II. ASPIRATION CORNER

Playing the Political: The Role of Improvisation in Deleuze and Guattari

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Abstract: Musical improvisation poses a complex set of issues, challenging how agency and action is ordinarily conceived. Similarly, with its aptitude for variation, improvisors are also concerned with bringing about the new as a means of resistance. I contend that these issues are reflected in Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*. While they propound an ontology of difference in interrelated notions of strata, milieux, refrains, territories, assemblages and a pre-agential metaphysics, they make numerous ethical demands. To resolve this tension, I propose improvisation as the nexus between action and wider events, a mechanism that increases agency.

This article offers a reinterpretation of the Deleuze and Guattari's definition of improvisation. While Deleuze and Guattari liken improvisation to the third dynamism of the refrain, the movement of deterritorialization, insofar that it is creative, improvisation involves a reterritorialization. However, this is a particular kind of reterritorialization that develops an attunement with the World. Imbricating issues of novelty, agency and political action, this serves to reinscribe the importance of improvisation in *A Thousand Plateaus.* Improvisors are take up a political project; learning about their collective constitution, they continually harmonize, differentiate and reharmonize themselves to a community. Improvisation is the mechanism by which improvisors connect and differentiate preexisting materials, the variation of musical materials opening avenues to new ways of thinking.

Keywords: Deleuze, Improvisation, Politics, Creative Resistance, Agency, Collectivity

Introduction:

With its spontaneity a musician that improvises cannot have a clearly defined plan of what they will perform. Because of this, sometimes, improvisors are not offered the same opportunities for rehearsal. The initial con-

fusion at an improvisor's need to prepare for performance denies the difficulty of its practice – taking root in one of two derisive intuitions. On the one hand, given its spontaneity, improvisation is thought to be an accidental happening in which the improvisor has minimal control over what will be performed. On the other hand, the music performed is thought to be an intentional outpouring – improvisation being a mechanism that offers some kind of primitive and unbridled freedom.[1] Against these suppositions, this article argues that improvisation is purposive and that the difficulty of its performance lies in cultivating the conditions in which an improvisor can open themselves to transformation.

Musical improvisation cannot be too chaotic or too well-defined. Listeners expect to be able to follow the music but also expect to be surprised. This forms an aesthetic paradox – should a performance cohere too well, appearing rehearsed, seems not to constitute an improvisation because it does not sound like it is spontaneously produced.[2] Exposing the risks an improvisor faces, of falling into noise and playing what has already come before, describes an interrelationship between novelty, creation, and resistance. As such, improvisation, and particularly jazz improvisation, is often taken as an exemplar of consistency and variation.

Clearly, improvisors do practice – and besides their technical facility as instrumentalists, they are skilled at improvising. Improvised performances are not incoherent ramblings, with its practitioners maintaining aesthetic goals. The problem of improvisation lies in generating a space in which improvisors can open musical material, their trained habits, and their goals to transformation in a way that is not chaotic. Improvisation requires intense preparation but is modified to suit a dynamic performance environment filled with unforeseen interjections. A pure sense of spontaneity or novelty alone renders improvisation impossible. Rather, improvisors rely on their trained behaviour to cultivate and navigate a particular kind of uncertainty. While they might use their skilled behaviour to make sense of unexpected interruptions to a performance, they cannot dogmatically repeat something that has come before. While its performance is enabled by preexisting musical elements

[1] Jeremy Lane, "Theorising performance, performing theory: Jacques Derrida and Ornette Coleman at the Parc de la Villette", *French Cultural Studies*, 24:3 (2007), 319.

[2] Alessandro Bertinetto, "The Aesthetic Paradox of Improvisation (and its Solution)", *Proceedings of the European Society for Aesthetics,* edited by Vitor Moura and Connell Vaughan (2021), 14.

and structures, the variation and spontaneity of improvisation opens it to unforeseen and contingent interjections.

In my view, the same problem of creation and resistance runs parallel in the geophilosophy of Deleuze and Guattari. Janae Sholtz aptly highlights that with the term geophilosophy Deleuze and Guattari dislocate philosophy's anthropocentric centre and instead link ontology with concrete social formations.[3] As such, their philosophical system of stratification, insofar that it describes how differential milieux intersect, cohere and evolve in the operations of territorialization, deterritorialization and reterritorialization, carries political weight. That is, as much as these are ontological concepts that explain the relative stability and transformation and becoming of entities, these are operations that detail how social formations can be changed. For these philosophers of difference, territorialization is of vital importance, explaining how differential milieux produce and hold together where variation precedes the fixity of a particular form. It describes a process of hierarchization and stabilization. Conversely, deterritorialization describes the disarticulation and dislocation of milieux from an assemblage.

Given that territorialization, deterritorialization and reterritorialization describe the intersection and interlocking of disparate milieux, there is an issue of how entangled assemblages are. If deterritorialization describes the transformation of already existing milieux, at what point is a novel assemblage engendered? Deleuze and Guattari's system of stratification present a monism: diverse instances of the same, rather than explanations of the proliferation of difference.[4] Similarly, if deterritorialized lines of flight are always taken up in a reterritorialization, it is unclear what means of escape or resistance deterritorialization offers. There is a tension between what Deleuze and Guattari describe as a pre-agential but social ontology, and their ethical imperatives to "make oneself a body-without-organs", to "become-other", and to become imperceptible".[5]

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[3] Janae Sholtz, "Intervals of Resistance: Being True to the Earth in the Light of the Anthropocene", *Interrogating the Anthropocene: Ecology, Aestehtics, Pedagogy, and the Future in Question,* edited by Jan Jagodzinski (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2018), 175.

[4] As Adorno writes, "Put bluntly, closed systems are bound to be finished" *Negative Dialectics* (London: Routledge, 1973), 27.

[5] Sean Bowden offers an artful analysis of this tension in "Assembling agency: expression, action and ethics in Deleuze and Guattari's A Thousand Plateaus", *Southern Journal of Philosophy,* 58: 383.

In my view, Deleuze and Guattari are sensitive to these issues of agency, given that they tie their discussion of resistance and creation together in *What is Philosophy?* They write, "We lack creation. We lack resistance to the present. The creation of concepts calls for a future form, for a new earth and people who do not yet exist. … Art and philosophy converge at this point" **Error! Reference source not found.**. It is important to remember that difference is ontologically primary for Deleuze and Guattari. They distinguish difference from diverse instances of the same. This distinction is crucial because diversity will not generate new ways of thinking, but already reinscribes the dogmatic image of thought. At the most, this would simply invert an existing hierarchy, rather than interrogate why the hierarchy exists at all. As such, in this call to resist the present, they do not wish to reinstate another version of the same social order, but to create new diagrams of the transversal relations of these hierarchies. Resistance is artistic because it involves creativity. In describing the convergence of art and philosophy, Deleuze and Guattari insinuate that art encourages its spectators to think differently, to be creative themselves. Yet, it remains to be explained how deterritorialization, in its disarticulation of milieux, and the ways in which these milieux are reterritorialized, is creative.

This article has two purposes. First, to address issues of novelty and creation in improvisation, and second, to consider the relation between creation and resistance in Deleuze and Guattari. To illustrate the political significance of deterritorialization as a line of escape that is creative of another space, I begin by reinterpreting their definition of improvisation and propose a notion of improvisation. Putting this conception to work, I explain an improvisation's novelty and the sense in which it is creative. I then turn to the connection between creativity and resistance before elucidating the sense in which an improvisor is playing politics. In so doing, I make several claims. First, that the conceptual geometry of stratification indicates the novelty of an improvisation while using pre-existing material and patterns. Second, that in offering an albeit brief description of improvisation in *A Thousand Plateaus,* Deleuze and Guattari address issues of agency. Third, that improvisors take up a political project. In the transformation of musical material and their own habits, they learn about how they are collectively constituted. Fourth, that an improvisor must be open to and open the music being performed to transformation. Fifth, that the notion of improvisational

space indicates the sense in which to understand the creative resistance offered by deterritorialization.

Repetitions, Refrains, Territories

Understanding territorialization and deterritorialization as occurring within the wider system of stratification indicates the novelty of improvisation. Before describing the relations between territorialization and improvisation, we must first examine the link between refrains and territories. Explaining the genesis of territorial assemblages and how they interconnect, this link also indicates why Deleuzean analyses of improvisation tend to focus on the notion of deterritorialization. In my view, although suggestive of the unexpected and volatile movement typical of improvised performances, by itself, the disarticulation and modification of milieux does not explain the novelty of improvisation.

Deleuze and Guattari note their most famous concept is that of the refrain, a philosophical concept of the ritornello.[6]**Error! Reference source not found.**. Drawing on its musical content, the refrain describes a small repetition of a motif. Translating it to philosophy is significant for two reasons. First, the refrain explains how territorial assemblages are engendered and how they evolve through deterritorialization. It is important to note that a refrain and a territory are not identical. However, as will be shown, a parallel can be drawn between the stabilising force of the refrain and the hierarchization of milieux that occurs in territorialization. Second, it describes how concepts are created. Nothing is created *ex nihilo*, but by refrains, i.e. little returns of difference that are productive of new ideas.

The refrain comprises three aspects, the determination of a semi-stable centre, the genesis of a territory, and the opening of the territory onto other milieux. Famously, Deleuze and Guattari describe the determination of a centre with an analogy of a boy, afraid of the dark, who hums his little song to comfort himself. This little repetition "jumps from chaos to the beginnings of order in chaos."[7] The affective relationship between the stabilizing force of the refrain and the chaotic

[6] Emma Ingala, "Of the Refrain (The Ritornello)", *A Thousand Plateaus and Philosophy*, edited by Jeffrey A. Bell and James Williams Henry Somers-Hall (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 191.

[7] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia vol.2,* translated by Brian Massumi (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 362.

darkness draws a circle, a home, a territory. To protect this fragile centre, the refrain demarcates and structures a space filled with various landmarks. Emma Ingala compellingly summarises that "the child is no longer singing to calm down, but to mark his territory, his spot."[8]

Before moving to the third dynamism of the refrain, it is necessary to make a distinction between the operations of territorialization and deterritorialization and the genesis of a territory. A territory describes an assemblage of milieux that has been hierarchized and stabilized. For Deleuze and Guattari, there is a territory when milieux cease to be directional and functional, and become dimensional and expressive.[9] This is illustrated with the example of birdsong. The musician, or territorial bird, is distinguished by the style of its song alone. The non-musician bird might still sing, but its song cannot be separated from its functional biological processes and imperatives. For instance, the song might serve a purpose in finding a mate. Yet, the song is not so organized or codified to signal what kind of bird it is. This draws on their description of stratification as being a double articulation, both an articulation of content – an order of bodies – and an articulation of expression – a regime of signs. Territorialization are those affective forces that tie the articulations together, hierarchizing, and stabilizing milieux into an assemblage. By contrast, deterritorialization describes the dislocation of bodies and signs, so that they can be rearticulated anew. However, this is not simply a destructive operation, but a productive one.

As explained in the third vignette, the refrain turns outward, describing the movement of deterritorialization. Here it is worth quoting Deleuze and Guattari at length.

> Finally, one opens the circle a crack, opens it all the way, lets someone in, calls someone, or else goes out oneself, launches forth. One opens the circle not on the side where the old forces of chaos press against it but in another region, one created by the circle itself. … One launches forth, hazards an improvisation. But to improvise is to join with the World, or meld with it. One ventures from home on the thread of a tune.[10]

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[8] Ingala, "Of the Refrain (The Ritornello)", 196.
[9] Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus, 366.
[10] Ibid., 362-363.

Territories open onto and intersect with other assemblages, allowing one to improvise. While this will be explored more fully below, one can already see the importance of improvising to Deleuze and Guattari. This describes the mechanism by which one embraces difference and becomes *other*. In the third aspect of the refrain, Deleuze and Guattari seem to insinuate that improvising is like a deterritorializing line of flight. Further, per the first two aspects of the refrain, they acknowledge that improvising is risky and can devolve into noise, into chaos. With Deleuze and Guattari's ethical supposition that the problem of music is "deterritorializing the refrain", one might envisage improvisation as the deterritorializing line of flight that constantly pushes at the boundary of noise.[11] This romantic image ignores the inseparability of territorialization and deterritorialization. However, while inseparable, they are distinct concepts. By itself, deterritorialization, as the disarticulation of milieux, does not describe how musical improvisation remains consistent and coherent. Similarly, although deterritorialization and reterritorialization describes the transformation of the cosmos, likening improvisation to deterritorialization confuses whether there are discrete improvisations or on cosmos-sized improvisation.

With these issues in mind that I propose that an improvisor territorializes milieux and cultivates an improvisational space. As the discussion of the third dynamism of the refrain suggests, the very act of territorialization opens opportunities for further improvisation, as milieux are deterritorialized and made available to be articulated anew. What must be explained is the sense in which this territorialization is novel. The distinction between territory and territorialization comes to the fore. While Deleuze and Guattari insist that the three aspects of the refrain are not successive but simultaneous moments, one can see that an improvisor begins with a refrain. That is, they call a tune, or in starting to play, loosely demarcate some musical material they want to play with. After a point of relative stability is established, an improvisor draws an improvisational space, a territory. The sound organization is a contingently produced instance of solution. The improvisational space serves as a safety net from which the improvisor can explore the various passages between musical material. More precisely, an improvisor reterritorializes deterritorialized milieux. Musical material like notes, rhythms,

[11] Ibid., 351.

chord and so on, are removed from their historical context, to express the idiosyncratic style of the improvisor. Crucially, an improvisor does not possess a birds-eye view of the improvisational space. An improvisational space is a territory formed by at least two territories – the improvisor and musical material. This means their habits and skilled behaviour is deterritorialized and reterritorialized by the musical material, drawn to perform stratified usages, to rehash certain epithets and tropes that arise in accordance with their skill and training.

Understanding Novelty in Improvisational Space

This initial sketch alludes that there are two senses of novelty in improvisation. First, in being creative of an improvisational space, and second, in its dynamism, illustrated by its shifting border. As much as the discussion of the refrain depicts the instigation of a territory, to elaborate the sense in which this territory is novel, we must consider Deleuze and Guattari's distinction of meter and rhythm. These are both differential repetitions that codify and are productive of milieux. While meter describes the homogenous, measured repetition of the same, rhythmical relations recapitulate difference: in other words, metered repetitions that code milieux and present diverse instances of the same. Rhythm, on the other hand, takes difference to be productive of a new entity, decoding and transcoding milieux. For instance, a pianist might simultaneously play two melodic lines. The coupling of these two lines is productive of harmony or dissonance, describing the points of intersection and divergence.

To determine the sense in which the production of an improvisational space is novel, we must explain how metered repetitions give rise to rhythm and how rhythmical relations can atrophy into meter. Eugene Holland makes a compelling parallel between meter and rhythm and Deleuze's notions of bare and creative repetition. He writes, "learning to play a musical instrument involves a significant amount of bare repetition", like scales and songs. He continues, that at a critical point, "improvisation becomes possible."[12] This critical juncture is a rhythmical relation. A musician arrives at this critical point by the intersection and overlapping of metered repetitions. It is through these overlaps that they begin to improvise. Interestingly, as this demands evolution, the performer who simply rehashes the same solo

[12] Eugene Holland, *Deleuze and Guattari's A Thousand Plateaus* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 8-9.

over and over, no matter how initially novel and daring, can hardly be said to be improvising. Rather, this presents diverse instances of the same. Improvisation demands development and transformation of both the improvisor and the musical material.

While Holland indicates that improvisation is possible at this critical point, I contend that improvising consists in this rhythmical relation. This follows from the claim that an improvisational space is a territory. Deleuze and Guattari describe the formation of a territory as an "act of rhythm."[13] The creation of a territory transcodes and overcodes milieux. I will return to how this occurs through deterritorialization in the following section. For the moment, it suffices that this is not just a rearrangement of milieux, but something that cuts across the content and expression the milieu-components. From the fact that rhythms arise from the intersection and overlapping of metered repetitions, the cultivation of an improvisational space is novel insofar as it transforms the relations between musical material in a way that describes its aptitude for change. This is evidenced by the fact that jazz improvisation typically involves a 'canon' of jazz standards, yet one that eludes codification. While this presents from loose parameters at a jam session, the performance of these standards does not present diverse instances of the same. Instead, performances serve as springboards for further improvisation as much as the original standards, and indeed, transform the content of the original song. For instance, in John Coltrane's late recordings of "My Favourite Things", one hears little of the original Broadway classic.

Importantly, an improvisational space, as emerging out of these patterns and as a rhythmical relation, rewrites the metered repetitions that underpinned its genesis. Rhythm underpins the operations of deterritorialization and reterritorialization. These operations transform the improvisational space and the territories that constitute it, the improvisor and musical material. As the improvisor and musical material is altered, the border of the improvisational space shifts. This demonstrates the second sense of novelty in improvisation – the contingent and dynamic interplay between deterritorialization and reterritorialization. To illustrate this dynamism and explore how improvisational space affects the territories that constitute it, I turn to Deleuze and Guattari's distinction between Chess and Go.

[13] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus,* 336.

In chess, pieces have specific intrinsic properties. The white squared bishop can only ever be a white squared bishop. Deleuze and Guattari explain that chess pieces "have an internal nature and intrinsic properties from which their movements, situations, and confrontations derive" in a heavily regulated "closed space."[14] In other words, each square will retain the same dimensions and status no matter which piece occupies it. And it is on these two principles that the chess player is sovereign, controlling their pieces. Deleuze and Guattari contrast the internal characteristics that distinguish chess pieces with the extrinsic relations and situational properties of Go stones. Go stones fulfil "functions of insertion or situation, such as bordering, encircling, shattering."[15] A stone is not distinguished by its internal properties, but by its position on the board, where it has been, and what it is adding to the landscape surrounding its position. A well-placed Go stone will shatter an opponent's constellation of stones and occupation of space. This does not come about in the same way as the chess player's scheming. The movement of a stone drastically alters the dynamism of the board's landscape.

What is crucial in this distinction is that go stones radically transform space, and space transforms Go stones. Improvisation resembles Go rather than Chess. The improvisational space in engendered by the rhythmical relation between the performer and the musical material. The improvisor is not a sovereign individual, but an entity implicated in the improvisational space. They are reciprocally affected by the dynamism of the improvisational space, called to respond to various differential relations and arrangements of musical material. Like the addition of a stone on the Go board, the insertion or placement of a musical element alters the harmonic and rhythmic landscape. Stones of the periphery distort space in the centre of the board. Similarly in improvisational space, the milieux and musical opportunities at its border, depending on the arrangement at the time, direct an improvisor to play certain phrases, and at other times, allow a greater degree of freedom.

The various aesthetic decisions an improvisor rehearses will impact how they improvise. As much as improvisors rely on this habituated behaviour, David Borgo notes that a common technique amongst improvi-

[14] Ibid., 411.
[15] Ibid.

sors is handicapping.[16] Improvisors deliberately constrain their physical or conceptual skills in some way to test the limits of their other habituated behaviour, cultivating a particular kind of uncertainty. As the improvisor is deterritorialized and reterritorialized, an improvisor oscillates between falling into habituated routine and resisting these patterns. This process of deterritorialization and reterritorialization describes the transformation of habituated patterns and ensures that the improvisor's stylistic hallmarks remain recognisable as they evolve. The improvisor intentionally resists certain epithets in favour of propagating some kind of selective uncertainty. This resistance to stratified habits describes the launching into improvisation. This is not a jettisoning of habit, but a choice not to conserve or preserve the habits that constitute them. They meld with the world to create new ones. This exposes the error in the production crew's supposition about the difficulty of improvisation. What is difficult is not the spontaneous making of musical sounds, but the creation of a space in which an improvisor can open themselves to transformation.

At this point, one might object that this does not offer a logic peculiar to improvisation. The transformation described by deterritorialization and reterritorialization means that everything, including the performance of a composition, is some improvisation. Against this charge, we must not conflate ubiquity with specificity. Improvisation consists in some minimal rhythmical relation which sees it inhabit various musical practices. While Holland's example of the music student starts with bare repetition, in a sense, they too are improvising. There are rhythmic relations between student and instrument as they begin to get the basic musical material down. They are a student insofar that they do not have the skill required to improvise with musical material. This means that the difference between improvisation and the performance of composition is not a difference in kind but in degree. The distinction lies in its openness to the unforeseen, unexpected and interjections that outstrip the improvisor's control.[17] In the analysis of improvisation as rhythm I have sought to demonstrate how the unforeseen and unexpected arises. To further clarify this notion of openness, we must draw together the genesis of a territory and Deleuze and Guattari's third dynamism of the refrain. Im-

[16] "Negotiating Freedom: Values and Practices in Contemporary Improvised Music." *Black Music Research Journal* 22: 2 (2002), 174.

[17] David Bell, "Improvisation as anarchist organization." *ephemera: theory & politics in organization* 14:4 (2014), 1013.

provisation, here, is characterised as a joining or melding with the World. But what world?

In their anexact history of music, Deleuze and Guattari write that the "classical artist hazards an extreme and dangerous adventure. He or she breaks down the milieux, separates them, harmonizes them, regulates their mixtures."[18] In a similar vein, by delimiting certain musical information, improvisors cultivate musical opportunities that are conducive to their aesthetic tastes. Improvisors do not shirk their musical training, but rely on it, and as such they strive to accomplish particular musical ideas. Deleuze and Guattari continue that "the task of the classical artist is God's own, that of organizing chaos; and the artist's only cry is Creation!"[19] Deleuze takes up the creation of a world when describing the diagrams of Francis Bacon. The rhythm between the painter's idiosyncratic brushstrokes and the canvas "is like the emergence of another world."[20] The key term is idiosyncratic, denoting something signed and expressive of the painter. This locates the emergence of a world as occurring between the articulations of content and expression in stratification, much akin to the genesis of a territory. This is why it is necessary to consider improvisation as territorialization. What I mean to suggest is that improvisation involves two moments – the creation of a world, and a melding with it, in which the improvisor opens it to be transformed. As much as this occurs by why of deterritorializing musical materials, deterritorialization does not just mark a rupture, but is already en route to some reterritorialization. By territorializing, an improvisor puts themselves at the creation and beginning of a world. After the creation of the world, embarking on some new improvisation, an improvisor melds with it. That is, they investigate its various flows and forces while working to make external elements and interjections cohere musically.

Deterritorialization and Creative Resistance

We must clarify what Deleuze and Guattari mean by the term, "world". Here, we much recall that the crack in the third vignette of the refrain does not open onto the old forces of chaos, but a new region. With this

[18] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus,* 393.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Deleuze, F*rancis Bacon The Logic of Sensation,* translated by Daniel W. Smith, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 82.

term, Deleuze and Guattari refer to the cosmic forces of all becoming. In melding with the world, an improvisor enjoys a unique vantage point from their existing habits to these forces of becoming. That is, while improvising they witness how their habits are developed and how they might be changed. This melding describes an attunement to the world – the predicament of performance, and what they must achieve to stay musically coherent. To develop this notion of attunement it is necessary to the expand the definition of deterritorialization and clarify how this provides a means of creative resistance.

Deleuze and Guattari make a distinction between relative and absolute deterritorialization. Relative deterritorialization describes a line of flight that is taken up in a reterritorialization. This can be positive or negative. It is negative, when it is immediately obstructed by reterritorialization. For instance, it is easy to imagine a jazz improvisor playing varying the milieux of the melody, but staying within the confines of ossified harmonic theory and recapitulating the form of the song. Insofar that the improvisation is immediately recaptured by the dogmatic forces of sameness, this in some sense, describes a failure. The improvisor plays exactly as expected with any elements of creativity and chance strictly regulated. Conversely, relative deterritorialization might be positive, when it bypasses immediate reterritorialization, but does not intersect with other deterritorialized components. The deterritorialized milieux are rearticulated in some process of becoming in a way that is creative of novel opportunities. This improvisation does not implement or give form to a preexisting standard, but structures at every moment a dynamic sonic field, burgeoning novel musical connections and opportunities for further exploration.

Absolute deterritorialization is often thought to be a movement that cannot be taken up in a reterritorialization, describing the destruction of a system. This seemingly reflects the risks of an improvisor playing too chaotically and devolving into noise. While this is a danger, Paul Patton accurately surmises that absolute deterritorialization "exists only in and through relative deterritorialization."[21] Absolute deterritorialization is absolute insofar that it connects with the world. Besides the dynamisms of the refrain being simultaneous, they write that a territory is "inseparable from vectors of deterritorialization working it from within". Con-

[21] Paul Patton, *Deleuze and the Political* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 107.

versely, deterritorialization "is in turn inseparable from correlative reterritorializations."[22] Given their geophilosophy is grounded in social structures this has political consequences about what kind of reform is possible. What is absolute are the revolutionary ways of thinking that come about from the intersection of deterritorialized components. In seeing a jazz musician link up various musical milieux, one's understanding of a song and song form is changed. Deleuze and Guattari continue that deterritorialization is only absolute when it "brings about the creation of a new earth, in in other words, when it connects lines of flight, raises them to the power of an abstract vital line, or draws a plane of consistency."[23] This critical point of creation again coincides with the hazardous leap into an improvisational space.

This establishes deterritorialization as a creative procedure. Given that territories are distinguished by the lines of flight working them from within, an improvisation is not just a means of change, but one of creative resistance. That is to say, it is through the interrogation of patterns that new patterns comes about. The change in an improvisor's habits, facilitated by metered and then rhythmic repetitions, implies that an improvisor is learning not just about musical material but about themselves. An improvisor probes how and why particular patterns arise under certain conditions. In improvising, one engenders a territory, and in melding with it, they attune themselves to the world, learning and re-learning their habits. The improvisor sees the convergence and divergences of thinking about musical material, and the limits of these ways of thinking. Deterritorialization enables a rhythmic repetition, a passage and relay between the improvisational space and the material that gave rise to it.

Creative Resistance and Playing Politics

Holland writes, "Inasmuch as social life is composed of refrains of various kinds, … the political challenge is to organize social relations so that as we launch forth on the thread of a tune, (to) hazard an improvisation that joins us with the World and a people to come."[24] In noting geo-

[22] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus,* 591-592

[23] Ibid.

[24] Eugene Holland, "Jazz Improvisation: Music of the People-to-Come", *Deleuze, guattari and the production of the new*, edited by Simon O'Sullivan and Stephen Zepke (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2011), 204.

philosophy is tied to social structures, Holland questions what kind of social institutions are open to the same kind of organization and rearrangement that occurs in improvisation. To respond this challenge, and as I hope to have already suggested, we are already improvising when we consider how metered repetitions intersect and overlap. This section outlines the political importance of improvisation as the mechanism, which, at the nexus of the World, links actions with wider events. This consists of two claims. Firstly, we observe that despite being spontaneous and unforeseen, improvisation increases a performer's agency. Secondly, that the revolutionary and political element of improvisation lies in the fact that it serves as another platform for improvisation.

As observed, in an improvisational space, an improvisor deterritorializes and reterritorializes musical milieux. Conversely, as they push and pull musical material together, their habits and faculties are reciprocally deterritorialized and reterritorialized. The history of sedimented usages within musical milieux, stratified ways of thinking and practicing music, and what an improvisor has rehearsed, directs them to play particular phrases over others. This is why, as Gary Peters notes, we encounter boring improvisations.[25] It is strange to disqualify these as successful improvisations, but they do not feel as dynamic as a listener would expect. In my view, this describes an instance of diversity, a repetition of the similar, rather than of difference. The performer has followed established routines and patterns, and perhaps, navigated unexpected interruptions or interjections. It lacks dynamism because it is not open.

With this openness, a parallel can be drawn between the practice of improvisation and Deleuze and Guattari's enigmatic, and often misunderstood concept of war-machine. This is contrasted by with the control and power of the state apparatus. The war-machine seeks to dismantle power hierarchies and social structures of capture. Deleuze and Guattari write that war-machines "take shape against the apparatuses that appropriate the machine … they bring connections to bear against the apparatuses of capture."[26] The war-machine does not describe a passive force, but an interrogative one that makes rhythmical connections that open up deterritorializing lines of flight within metered and dogmatic repetition. As such, it is

[25] *The Philosophy of Improvisation* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), 64.
[26] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus,* 492.

defined by "a movement of decoding."[27] An improvisational space is also an assemblage that draws deterritorializing lines of flight. In both, there is "creative mutation and change."[28] The most compelling parallel, however, is in the fact that both must adapt and evolve, preventing their creative power relations from becoming dogmatic.

In propagating an improvisational space, an improvisor creates a world but must meld with it. They open themselves to change. Within the improvisational space, they are deterritorialized and reterritorialized, their habits and faculties extended. This could be a way of thinking about musical, increase in skill, or a physical alteration of their body to their instrument. The supposition is that besides the patterns in the music, the improvisor recognises their own relationship to the music being performed as it is being performed. That is, in improvising, a performer witnesses how and why they play or rely on a particular pattern. They intuit how this habit is stimulated and can now choose whether to cultivate it. The question immediately arises, what enables an improvisor to handicap themselves?

Positing there is only difference all the way down, there cannot be some sovereign or innate identity from which one's agency proliferates. Traditionally, an agent is one that acts on their intentions and decisions. A patient is one that is passive. For this reason, and insofar that it connotes control over one's actions, agency is typically linked with self-empowerment and self-determination. Holland incisively argues that Deleuze and Guattari derive territorialization and deterritorialization from Lacanian psychoanalysis, to refer to Freud's libidinal drives and Marx's labour-power in human agents.[29] Given that the dynamisms of the refrain are simultaneous rather than successive and given that a territory is distinguished by its capacities for deterritorialization, agency, for Deleuze and Guattari is never individual but social and collective.

Following the discussion of the creation of and melding with the world, improvisation is the mechanism by which one interrogates and reharmonizes with society. An improvisor, responding to the demands of the action, does not have complete control over the improvisation. As alluded in the discussion of an improvisational space and its nexus with

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[27] Ibid., 466.

[28] Patton, *Deleuze and the Political,* 110.

[29] Eugene Holland, "Deterritorializing "Deterritorialization" - From the Anti-Oedipus to A Thousand Plateaus", *SubStance* 6 (1991), 57-58.

the World, an improvisor enjoys a vantage point where they witness the transformation of patterns in musical material and in themselves. An improvisation is dynamic in its openness, with improvisors remaining open to the tensions that arises between these patterns. In Holland's example of learning to play music, we realise that in observing the intersection of these patterns and habits while improvising, that improvisors continuously learn about themselves and the world.[30] Seeing the intersection and limits of particular ways of thinking, the ethical import of improvisation lies in this intentional development of particular habits.

Yet the propagation of new habits and thinking about musical patterns serve as another platform to improvise. An improvisation cannot become dogmatic or resistant to the vectors of deterritorialization within the improvisational space. This does not describe a rhythmical relation but a metered repetition of the same. Here, a performer is not improvising but replicating something that has come before. While it might be musically interesting, it cannot be said that a performer who strives to replicate their solos night after night is improvising. Rather, they must evolve as the musical material changes. In the same way, replaying a recording of a famous improvisation is a benefit to one's musical education – but the recording it cannot prescribe how one must improvise. One is an improvisor while one is improvising, while open to creative mutation.

In *Foucault,* Deleuze echoes the famous epithet, "Resistance comes first."[31] This paradoxical affirmation demonstrates the political import of improvisation. Deleuze criticises weak notions of resistance that simply invert or react to hierarchies. Resistance is typically secondary, succeeding or coexisting with power hierarchies and relations. Should it precede them, it is not so much resistance but the dominating power relation. In proposing that it is primary, Deleuze suggests that there is already a negation of power relations and that the structures of resistance will dissolve. What is required in resistance is to interrogate what gives rise to these hierarchies and to note the mechanisms by which they become dogmatic. For Deleuze, resistance is that which is

[30] Deleuze echoes this intuition, and the link between thought and self-determination when he asks the reader, "to what are we dedicated if not to those problems which demand the very transformation of our body and our language?" *Difference and Repetition,* translated by Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 192.

[31] *Foucault,* translated by Sean Hand (London: Athlone Press, 1988), 89.

outside.[32] Resistance is the genetic condition of power hierarchies, the forces of territorialization, because territories are distinguished by their vectors of deterritorialization.

It is not so simple a picture in which improvised music resists the hierarchy of the score. Rather, improvising is made possible by vectors of deterritorialization in the musical material and the performer's skill. This exposes a tension between an improvisor's methods of handicapping and their openness to the unforeseen. Take a concrete example of a Free Jazz concert. Being open to unexpected contributions, Free Jazz improvisors must be generous towards and supportive of their bandmembers contributions. They work hard to make whatever is played cohere musically. However, the improvisor must resist musical phrases that reinscribe existing musical and social hierarchies. For instance, it will miss the point to play a blues. Although Free Jazz does not have conventional stylistic hallmarks, it does not follow that there are no power hierarchies in its performance. It is enabled by metered repetitions, preexisting patterns and materials. As such, there are similar power dynamics that appear in other jazz styles. At various times bandmembers will orient what they play to accompany and support an individual.

The power hierarchies and relations that comprise this improvisational space are open to interrogation. The degree to which an improvisation presents a mode of creative resistance is immanent to how open the improvisors are. While antithetical in Free Jazz to start with a blues, various allusions may be made through deterritorialization and reterritorialization to support or stabilize the improvisation. Crucially, why it was necessary to stabilize the improvisation in this way will be open to subsequent critique. Insofar that an improvisation cannot become dogmatic, its own creative resistance dissolves, giving way to another improvisational space. An improvisor undergoes a perennial process of reharmonization and is in some sense aware of the transience of their improvisations.

George Lewis traces the stylistic features of free improvisation in his influential delineation of Afrological and Eurological perspectives. Noting the respective importance of Charlie Parker and John Cage to these broad emergent histories, Lewis makes a distinction in their methodological underpinnings.[33] Eurological perspectives, following Cage,

[32] Francoise Proust, "The Line of Resistance." *Hypatia* 15:4 (2000), 24.

[33] George Lewis, "Improvised Music after 1950: Afrological and Eurological Perspectives." *Black Music Research Journal* 16:1 (1996), 218-221.

will focus on the prevalence of indeterminacy and what this means for musical material. Afrological perspectives, on the other hand, observe that the freedom of improvisation is linked to individual and social struggles. Eurological perspectives will focus on ontological questions about the music itself, while Afrological perspectives will focus on how agency is collectively constituted. In this division, two points are particularly pertinent to our discussion. Firstly, improvisation is already politically and culturally contingent. As has been observed, the sense in which improvisation presents a mode of creative resistance is tied to how open the musicians are to the unexpected. As encultured creatures, different improvisors focus on different musical and cultural material. Secondly, at the nexus of creating and melding with the world, improvisor realises what they are open to and what they are resisting.

Afrological perspectives observe that agency is implicated in this connection between creation and resistance. Agency is increased by improvisation. This presents a mode of resistance insofar that this is already social. While improvising enables an intentional relationship to habit, improvisors are "learning to undo things, and to undo oneself."[34] Improvisors learn how their agency is constituted by a collective, and in delineating certain power hierarchies, they witness how they inform this collective. Improvising enacts the perennial political question; how an individual relates to society. Involving a rhythmical relation, improvisation consists in this process of becoming-other. Deleuze and Guattari write that "the rhythm, precisely, is caught up in a becoming that sweeps up the distances between characters, making them rhythmic characters that are themselves more or less distant."[35] While improvising can be a solitary exercise in a rehearsal room, an improvisor investigates these intervals. Given Deleuze and Guattari's geophilosophy, improvisation remains fundamentally social, with improvisation space describing the relation of attunement between individuals and collectives.

The role of improvisation in Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy is not a simple translation. While milieux are modified, it cannot be characterised by this alone. Rather, improvisation describes a revolutionary process that demonstrates the creativity of deterritorialization. The political significance of improvisation lies in the eventual dissolution of its power relations. Improvisations present opportunities for further im-

[34] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus,* 466.
[35] Ibid., 372.

provisation. As a practice, improvisation not only present a means of escape but one of resistance, that interrogates and opens the forces of deterritorialization within metered repetitions. Improvisors, in developing an attunement to the world, learn about themselves and undergo a perpetual process by which they create and meld with the collective in an improvisational space. Improvisation is the mechanism by which Deleuze and Guattari implicate and traverse diverse disciplines, moving from ontology and politics, biology and music, psychoanalysis, and art. Improvisation serves as a mechanism that ties art, agency, philosophy, and politics together.