor W. Adorno, *Philosophy of Modern Music*, trans. A.G. Mitchell and W.V. Blomster, The Seabury Press, 1973, p. 110.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 13.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 335.

⁵⁷ Ibid. (emphasis in original).

⁵⁸ Ibid., pp. 474–500.

The terms themselves, however, are borrowed from Boulez's chapter in *Penser la musique aujourd'hui* discussing smooth and striated spaces in music.⁵⁹

In this chapter Boulez explores the "variable spaces, spaces of mobile definition capable of evolving (by mutation or progressive transformation) during the course of the work."⁶⁰ The variability of musical space leads Boulez to redefine the concept of the *continuum* as a kind of proto-plane of consistency. The continuum "is certainly not the transition 'effected' from one point in space to another (successive or instantaneous). The continuum is manifested by the possibility of partitioning space ... the dialectic between continuity and discontinuity thus involves the concept of partition; I would go so far as to say that continuum is this possibility, for it contains both the continuous and the discontinuous ..."⁶¹ Instead of identifying the continuum with some kind of musical continuity, Boulez here construes the continuum as the very possibility of partitioning musical space in various ways; the ability to gather heterogeneous elements (continuity, discontinuity, etc.) in a plane of consistency. Deleuze and Guattari likewise refer to music's capacity to partition its components in continuous variation as a "virtual cosmic continuum."⁶² Analogously, the "continuum," for Deleuze and Guattari, a "placing-in-variation ... without beginning or end," should "not be confused with the continuous or discontinuous character of the variable itself ..."⁶³ The difference between striated and smooth space thus depends on the space's mode of partitioning. For example, "frequency space may undergo two sorts of partition: the one, defined by a standard measure, will be regularly repeatable, the other, imprecise, or more exactly, undetermined."⁶⁴ Striated partitioning can be effected in various spheres: temperament, for example, 'striates' the music's pitch space, as does pulsation 'striate' its temporality, thereby offering localizable reference points for the ear. In contrast, where partitioning is undetermined, resulting in reference-free smooth space, the ear loses its bearings. Boulez likens this audible condition to the eye's failure to gauge distances on completely smooth surfaces. As a result, smooth space is less easily categorized than striated space. Smooth space can only be classified "in a more general fashion"; smooth space is known only by "the statistical distribution of the frequencies found within it."⁶⁵ In contrast, striated space can be additionally categorized into fixed and variable, straight and curved, focalized and non-focalized, regular and irregular, and so on, and these categories furthermore can intermingle with each other to various degrees. It is important to note, finally, that Boulez's analysis of musical spaces privileges music's mode of production/partitioning over either its sounding result or its social

⁵⁹ Boulez, *Boulez on Music Today*, pp. 83–98.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

⁶² Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 95.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp. 94–5.

⁶⁴ Boulez, *Boulez on Music Today*, p. 85.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

reception. Thus, even if smooth space actually resembles striated space in some specific musical context, its mode of partitioning, and hence of musical being, is qualitatively different.

A similar perceptual ambiguity exists between smooth and striated time. Although striated time is “pulsed” (grounded in a “referential system” that is a “function of chronometric time of greater or lesser delimitation, breadth or variability”) its actual sounding can be taken for smooth time.⁶⁶ And although smooth time is “amorphous” (without either “partition” or “module”) its actual sounding can be taken for striated time.⁶⁷ For example, “a static distribution in striated time will tend to give the impression of smooth time, whereas a differentiated and directed distribution in smooth time, especially when based on adjacent values, may easily be confused with the usual results of striated time.”⁶⁸ Again, the technique of music’s production ultimately defines the difference between smooth and striated time: “in smooth time, time is filled without counting; in striated time, time is filled by counting.”⁶⁹ As it is with Deleuze and Guattari’s plane of consistency, it is smooth time that paradoxically opens to the heterogeneity of limitless connection and thus mutation. In their discussion of the “technological model,” for example, Deleuze and Guattari develop an analogous contrast between, on the one hand, knitting and embroidery (both striated) and, on the other, crochet and patchwork (both smooth), on the basis of their respective modes of production. Embroidery, for instance, operates on the basis of “a central theme or motif.”⁷⁰ For all its complexity and variability embroidery nonetheless remains an inmate of a striated back-and-forth. Patchwork, in contrast, uses “piece-by-piece construction ... successive additions of fabric.”⁷¹ Thus patchwork relates to the “fabric of the rhizome” with its limitless conjunction “and ... and ... and ...,” which Deleuze and Guattari elaborate in the opening pages of *Mille Plateaux*.⁷² Analogously, knitting needles interweave, producing striated space; while crochet produces a smooth space running in all directions.⁷³

We find in the smooth spaces of patchwork and crochet the “logic of the AND,” which ultimately overthrows ontology and nullifies endings and beginnings.⁷⁴ As “an amorphous collection of juxtaposed pieces that can be joined together in an infinite number of ways,” patchwork thus eludes the “false conception of voyage and movement” implied by “making a clean slate, starting or beginning again

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 88.

⁶⁷ Ibid., pp. 88, 93.

⁶⁸ Ibid., pp. 92–3.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 94.

⁷⁰ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 476.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid., p. 25.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 476.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 25.

from ground zero.”⁷⁵ This being “between things, interbeing,” a transversal always and already *en route*, defines smooth space. The philosophers summarize their discussion of smooth and striated musical space and time thus: “The smooth is the continuous variation, continuous development of form; it is the fusion of harmony and melody in favor of the production of properly rhythmic values, the pure act of the drawing of a diagonal across the vertical and the horizontal.”⁷⁶ And, in the final analysis, it is music in *Mille Plateaux* that time and again proffers such planes of consistency. In “Memories of a Plan(e) Maker,” Deleuze and Guattari advance Boulez’s “nonpulsed time for a floating music” and John Cage’s “fixed sound plane” as exemplary instances of rhizomatics. Such a plane “affirms a process against all structure and genesis, a floating time against pulsed time or tempo, experimentation against any kind of interpretation, and in which silence and sonorous rest also marks the absolute state of movement.”⁷⁷ This is music as rhizomatics.

On the face of it, Deleuze and Guattari’s interpretations of certain strands of modernism in music do not line up with widespread views about it. In particular, the curious way in which Webern’s 12-tone technique, albeit mediated by a Boulezian optic, is enlisted to buttress a philosophy of heterogeneous rhizomatics, which in turn is linked to a politics of multiplicity, is far from obvious. In recent musicological commentaries, for example, Webern’s radical musical abstractions are figured as willfully denying music’s irreducible social component; the music’s structural autonomy is figured as dogmatically repressing interpretative plurality; the patterned unity of his row forms is said to constrain the music’s subjective dimension; and, to the extent that it is linked to the political sphere, the music is linked to totalitarianism. Thus, Rose Rosengard Subotnik demonstrates how the music’s radical autonomy fails to “reintegrate [its] values with some larger and present [social] context.”⁷⁸ Likewise, Alan Street shows how Webern’s particular brand of “aesthetic unity” sustains an unswerving, but false, commitment to “the cause of formal integration” in music analysis today.⁷⁹ Adorno, as briefly discussed above, associates the hyper-intergration of Webern’s brand of 12-tone music with reified and undialectical thought. And Richard Taruskin draws attention to Webern’s totalitarian tendencies, down to his “enthusiastic embrace of Hitler.”⁸⁰ Under these readings, the “smoothness” of Webern’s musical spaces (“drawing a diagonal across

⁷⁵ Ibid., pp. 25, 476.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 478.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 267.

⁷⁸ Rose Rosengard Subotnik, *Developing Variations: Style and Ideology in Western Music*, University of Minnesota Press, 1991, p. 271.

⁷⁹ Alan Street, “Superior Myths, Dogmatic Allegories: The Resistance to Musical Unity,” in A. Krims (ed.), *Musical Ideology: Resisting the Aesthetic*, G&B Arts International, 1998, pp. 57, 59.

⁸⁰ Richard Taruskin, Review: “Back to Whom? Neoclassicism as Ideology,” *19th Century Music* 16, 1993, p. 299.

the vertical and the horizontal”) would be the smoothness of compressed homogeneity instead of that of expanding heterogeneity; the “consistency” of its musical planes would be the consistency of unity and uniformity instead of the consistency of thickening intensities and de-stratified multiplicities. How can this be?

Arguably the shift in Boulez’s conception of serial technique after 1951 accounts for this curious alliance between Webern, and Deleuze and Guattari. In other words, Webern’s compositional endeavor is represented in *Mille Plateaux* as a function of Boulez’s peculiar mediation of it in the context of post-war Europe. In Boulez’s post-*Structures* serial works, that is, the row no longer functions as an integral structure but rather as a proliferating machine. Instead of deferring to the unifying internal elements of the series, Boulez employs the row as a source of smaller cells, which burgeon along independently conceived trajectories. Here we find an asymmetrical and fragmentary partitioning of the basic row forms, dispersed by diverse “multiplications” (pitch and/or rhythmic cells infused with the properties of other cells), which in turn proffer musical networks further modified by “elisions,” “tropes” and “parentheses.” In the manner of Deleuze and Guattari, Boulez employs a kind of “coalescent” logic, “linking rhythmic structures to serial structures by common organizations, which will also include other characteristics of sound: intensity, mode of attack, timbre. Then to enlarge that morphology into a coalescent rhetoric.”⁸¹ Boulez thereby argues for musical transformations in terms of coalescing characteristics of sound; transformations of musical strata, one might say, on a plane of consistency; a “hyperinstrument.”⁸² On the principle of coalescence, Deleuze and Guattari likewise describe Boulez’s music as the “*fusion* of harmony and melody ... drawing ... a diagonal across the vertical and the horizontal,” and Messiaen’s music as the presentation of “multiple chromatic durations in *coalescence*”; “a diagonal for a cosmos.”⁸³

The *locus classicus* for this kind of compositional practice is probably Boulez’s aptly titled *Le Marteau sans maître* (*The Hammer without a Master*) of 1952–54. Based on poems by the surrealist poet René Char, with images that combine extreme chaos and violence with control and order, *Le Marteau* is an exploration of the dialectic between a brute and arbitrary authority principle and freedom. Like Hegel’s *agon* between master and slave, it was as if total control had recapitulated total randomness (freedom in John Gray’s radical sense).⁸⁴ There are structural reasons why these antitheses were considered collapsed in this compositional system. The serial operations employed in the work are practically undecipherable—there is no hope of “hearing” them. The music theorist Lev

⁸¹ Boulez, *Notes of an Apprenticeship*, p. 151.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 197.

⁸³ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 478, 309 (emphasis added).

⁸⁴ John Gray writes, “We are forced to live as if we are free”; without the knowledge, that is, that grounds the possibility of real choice. John Gray, *Straw Dogs*, Farrar Straus and Giroux, 2007, p. 110.

Koblyakov first described the labyrinthine harmonic conception (multiplications, etc.) of *Le Marteau* in 1977, two full decades after its completion.

It is important to note that this kind of analytic uncovering misses the point, to some extent, of *Le Marteau*. In Boulez's lexicon, serial syntheses should resist "the aspect of a reflex" encouraged by the pre-compositional apparatus; it should seek out instead the "unforeseeable," the "unexamined," the "unperceived."⁸⁵ Boulez distinguishes between composition as "bookkeeping" (carefully observing the demands of the row) and composition as "free play" (which "projects itself toward the unperceived").⁸⁶ As if to enact these unpredictable turns in the flow of his own writing, Boulez's *Notes of an Apprenticeship* are frequently interspersed with unexpected turns, revisions, and reversals. For example, in his essay "Eventually . . ." (1952) Boulez interrupts his formal descriptions of pitch/duration structures and their multiplication processes with sentences that veer away from the guiding logic of the argument. In mid-essay he writes, "After this theoretical essay, which will appear to many as the glorification of intellectualism as against instinct, I shall finish. The unexpected again: there is no creation except in the unforeseeable becoming necessity."⁸⁷ Boulez's insistence on harnessing the unforeseeable maps readily onto the "unthinkable, invisible, nonsonorous forces" harnessed by the music of *Mille Plateaux*.⁸⁸ Under Boulez's creative gaze, the row has been re-conceptualized as Deleuzian "patchwork"; the musical series has become rhizome, a "generalized chromaticism."⁸⁹

The Trouble with Deleuze and Guattari's Musical Mappings

Nonetheless, Deleuze and Guattari's concept of a generalized chromaticism—"placing elements of any nature in continuous variation [in] an operation that will perhaps give rise to new distinctions, but takes none as final and has none in advance"—is not without its paradoxes when placed alongside the music upon which it is modeled. While Boulez's music and Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy both elaborate the coalescence of vertical and horizontal dimensions in terms of diagonal lines of flight, the unhinging of the interval (as interbeing) from historically sedimented coordinates, and the destratification of planes in quest of smooth space/time, their respective attitudes to heterogeneity are in fact vividly contrasting. Deleuze and Guattari would place elements "of any nature" in continuous variation; Boulez seeks out strictly "musical" elements for such variation. "This, then is the fundamental question," writes Boulez, "the founding of musical systems upon exclusively musical criteria, rather than proceeding from

⁸⁵ Boulez, *Notes of an Apprenticeship*, pp. 172, 174.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 172, 181.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 173.

⁸⁸ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 343.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 476, 97.

numerical, graphic or psycho-physiological symbols to a musical codification (a kind of transcription) that has not the slightest concept in common with them.”⁹⁰ Here Boulez emphasizes the radical autonomy of music, its non-reconcilable difference from externalities: number, graph, psychology, physiology. In contrast, Deleuze and Guattari’s work is radically inter-disciplinary, almost anarchic in its diverse mappings (from Sylvano Bussotti to Noam Chomsky, from geometric fractal to Dogon egg), its thousand plateaus of inquiry. Far from rejecting them on grounds of non-reconciliation, Deleuze and Guattari, encourage mappings across non-identical fields (conceptual stratum as lobster’s pincer; Messiaen’s music as becoming-bird): “[The map] fosters connections between fields, the removal of blockages on bodies without organs, the maximum opening of bodies without organs onto a plane of consistency. It is itself a part of the rhizome. The map is open and connectable in all of its dimensions, it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification.”⁹¹ For Deleuze and Guattari, the map modifies the content of the mapped—“becoming-child ... is not ... the becoming of the child.”⁹² The map is the rhizome, the metamorphosis produced by a line of flight.

It is an irony that Deleuze and Guattari’s description of the map as rhizome precisely derives from Boulez’s descriptions of high modernist serial procedure, operating on the basis of detachable partitions that can be individually modified, reversed, multiplied. Yet Boulez emphasizes the importance in musical composition of “making sure that all forks, twists and turns are integrated into the context,” ensuring that musical lines of flight are recouped in some kind of unified structure. This is a subtle point, for, on the one hand, it insists on the unity of experience (not unlike Deleuze and Guattari’s planes of consistency), and yet, on the other, it seems to constrain its operational field of referents aprioristically to pure, unified musical elements: a policed nomadism? It is possible of course that Boulez’s musical mappings are less unified (and his ‘purely musical’ elements less pure) than the rhetoric to support them suggests. In fact, Deleuze and Guattari’s distinction between “tracing” and “map” accurately captures the contrast between the more obviously unified 12-tone practice of Webern (at least as Adorno conceives it) and the more nomadic post-*Structures* serialism of Boulez (at least as Deleuze conceives it): “The map has to do with performance, whereas the tracing always involves an alleged ‘competence’ ... schizoanalysis rejects any idea of pretraced destiny, whatever name is given to it—divine, anagogic, historical, economic, structural ...”⁹³ Where Webern’s carefully structured 12-tone rows arguably predestine wall-to-wall motivic unity, “always com[ing] back ‘to the same’,” Boulez’s serial transformations annul unity by splitting in several diverse directions, ever-relocating, nomadic.⁹⁴

⁹⁰ Boulez, *Boulez on Music Today*, p. 30.

⁹¹ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 12.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 344 (emphasis in the original).

⁹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 12–13.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

Still, Boulez repeatedly insists on a certain non-coalescent purity of musical language. In his critique of early integral serialism, for example, Boulez protests the nomadic blending of disciplinary spheres: “When the serial principle was first applied to all the components of sound, we were thrown bodily, or rather headlong, into a cauldron of figures, recklessly mixing mathematics with elementary arithmetic ...”⁹⁵ Boulez’s desire for non-mixed, purely musical, material leads him to posit a musical logic of “over-all and hierarchic neutrality”: He writes, “If ... one gives each sound an absolutely neuter *a priori*—as is the case with serial material—the context brings up, at each occurrence of the same sound, a different individualization of that sound.”⁹⁶ For Boulez, transformation and proliferation thus *depend* on neutralizing sound pre-compositionally. This is why he regards Webern’s absolute musical interval, unhinged from the coordinates of tonal harmony and counterpoint, as a moment of such signal historical importance: the diagonal not as rhizomic multiple but as eviscerated neuter. And, in Boulez’s view, this aprioristically non-aligned sound (premature plane of consistency?) sponsors the music’s ability to voyage into unguessed-at dimensions.

Is this the refrain required for deterritorialization? Probably not exactly. Webern’s historic achievement was, for Boulez, to annul history. Boulez’s exclusively musical material lays the foundation for a kind of utopian composition from nowhere. Boulez aspires to “strip music of its accumulated dirt and give it structure,” he states: “It was like Descartes’ ‘Cogito, ergo sum.’ I momentarily suppressed inheritance. I started from the fact that I was thinking and went on to construct a musical language from scratch.”⁹⁷ Here we find the Boulezian dream of a neutralized, non-historical sound of multiplications, as against the historically ‘bastardized’ sound of nomadic mergings and mappings.⁹⁸ Schoenberg is dead.⁹⁹

Boulez’s language of absolutes (history annulled, sound neutered, Schoenberg deceased, composition *ex nihilo*) carries awkwardly with the nomadism of Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophy. The very idea of “making a clean slate” is regarded from the start with hostility and contempt by the latter: “starting or beginning again from ground zero, seeking a beginning or a foundation—all imply a false conception of voyage and movement (a conception that is methodical, pedagogical, initiatory, symbolic) ...”¹⁰⁰ For Deleuze and Guattari, the rhizome is “always in the middle, between things, interbeing, *intermezzo*”; it establishes a logic of conjunction (“and ... and ... and”) that aims to “overthrow ontology, do away with foundations, nullify endings and beginnings.”¹⁰¹ It is noteworthy that both Boulez, and Deleuze and Guattari seek to abolish sedimented historical modes of thought from their

⁹⁵ Boulez, *Boulez on Music Today*, p. 25.

⁹⁶ Boulez, *Notes on an Apprenticeship*, p. 175.

⁹⁷ Joan Peyser, *Boulez: Composer, Conductor, Enigma*, Cassell, 1976, p. 63.

⁹⁸ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 105.

⁹⁹ Boulez, *Notes on an Apprenticeship*, p. 268.

¹⁰⁰ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 25.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

respective projects, but where Boulez posits the diagonalized interval as neutral starting point (a monad), Deleuze and Guattari posit the same as always-already *en route* (a nomad). This is Boulez's particular "freedom ... through discipline"; a carefully regulated antimemory—as against the hybridized nomadism of Deleuze and Guattari.¹⁰²

Enforced Deterritorialization: A Boulezian Century?

Does Boulez's serial technique prefigure the fundamental features of our world today? And does Deleuze and Guattari's particular reading of Boulez illuminate this uncanny resonance? In his book *The Age of Extremes: A History of the World 1914–1991*, Eric Hobsbawm notices the curious way the arts and aesthetics demonstrate an uncanny aptitude for prophetic foresight. "Why," he states, "fashion designers ... succeed in anticipating the shape of things to come better than professional predictors, is one of the most obscure questions in history."¹⁰³ Hobsbawm notices that by 1914 "virtually everything that can take shelter under the broad and rather undefined canopy of 'modernism' was already in place: cubism; expressionism; futurism; pure abstraction in painting; functionalism and flight from ornament in architecture; the abandonment of tonality in music; the break with tradition in literature."¹⁰⁴ For Hobsbawm, "the avant-garde revolution in the arts had already taken place before the world whose collapse it expressed actually went to pieces."¹⁰⁵ Modernism, for all its internalized self-reference (a magnified focus on its respective media, etc.) is paradoxically peculiarly predictive of the various technologies of death, and so on, to come. It is for this reason that the cultural historian should pay close attention to the evolving aesthetic modalities of art in the context of particular political conjunctures.

When it comes to Boulez's reception, the fairly predictable critical association of serialism (via Webern) with a kind of hermetic totalitarianism (the music's mathematics as anti-social hyper-integration, etc.) has given way in more recent times to a more sober, and more empirical, critical move to pin serialism and dodecaphony to the politics of the Cold War. This critique confronts the paradox that serialism's rarefied artistic retreat from commercial market values actually met with such enormous commercial success and attendant publicity in the early 1950s and beyond.¹⁰⁶ While Harry Truman still articulated a view held by many

¹⁰² Boulez, *Boulez on Music Today*, p. 15 and Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 21, 297.

¹⁰³ Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: A History of the World 1914–1991*, Vintage, 1994, p. 178.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 178–9.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 181.

¹⁰⁶ See, for example, Frances Stonor Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters*, The New Press, 1999 and Serge Gilbert, *How New York Stole*

Americans that linked experimental art to degenerate or subversive impulses, dodecaphony and abstract expressionism also held a contrary virtue. As a tool for foreign policy, these artistic forms spoke to a specifically anti-communist ideology, of freedom and free enterprise. Non-tonal, non-figurative and politically silent, it was the very antithesis to socialist realism. In this argument, radical art—whose explicit politics can be read as an attempt to manage or evade repetition, sentimentality, and historical reference—paradoxically, (i.e. *falsely*) parades as capitalist propaganda.

What *this* critique misses (modernism as the *false* mask of capitalism) is the *truly* uncanny prophetic resonance (in Hobsbawm's sense) of post-war radicality with the digital information network that emerged at the end of the twentieth century. Here the ridiculous argument that serialism is totalitarian (where every element has its predictable place in the series, etc.) actually comes closer to the truth, but as its inversion: serialism is totalitarianism-inside-out, a network in which *nothing* has a predictable place. This is a terrain in which the series' fixed elements are mixed, in Deleuze and Guattari's terms, into concrete; or, restated in Marxist terms, a terrain in which all that is solid has been synthesized into air. Is *this* not the crisis facing us in the twenty-first century—an age of what I would call *enforced* deterritorialization, where generalized digitization coupled with economic risk and unpredictability are naturalized as everyday? Perhaps this is why Slavoj Žižek regards Jackson Pollock as *the* Deleuzian painter: “does his action-painting not directly render this flow of becoming, the impersonal-unconscious life energy, the encompassing field of virtuality out of which determinate paintings can actualize themselves, this field of pure intensities with no meaning to be unearthed by interpretation?”¹⁰⁷ It is here that one must issue a warning about the affordances of Deleuze and Guattari's transmedial thinking and point instead to the limits of their mappings and minglings. By freely mapping across media—from dodecaphony to rhizome, from musical interval to philosophical intermezzo, from smooth musical space to plane of consistency, and so on—the philosophers ignore certain prominent features of Boulez's project.

For Boulez, serialism must project itself toward risk and unpredictability. This is the terrain of perpetual crisis—the “unforeseeable,” the “unexemplated,” the “unperceived.” Such “free play” opposes the “bookkeeping,” which carefully observes the demands of the row—its combinatorial properties, and so on—to the point of becoming *obligatory*: “There is no creation except in the unforeseeable becoming necessity.”¹⁰⁸ This is the music of calculated goalpost-shifting, yielding series' whose harmonic networks elude the shrewdest decoding. This is smooth time—filled without counting; smooth space—filled without *accounting*; the machinic generation of unpredictability and rhizome. In short, what Deleuze and

the Idea of Modern Art, The University of Chicago Press, 1983.

¹⁰⁷ Slavoj Žižek, *Organs without Bodies: On Deleuze and Consequences*, Routledge, 2004, p. 5.

¹⁰⁸ Boulez, *Notes of an Apprenticeship*, p. 173.

Guattari miss in their conceptualization of Boulez's production is the fact that maximal uncertainty and opacity requires, as a condition for their possibility, an elusive asubjective algorithm (a non-human actor to generate the network). In other words, Boulez's quasi-mathematical multiplications (by definition unhearable) are the condition for the possibility of post-serial "rhizomic" flight. These serial structures involve two-tiered modalities of construction: on the one hand, the generative multiplication processes and, on the other, the unpredictable fields of finely proliferated networks proffered thereby; the pre-emptive, and highly centralized, algorithmic engine on the one hand, and the beautifully dispersed, but incoherent, arrays on the other; the inner workings versus the outer appearances: in sum, the technical structure of *magic*.

But is not the argus-eyed and micro-capillaried digital network, its algorithmic surveillance attuned to ever-finer gradations of *resonance* between consumer desire and niche market production, the very lifeblood of capital today? The proliferation of "Web 2.0" "social" software, and "social networking sites" (Wikipedia, MySpace, YouTube, Foursquare, Flickr, Facebook, Twitter, YouPorn, LinkedIn, etc.) are platforms for supplying and storing personal data, which in turn are systematically analyzed and used to target personalized advertising to users. Quite apart from the wall-to-wall electronic surveillance that can actualize totalitarian elements in society with but the smallest tilt of logical angle, is the user-friendly network not caught precisely in the simple structure of this magic? *Transparently*, the experience of "new participatory architectures of the Web" (which Yochai Benkler's describes as a dispersed creative commons) is tethered, *opaquely* (i.e. digitized in a minefield of privacy "agreements"), to the algorithmic harvesting machine, which monitors and aggregates user-generated personal and intellectual information to companies controlling mainstream platforms, thereby delivering power to the hands of technology designers and their financiers.

Increasingly, online information sources, such as Wikipedia, no less than *MMogs* (Massive Multiple User Online Games), such as Second Life, are grounded in content that is mounted entirely by users. Benkler's terms take on an ominous tone: the "costs of production" in such volunteer-driven collaboration, he says, "is trivial."¹⁰⁹ In short, peer production becomes *immaterial*; or, again, all that is solid melts into air. Given the relative reliability and robustness of open source software, the exploitation of decentralized, non-proprietary collaboration is taking ever more systematic forms. Netflix, the online movie rental company, for example, has shifted aspects of its marketing research away from in-house computer engineers, programmers and statisticians (on payroll) to the collaborative commons (in competition): In quest of a recommendation software that could predict customers' tastes in movies 10 per cent better than their in-house software Cinematch, for instance, the company offered a million-dollar prize for the winning team. Aside from the winners (known as Bellkor, a global alliance of some 30 members), three years of labor, involving thousands of teams, from over 180 countries, missed

¹⁰⁹ Yochai Benkler, *The Wealth of Networks*, Yale University Press, 2006, p. 54.

the mark. In the words of Greg McAlpin, a software engineer (and leader of the runner-up team Ensemble): “Out of thousands you have only two that succeeded. The big lesson for me was that most of those collaborations don’t work” (*New York Times*, September 21, 2009). The simple calculus of such crowdsourcing is startling: Netflix paid for 0.1 per cent (at most) of the total labor expended on the project. Of those paid, each person received \$11,111.11 per year on a three-year limited term contract. In return, Netflix obtained a 10 per cent improvement in their predictive modeling algorithm. Benkler’s rhizome-like utopianism is disturbingly to the point: Like a hammer without a master, these hive-like collaborative efforts do not fall under the commanding attentions of the managerial class. (The question today is: Who can get lucky enough to command such attention?) The link between Boulezian serialist practice and late capitalism, then, is to be found in this mystified process of desubjectification, in which mastery and domination are hidden; high modernist serialism would in this sense have announced the future we are now living, as (apparently) unrelated innovations in the modes of control and domination. Boulezian serialism is the musical laboratory for this now generalized regime of (hidden, mystified) social control, a *mode d’emploi* for corporate cost reduction and its propaganda.

Likewise, Chevron, for example, launched an interactive online game (“Energyville”) in October 2009 that dispenses with even this 0.1 per cent marginal cost: In “Energyville” participants are “put in charge of meeting the energy demands of a city,” in a game whose rules are grounded in the Economist Intelligence Unit’s “assessment of global facts and trends obtained from numerous credible sources.”¹¹⁰ Thus Chevron, reporting record profits in 2008, can address complex scientific and business predicaments and challenges in the context of crowdsourcing—the rhizomic exploitation of online play-for-no-pay. There is a small paradoxical truth about the guiding logic of Chevron’s game embedded in the small print description on the webpage: Although its underlying algorithms model reality as accurately as possible, the description reads, “the game does not take into account the amount of time and investment needed to replace existing infrastructure with your choices.” The lack of account-taking on the side of execution (actively encouraging the gamer’s disinterest in challenges pertaining to labor) mirrors the lack of account-taking on the side of design and planning (gathered by free labor). This is a closed circuit of abstracted collective energy and effort, actively shrugging off the precariousness of working conditions even in virtual space, if not gesturing toward the outright elimination of paid work itself.

Arjun Appadurai’s recent diagnosis of what he calls “ecstatic capitalism” is relevant here.¹¹¹ Where earlier modes of capitalism were grounded in the calculative ethic of Protestant thought (the values of methodicality, discipline and sobriety

¹¹⁰ www.willyoujoinus.com/energyville.

¹¹¹ Arjun Appadurai, “The Entrepreneurial Ethic and the Spirit of Financialism: Some Weberian Thoughts on the Global Meltdown,” unpublished talk delivered at the Institute for Public Knowledge, New York University, February 23, 2009.

grounded in double-entry book-keeping, and so on), capitalism at the end of the twentieth century is characterized by the genie-like multiplication of hybridized financial instruments of opaque value, which intensify the role of speculation, optimization, chance and choice. Does this new spirit of financialism not find an uncanny resonance in the essential features of Boulez's *Le Marteau sans maître*?: the genie-like multiplication of hybridized pitch and rhythm sets of opaque serial value, which in turn intensify the experience of pure musical chance. Appadurai calls the increasing focus on navigating risk via probabilistic thinking *magic*. By magic, he does not mean the dominance of mysterious or mystical thinking, but the "irrational reliance on a *technical* procedure" to solve an economic problem.¹¹² Thus magical thinking, for Appadurai, is linked to the spread of agonistic risk. And thus we return to Deleuze, via Spinoza: like all miracles, Boulezian mystification must be subjected to the Spinozian critique of miracles as quite simply the machine-like functioning of the ideological itself, hidden by hegemonic power behind the curtain of "magical" explanations or structures: "miracles," Spinoza wrote, "signify nothing other than something whose natural cause cannot be explained."¹¹³

If we draw Appadurai's analysis into a dialectical confrontation with the constitutive converse of risk, namely planning, we are faced with another dimension of magic: the appearance of risk, the reality of order. Indeed, if there is a political lesson in Boulez's *Le Marteau* today, it lies in the musical structure, which—like the surrealist poem by René Char which it exemplifies—combines extreme chaos and violence with *control* and *order*. The radical split between form and content grounds Boulez's peculiar sado-masochism at the dialectical knife edge between a brute and arbitrary authority and randomness. The lesson in Boulez is not therefore to be found in Deleuze and Guattari's emancipatory reading of it—the intermedial blending of all dialectics into the concrete mixer of deterritorialization—but rather in the two-tiered dialectical gap between hearability and unhearability; between visibility and invisibility; between the algorithmic apparatus of the insider, on the one hand, and the chaotic, seemingly decentralized, outer appearance, on the other. The dialectics of what I've called *enforced deterritorialization* echoes the irreducible uncertainty produced by what Žižek describes as being "compelled to make a decision in a situation which remains opaque to our basic condition," such that we can, in the end, understand Boulez as giving musical form to the masochistic subjection to the terrifying, ineffable Kantian law, the law which is itself the (magical/ideological) law of late capital.¹¹⁴

Does the 2008–09 financial crisis not betray the constitutive divide between the insiders who know the real numbers and the public (municipalities, insurance companies, individual traders, pension funds, etc.) who must act on the abstract

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Benedict de Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, trans. Michael Silverthorne and Jonathan Israel, Cambridge University Press, 2007.

¹¹⁴ Slavoj Žižek, *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce*, Verso, 2009, p. 63.

flight-lines of graphs and charts alone? Are the outsiders not the fools that rush in where the devils have hedgingly tread? Far from the transparency implied by the aura of the word ‘deregulation,’ does the recent wave of actual deregulation, especially the revisions of underwriting standards (whereby a financial provider gauges the eligibility of a lender to receive equity, capital, credit, etc.) for initial public stock offerings (IPOs) or for mortgage lending, for example, not precipitate the opacity with which these debt obligations can be traded? With the passing of the Commodity Futures Modernization Act in 2000, for example, financial institutions were no longer obliged to disclose derivative trades. Thus collateralized debt obligations (instituted as hybridized instruments of risk *reduction*) became the very vehicles for the intensification of risk. Through techniques of ‘laddering’ and ‘bundling’ underlying assets into esoteric diversified portfolios, powerful financial insiders manipulate share prices of packaged debt, shielding from view their real value.¹¹⁵

For all the rhizome-like speculative movement of share prices, the system is grounded in a two-tiered asymmetry: The decentralized outer appearance of risk for the many (who are left second-guessing the second-guessing); versus the predictable profiteering, yielded by high-frequency trading algorithms, for the few. As Rolfe Winkler writes: “Main Street still owns much of the risk while Wall Street gets all of the profit.”¹¹⁶ On the topic of the Enron bankruptcy scandal of January 2002, Žižek echoes the point: “those who did have the power to intervene in the situation (namely, the top managers), minimized their risks by cashing in their stocks and options before the bankruptcy. It is indeed true that we live in a society of risky choices, but it is one in which only some do the choosing, while others do the risking. ... The asymmetry gives an a priori advantage to Wall Street.”¹¹⁷ Herein lies the strange reverberation of *Le Marteau sans maître* for postmodern capitalism: for the insiders, an algorithm, a visible plan; for the outsiders, a rhizome, blind fate. On the one side, we find the hammer’s invisible master; on the other, the hammer without a master. Has the century become Boulezian?

Notes

This essay elaborates and expands upon arguments made in two recent articles: “Musical Modernism in the Thought of *Mille Plateaux*, and its Twofold Politics,”

¹¹⁵ Giorgio Agamben’s insight that the law creates the “state of exception” is relevant here. In this context, the topological structure of “*Being-outside, and yet belonging*” points to a generalized state of (economic) exception—a kind of Boulezian compositional law; or, in Agamben’s words, a “law without a law”. See Agamben, *State of Exception*, trans. Kevin Attell, The University of Chicago Press, 2005, pp. 35 and 39.

¹¹⁶ Cited in Frank Rich, “Goldman Sachs Can Spare You a Dime,” *New York Times*, October 18, 2009.

¹¹⁷ Žižek, *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce*, p. 13.

Perspectives of New Music, 2009, Vol. 46, No. 2, Summer 2008; and “Music in the Thought of Deconstruction / Deconstruction in the Thought of Music” (*Muzikološki Zbornik / Musicological Annual XLI*, Vol. 2 (Special Edition *Glasba in Destrukcija / Music and Deconstruction*), 2005, 81–104. Sections have been reproduced here with permission. I would like to thank Nick Nesbitt and Brian Hulse for their astute readings of and insightful comments on previous drafts of this paper. These have deeply enriched the argument.

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