

Territories of Music: Distributions, Productions, and Sonorous Individuations
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It is easy to think of society as a thing, substance, or entity. We often talk of what “society does”, what it thinks, and how it behaves. We talk about the properties or qualities of the social as if it were a substance possessing attributes. We treat the social as a substantial being, like the identity underlying all the qualitative transformations of Descartes’ famous wax in the Second Meditation. We might, after the fashion of some tendencies in Levi-Strauss, for instance, speak of self-identical structures of mind persisting throughout time. However, if we consider the newborn infant or the feral child, and if we consider the disappearance of societies, their dissolution in history, we see that the social is not something that can be thought as a substance, but is rather something that must be constituted, produced, engendered. And not only must the social be produced or engendered, it must be produced or engendered again and again in the order of time as a series of ongoing actions, operations, or events. The social, in short, is a *process*.

This necessity of a constitution of the social is above all evident at the level of those elements that compose the social; namely, social beings. While we might, as Lacan observes, be enmeshed in social relations from the moment of biological conception and even before as a subjects of a discourse that are not our own¹, we must also, nonetheless, account for the genesis or formation of social beings as elements of the social. Put bluntly, and I hope without offense, the newborn is little more than a beast or animal. It is a chaotic and unformed body and flow of cognitions, with few or no set desires and affects. The Kaluli of Papua New Guinea engage in ritual homosexuality with the older men of the tribe as a way of initiating young men into adulthood. They practice a dance called the Gisaro where they burn one another with sticks and

¹ For or a discussion of the subject as constituted in the field of the Other, cf. Bruce Fink, *The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995, pgs. 3-13.

where the aim is to produce grief in the audience.² We do not. Yet these trajectories are possibilities for *all* human bodies. What is the process by which we are individuated, formed, produced to live one of these social universes rather than another?

It is this sort of question that will lead Niklas Luhmann to claim that,

In contrast to what ordinary language and conceptual tradition suggest, the unity of an element (e.g., an action in an action system) is not ontologically pre-given. Instead, the element is constituted as a unity only by the system that enlists it as an element to use it in relations.³

The elements that belong to a system-- in this case persons belonging to a social system --cannot be said to pre-exist this social system but are instead constituted in and through this system. In this way, we avoid any Platonizing or essentializing tendency that would posit an eternal human nature where human beings are concerned. Whenever such a nature is evoked-- whether by the psychoanalytic theorist that posits that subjects are constituted in one way and in one way only, or by the conservative that posits an inherent evil or the liberal an inherent altruism --we know we are before an ideology. Rather, social subjects must be produced or individuated through a process of social production. However, it is always dangerous to advance such claims on normative grounds. If such an assertion is made, then this is not in opposition to essentialism, idealism, or Platonism, but rather because theoretical orientations that posit such an unchanging essence are powerless to account for the diversity of social subjects and systems we actually witness throughout the world and history.

Badiou will make a similar point. As Badiou puts it in *Being and Event*, "...the one is not...", but "*there is Oneness.*"⁴ According to Badiou, what this entails is that, "the one, which is not, solely exists as *operation*. In other words: there is no one, only the count-as-one. The

² Cf. Edward Shieffelin, *The Sorrow of the Lonely and the Burning of the Dancers*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.

³ Niklas Luhmann, *Social Systems*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995, pgs. 21-22.

⁴ Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, London: Continuum Press, 2005, pg. 23

one, being an operation, is never a presentation.”⁵ For Badiou, like Luhmann, any social elements we discover will be a product, result, or effect. The components that make up social systems will be the result of *operations*-- Luhmann will say *selections* and *constitutions*. Deleuze will say *individuations* or *morphogenetic processes*. For Badiou, Luhmann, and Deleuze, the passage by which inconsistent multiplicities are transformed into consistent multiplicities, will not result from operations of a *subject*, as in the case of Kant’s transcendental unity of apperception applying the categories of the understanding to the manifold of intuition or Husserl’s transcendental ego constituting the objects of phenomenological intuition, for the one is not and subjects too, as unities, must also be constituted through such operations. There will be no substances with an intrinsic nature pre-existing such operations, but rather being *as such* will be a sort of chaos or what Badiou refers to as “inconsistent multiplicities”. As Badiou so nicely articulates it, ontology will be the science of multiplicity *qua* multiplicity without any identical terms or unities pre-existing these multiplicities. The aim will be to explain how we move from these inconsistent multiplicities to consistent multiplicities.

This too is Marx’s position. As Marx famously says in the preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*,

In the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will, relations of production which correspond to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political and intellectual life process in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness.⁶

⁵ *Ibid.* pg. 24.

⁶ Robert C. Tucker, ed., *The Marx-Engels Reader*, New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1978, pg. 4

Like Luhmann, Badiou, and Deleuze, Marx treats social subjects as products that result from operations or particular processes of individuation and production. Just as Deleuze argues that it makes far more sense to compare a work-horse to an ox than a race-horse⁷, so too does it make little sense to compare a serf to a contemporary bourgeoisie. Such a comparison would presuppose an identical human essence underlying these two social forms, ignoring that the social forms are themselves the result of operations, individuations, or productions whereby they are counted-as-one and produced as specific forms of embodiment, affect, and consciousness or subjectivity. It is clear that any theory seeking the possibility of revolutionary change must presuppose such an ontology, for it must posit that there is not an intrinsic nature to the elements composing the social which would thereby function as an intrinsic limit and constraint to how the social could be organized.

This thesis will have far ranging consequences for how we conceive a number of issues. Take the example of mental illness. By now we are all accustomed to taxonomies of mental illness such as those found in the DSM-IV, or Lacan's diagnostic categories, or the correlation between certain forms of mental illness and brain chemistry. With the possible exception of Lacan, this implicitly suggests the idea of a "human nature in itself" that underlies all possible social formations. However, if it is indeed the case that persons are the result of individuations within a social field, that they are produced, then we can no longer generalize in this way. Rather, now we must examine the social field in which the individual is individuated as a constituent condition for such phenomena. Indeed, as Levi-Strauss notes in his *Introduction to Marcel Mauss*, phenomena we know of as psychotic or neurotic are largely absent in shamanistic

⁷ cf. Gille Deleuze and Felix Guattari, "Becoming-Intense, Becoming-Animal, Becoming-Imperceptible" in *A Thousand Plateaus*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987.

societies, while they rise in non-shamanistic societies.⁸ The point here is that we have different fields of individuation that produce different forms of embodiment, affect, and consciousness. This observation should in no way be taken to denigrate the reality of mental illness within our particular field of individuation. Just as we would not treat a particular plant or moss as less real because it is only able to grow in a South American rain forest and not the Alaskan wilderness or the Sahara Desert, so too is mental illness no less real because it is a form of being that arises under very particular social and historical conditions. It does, however, raise certain questions about assumptions underlying treatment and theory, where a sort of universal human nature immune to history and social relations is posited.

To his credit, Lacan had already recognized this ethnographic dimension of structures of desire as early as his article “The Family Complexes”, where he had observed that neurosis is not an invariant structure immune to history, but itself emerges under very specific historical conditions where the imaginary father and the symbolic father occupy one and the same position within a social structure. In totemic societies, according to Lacan, these terms are separated as the totem functions as the name-of-the-father establishing the incest prohibition, the maternal uncle serves the function of the imaginary father, and the real father falls out of the picture entirely. Because the symbolic name-of-the-father and the imaginary father occupy different structural positions in such social systems, the individuated subject does not find itself caught in a relation of contradiction between identifying with the paternal signifier (the totem) so as to become a subject, while simultaneously rejecting such an identification as a violation of the incest prohibition. We thus do not find the structures of neurosis we are familiar with today in these social systems. Rather, there are different symptomologies. Similarly, Lacan varied his technique depending on which culture his analysand’s came from, taking into account

⁸ Claude Levi-Strauss, *Introduction to Marcel Mauss*, London: Routledge, 1987, pg. 16-21.

differences in their specific social structures. In short, the Lacanian diagnostic categories refer to a specific social structuration and are not cross-cultural, ahistorical universals. Unfortunately Lacan's followers have not always been good at acknowledging these important nuances. Deleuze and Guattari would go on to make this observation one of their central points of critique in *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, showing how it is necessary to take into account differences in social structuration.⁹ This should not be understood as a critique of Lacan himself, but as a critique of Lacan's followers who had illicitly universalized the Oedipus which is largely historically specific to capitalist bourgeois kinship structures.

But this constitution of social beings is not all. Not only must the social constitute its own elements out of a sort of chaos-- what Deleuze will call "populations", "packs", or "crowds"--but it must also constitute and reconstitute the relations among these elements. These relations are not established once and for all, but are rather ongoing *processes* that must constitute themselves again and again. As Luhmann, in *Social Systems*, puts it,

...*Reproduction* is a continuous problem for systems with temporalized complexity. This theory is not concerned, like the classical theories of equilibrium, with returning to a stable state of rest after the absorption of disturbances, but with securing the constant renewal of system elements-- or, more briefly, not with static but dynamic stability. All the elements pass away. They cannot endure as elements in time, and thus they must constantly be produced on the basis of whatever constellation of elements is actual at any given moment. Reproduction thus does not mean simply repeatedly producing the same, but rather reflexive production, production out of products. To emphasize that we do not envision the unchanged preservation of a system, but rather an occurrence on the level of elements, which are indispensable for the preservation and change of the system, we will call the reproduction of event-like elements *operations*.¹⁰

⁹ Cf. Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1983, chapter 3 "Savages, Barbarians, and Civilized Men". It is curious that Deleuze and Guattari's sympathy towards and praise of Lacan is seldom remarked in secondary literature on Deleuze and Guattari. Throughout *Anti-Oedipus* Deleuze and Guattari almost always speak of Lacan in positive terms as an authority and reformer of psychoanalysis. They even go so far as to credit him with the invention of desiring-machines (pg. 27). What they criticize is Lacan's followers or "Lacanianism", where Oedipus is treated as a schema or frame that predetermines any and all analytic interpretations.

¹⁰ Luhmann, pg. 49

Not only must new social subjects be produced and reproduced, but social relations must be produced and reproduced. For instance, in order for the social system to continue to exist in time, communications must generate further communications. Communications too are elements or components of social systems as well, and as such must result from operations of the count-as-one or regimes of individuation.

From a Marxist perspective this entails that there will have to be a reproduction of production, exchange, distribution, and consumption. Just as bricks cannot be found ready made in the earth, but rather clay must be readied and given *form*, so too do we not find the various dimensions of social relations ready to hand, but rather they must be produced through the ongoing activity of social agents. This leads to a paradox in which social agents simultaneously produce society and are produced by society. The social is nothing but the activity of the individuals that produce it, yet the relations composing society exceed the intentions or mastery of any single individual. On the one hand, there must be a production of production or a reproduction of the conditions of production. Production requires not simply the production of goods, but also the production of equipment to produce those goods and the production of forms of embodiment, affect, and consciousness in producers to produce these goods. As Althusser so beautifully shows in “Ideology and the Ideological State Apparatus”, the schools, churches, media, and family serve this function.¹¹ Similarly, there must be a perpetual production of exchange and distribution. Where exchange is not followed by counter-exchanges, social relations wither and atrophy. In *Capital* and *Grundrisse*, Marx will expend enormous effort tracing these highly complex webs of exchange and distribution, tracing how they function, reproduce themselves, function as constraints, and where potentials for transformation might be possible within them.

¹¹ Cf. Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001.

Finally, there must be a *production of consumption*. This might come as a surprise, for we are accustomed to thinking of consumption as something that is both given and the opposite of production. Yet apart from some very basic needs such as food, clothing, and shelter, consumption too must be produced so that capitalist economy might reproduce itself. In *Grundrisse*, Marx writes,

Production is also immediately consumption. Twofold consumption, subjective and objective: the individual not only develops his abilities in production, but also expends them, uses them up in the act of production, just as natural procreation is a consumption of life forces. Secondly: consumption of the means of production, which become worn out through use, and are partly (e.g. in combustion) dissolved into their elements again.¹²

Here Marx refers to the production of consumption in a very straightforward sense to refer to the way in which the body, machines, and natural resources are consumed or used up in the process of producing goods. Under this reading, appetites and desires, remain a natural “given”, and we do not yet have a “transcendental aesthetic”, where desires and appetites are not simply natural givens of human beings, but where they are actually produced or generated in the process of becoming a social being. However, a few pages later Marx goes on to say,

Production not only supplies a material for the need, but it also supplies a need for the material. As soon as consumption emerges from its initial state of natural crudity and immediacy-- and, if it remained at that stage, this would be because production itself has been arrested there --it becomes itself mediated as a drive by the object. The need which consumption feels for the object is created by the perception of it. The object of art-- like every other product --creates a public which is sensitive to art and enjoys beauty. Production thus not only creates an object for the subject, but also a subject for the object.¹³

Marx will repeat this point again a few years later in *Capital* when developing his theory of the commodity. “The commodity is, first of all, an external object, a thing which through its qualities satisfies human needs of whatever kind. The nature of these needs, whether they arise,

¹² Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, New York: Penguin Books, 1973, pg. 90

¹³ *Ibid.*, pg. 92.

for example, from the stomach, or the imagination, makes no difference.”¹⁴ Bourdieu develops this thesis in elaborate detail in *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, showing how aesthetic taste is not a natural given, but rather correlates to one's place in the social order, arising from the process by which the social subject is individuated or developed.¹⁵ The point here is that our desires, or appetites, are not simply natural givens, but are themselves results of how we are individuated within a particular social sphere. What is it that leads us to desire a BMW rather than a Mercedes rather than a Ford Escort? From the standpoint of use-value these objects are more or less the same. In order for markets to continue to grow and capitalism to continuously reproduce itself, it must produce desires. Baudrillard will later go on to develop this point in great detail in his early works such as *The System of Objects* and *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*. He will pitch this as a critique of Marx, or perhaps Marxism, but as we see here such a thesis is already at work in Marx's own thought. This production of consumption contributes to the reproduction of our social sphere in the particular form that we know it today.

Consequently, at the heart of any social and political theory we find presupposed a theory of individuation or those operations by which social systems reproduce themselves and by which social agents are produced. Individuation is not the individual, but rather the process by which an individual and the social system is counted-as-one or produced. In some cases, the theory of individuation presupposed by a social theory will be that of already constituted and individuated individuals. This will be the case, for instance, in *normative* political theories such as those of Habermas and Rawls, where we begin from the premise of already given universal structures or identities-- not unlike Kant's transcendental subject --and then proceed to draw consequences

¹⁴ Karl Marx, *Capital (Volume I)*, New York: Penguin Books, 1990, pg. 125.

¹⁵ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984.

from these structures for concrete historical situations. In other cases, it will be seen that social agents must themselves be constituted or produced, as in the case of figures such as Foucault, Butler, Deleuze and Guattari, Badiou, Ranciere, Lacan, Bourdieu, Marx, Adorno, etc. We will get very different social and political theories depending on which route we take.

Unfortunately, in the work of Badiou and Luhmann, we are told very little about the actual mechanisms by which individuation takes place. Badiou tells us *that* unities or consistent multiplicities are produced from inconsistent multiplicities through operations of the count-as-one, but he tells us very little as to just *how* these operations operate. As Peter Hallward notes in *Badiou: A Subject to Truth*, even Badiou's recent work devoted to situations or what he now calls "worlds" such as *Logiques des mondes*, where the operations of the count-as-one-operates, are *descriptive* rather than *explanatory*.¹⁶ This comes as no surprise given Badiou's focus on the event, subjects, and truth-procedures, rather than the elements composing situation. Similarly, in the case of Luhmann we find that while he is very clear in claiming that as a general axiom, sociology must posit that social systems constitute their own elements, he spends little time discussing the way in which this constitution takes place, instead arguing that the world apart from systems can only be thought as an undifferentiated chaos and that we can only speak of those constitutions that *have* taken place. As Luhmann puts it in *Art as a Social System*, "...matter as such, [is] sheer chaos, [and] is inaccessible to consciousness."¹⁷ Like Badiou, inconsistent multiplicities, for Luhmann, can only be thought anterior to the operation of the count-as-one and are otherwise inaccessible. Again, as a sociologist it would come as no surprise that Luhmann would largely gloss over the mechanisms of individuation, instead

¹⁶ Peter Hallward, *Badiou: A Subject to Truth*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003, pgs. 293 - 315.

¹⁷ Niklas Luhmann, *Art as a Social System*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000, pg. 104 (modified).

focusing on the individuated, for his aim is to investigate particular *existing* networks of social systems.

However, while we might understand why Badiou and Luhmann fail to engage in a close analysis of how individuation takes place, the absence of such a theory in their thought might very well have profound consequences for how they pose certain questions. Luhmann treats social systems as autopoietic systems that are operationally closed and which reproduce themselves in time. As Maturana and Varela put it, a system is characterized by operational closure if it is such that its "...identity is specified by a network of dynamic processes whose effects do not leave that network."¹⁸ In other words, operations within a system do not refer to what is outside the system, but rather only refer to themselves. They are self-referential.

Maturana and Varela go on to say,

In the interactions between the living being and the environment within this structural congruence, the perturbations of the environment do not determine what happens to the living being; rather, it is the structure of the living being that determines what changes occur in it. This interaction is not instructive, for it does not determine what its effects are going to be. Therefore, we have used the expression "to trigger" an effect. In this way we refer to the fact that the changes that result from the interaction between the living being and its environment are brought about by the disturbing agent but *determined by the structure the structure of the disturbed system.*¹⁹

The subtle point that Maturana and Varela are here making is that it is not the outside that determines the system, but rather the organization of the system itself determines itself. A perturbation is only an *irritant* that sets the system in action, but it is ultimately organization of the system that will determine the effects of this irritant. The system is not directly related to the outside. This conception of operational closure has a tremendous impact on Luhmann's theory of social systems. Luhmann will argue first that societies, like organisms, are autopoietically

¹⁸ Humberto R. Maturana & Francisco J. Varela, *The Tree of Knowledge: The Biological Roots of Human Understanding*, Boston: Sambhala Publications, Inc., 1998, pg. 89.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pgs. 95-96.

closed and therefore not directly related to an outside. As a result, societies cannot be steered from the outside. Secondly, each of the subsystems of society will be characterized by operational closure, such that no one subsystem can steer the other functional systems. Thus, for example, economy cannot determine governance because each is governed by different codes and vice versa.²⁰ As a result, systems cannot be changed from the outside, but rather evolve and change on their own as a result of system drift. In short, Luhmann's theoretical premises lead to a very pessimistic view as to the possibilities of social change through any sort of activism, because each system and sub-system is operationally closed and only relates to its environment through the mediation of its own code. A more focused analysis of individuation might instead yield insight into other possibilities of change that are invisible to Luhmann.

Similarly, in the case of Badiou, the lack of attentiveness to situations and their operations of individuation or the count-as-one, leads to the impression that the structure and state of situations is a monolithic form of organization from which there can be no escape. It is only by postulating an event unmediated by any of the structuring mechanisms of the situation, that he can imagine any sort of fundamental change within the situation. Insofar as the state and structure of the situation is an operational system organized around insuring the reproduction of its counting mechanism, change cannot occur within the situation itself. Again, however, other possibilities of change might reveal themselves through a closer analysis of just how individuation takes place.

While we do not find a well developed theory of individuation in either Badiou or Luhmann, we do find such a theory in the work of Deleuze and Deleuze and Guattari. Indeed, from beginning to end it could be said that Deleuze's thought consists of a profound meditation

²⁰ For an excellent and clear example of this, cf. Niklas Luhmann, *The Reality of the Mass Media*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007. Here Luhmann shows how mass media generates its own reality through the information/non-information code, rather than representing reality.

on individuation and the various ways in which change takes place. This should come as no surprise, for an ontology of difference is obligated to show just how unity, identity, similarity--all those features attributed to entity --arises out of difference. As Deleuze puts it in *Difference and Repetition*,

That identity not be first, that it exist as a principle but as a second principle, as a principle *become*; that it revolve around the Different: such would be the nature of a Copernican revolution which opens up the possibility of difference having its own concept, rather than being maintained under the domination of a concept in general already understood as identical.²¹

It is precisely this thesis that Deleuze strives to develop throughout his work. Deleuze and Guattari develop a particularly clear account of the processes by which beings are individuated in the “Geology of Morals” chapter of *A Thousand Plateaus*. There they follow Darwin in arguing that *populations* must precede forms.

It is through populations that one is formed, assumes forms, and through loss that one progresses and picks up speed. Darwinism’s two fundamental contributions move in the direction of a science of multiplicities: the substitution of populations for types, and the substitution of rates or differential relations for degrees.²²

Rather than beginning with the premise of pre-existent forms of which entities are more or less perfect copies, Deleuze and Guattari instead propose that we think heterogeneous populations out of which forms gradually emerge or are individuated. “Geographical areas can only harbor a sort of chaos, or, at best, extrinsic harmonies of an ecological order, temporary equilibriums between populations.”²³ The question, then, will be one of the temporal processes by which order emerges out of chaos or how stable forms come to be. There will be a variety of answers to these questions.

²¹ Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1994, pgs. 40-41.

²² Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, pg. 48.

²³ *Ibid.*

The relevance of this account for the understanding of social formations should be immediately relevant. If we recall that the social is not a substance that exists in itself, but rather a set of processes that must perpetually reproduce itself, then we require some sort of account as to how we get from unformed aggregates, to something like social forms. Deleuze and Guattari's account of individuation attempts to explain how we move from populations-- a sort of fuzzy statistical aggregate filled with heterogeneous elements --to the various social forms characterized by types that we see in the world around us. I cannot give a detailed discussion of Deleuze and Guattari's account of how forms are generated here, so hopefully it will suffice to draw attention to a few features of this account as developed in *A Thousand Plateaus*. Drawing on the linguistic theory of Louis Hjelmslev, Deleuze and Guattari deploy his account of content and expression as a general theory of individuation that would explain how forms are generated not only at the level of language, but at the level of social formations, biology, geology, and so on.

According to Deleuze and Guattari, there is a form and substance of content, and a form and substance of expression. Form refers to the process and order by which elements are selected to enter into an aggregate. By contrast, "substance" refers to formed matters or the results of this process. In explaining this complex nest of terms, Deleuze and Guattari write,

[Hjelmslev] used the term *matter* for the plane of consistency or Body without Organs, in other words, the unformed, unorganized, nonstratified, or destrafied body and all its flows: subatomic and submolecular particles, pure intensities, prevital and prephysical free singularities. He used the term *content* for formed matters, which would now have to be considered from two points of view: substance, insofar as these matters are 'chosen' and form, insofar as they are chosen in a certain order (*substance and form of content*). He used the term *expression* for functional structures, which would also have to be considered from two points of view: the organization of their own specific form, and substances insofar as they form compounds (*form and substance of expression*). A stratum always has a dimension of the expressible or of expression serving as the basis for a relative invariance; for example, nucleic sequences are inseparable from a relatively

invariant expression by means of which they determine compounds, organs, and functions of the organism.²⁴

It is crucial to emphasize that the distinction between form, substance, and matter is what the medievals called a *modal distinction* or a distinction of thought.²⁵ Just as color cannot exist independently of some sort of shape but the two can nonetheless be distinguished in thought, similarly, we never encounter a pure unformed matter or matter that is not substance. The Plane of Consistency is something that can be thought, that is posited by thought, but does not exist anywhere in its own right or in a pure state. The distinction between color and shape is a modal distinction or a distinction of thought, but nonetheless a genuine distinction for all that. Moreover, the relation between content and expression is a *relative* distinction, which is to say that something that functions as a content for one expression can, in turn, function as the expression of another content. Here we have emergent property relations and nested hierarchies. Similarly, something that functions as expression in one relation can function as content in another relation. This, for instance, would be the case with human beings, where humans are expressions in relation to DNA sequences and processes, but where they function as content with regard to larger social assemblages that are, in turn, themselves contents in relation to yet other assemblages.

The relation between expression and content can be thought as a sort of machine for the production of various types or formed matters. We should here note the dynamic use of terms in the passage such as “selection”, “choosing”, “ordering”, and so on. The example of the nucleic sequence is particularly illuminating in this connection. The nucleic sequence belongs to the substance and form of *content*. In being produced it must select particular materials or proteins (form), and produces certain substances as a result (formed matters). It has its own unique

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 43 (translation modified)

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 44.

organization or ordering sequences, its own unique actions and behaviors, and it selects or chooses from certain elements in its formation. On the other hand, the organism actualized from the genetic sequence, with its specific bodily organization, various functions, etc., is the form and substance of expression. Deleuze and Guattari emphasize that the plane of content, generally, though not always, corresponds to the molecular, and the plane of expression pertains to the molar.

On these strata, content (form and substance) is molecular, and expression (form and substance) is molar. The difference between the two is primarily one of order of magnitude or scale. Resonance, or the communication occurring between the two independent orders, is what institutes the stratified system. The molecular content of that system has its own form corresponding to the distribution of elemental masses and the action of one molecule on another; similarly, expression has a form manifesting the statistical aggregate and state of equilibrium existing on the macroscopic level.²⁶

What the relations between content and expression thus describe are the emergence of different unities, aggregates, or identities at different levels of scale, the organization among these elements, and the set of relations among these different levels of scale. Now a key point here is that the plane of content and the plane of expression *do not* resemble one another. As Deleuze repeatedly emphasizes in *Difference and Repetition*, the virtual does not resemble the actual. Similarly, while there is reciprocal presupposition and isomorphic relations between the nucleic sequence and the actualized organism, there is no resemblance between the two. The processes that take place at the level of content are distinct from the processes that take place at the level of expression. However, we would be in error to suggest that somehow the plane of content is *more real* than the plane of expression. The actualized organism engages in the world in ways that micro-level nucleic sequences cannot.

On the basis of this account of individuation, Deleuze and Guattari are able to make good on Badiou's observations about axiomatic set theory, where a set is always composed of

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pg. 57.

multiplicities of other multiplicities. That is, under this model we will not have any ultimate unities or identities, but rather it will be multiplicities all the way down, where one multiplicity constitutes another multiplicity as a unity for itself. The precise mechanisms by which matter takes on form to produce substance will, of course, have to be surveyed in all fields. They will differ from formation to formation, and depending on whether we are talking about ecosystems, rock sedimentations, city formations, and so on.

But what is the so-called “cash value” of Deleuze and Guattari’s theoretical construction here? Is it not overly complicated and baroque to be of any use? The value of distinctions lies in what they allow us to see and the questions they allow us to formulate. Take the example of the biological organism. There is a strain of contemporary genetic biology that situates everything in terms of a sort of genetic determinism, ignoring nearly everything else. From the standpoint of Deleuze and Guattari’s Hjelmslevian theory of individuation, such a theory restricts everything to the plane of content. While we can very well concede that there are important micro-processes that unfold at the molecular level, the molar actualized organism, the body, is not nothing. Processes of selection and interaction take place at this level as well that can neither be explained, nor reduced, to this molecular level. As Deleuze writes much earlier in *Difference and Repetition*,

A living being is not only defined genetically, by the dynamisms which determine its internal milieu, but also ecologically, by the external movements which preside over its distribution within an extensity. A kinetics of population adjoins, without resembling, the kinetics of the egg; a geographic process of isolation may be no less formative of a species than internal genetic variations, and sometimes precedes the latter. Everything is even more complicated when we consider that internal space is itself made up of multiple spaces which must be locally integrated and connected, and that this connection, which may be achieved in many ways, pushes the object or living being to its own limits, all in contact with the exterior; and that this relation with the exterior, and with other things and living beings, implies in turn connections with global integrations which differ in kind from the preceding.²⁷

²⁷ Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, pgs. 216-217

In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari will refine this observation, distinguishing between internal milieus, external milieus, and exchange milieus. The internal milieu is the internal make-up of a thing; in this case, the organs of an organism. The external milieu is the geography in which the organism is located. And finally the exchange milieu is the membrane between the two. First, at the level of DNA, all sorts of processes unfold whose trajectory is dependent on the release of local chemicals, nutrients, etc., in the vicinity of the cells in question. At the next level, we have similar interactions between the organs which will be dependent on rates of exchange between the organs, the nutrients and elements being processed, and so on. On these grounds, relations between the organs will not be strictly dependent on what is going on at the level of DNA, but will have a unique history of their own.

At the level of the organism as a whole, there will be interactions with an external milieu, a geographical localization, distinct from what goes on genetically or at the level of organs. Everything from the temperatures to the environment, to the air content, to the sorts of available nutrients will have an effect that rebounds back on the organs and DNA, effecting modifications on how these milieus function in their processing. Even more importantly, complete organisms enter into aggregates or assemblages with other organisms, whether of their own species or of other species, that also rebound back on the organs and DNA. Deleuze, for instance, refers to the function that geographical isolation can play in the individuation of species, insofar as the population mates and breeds with each other and not with others in other geographical locations. As Darwin observed, this leads to a process of speciation in which we get distinct groups. Between all these different levels we have relations of feedback and interaction, where genes influence populations and populations and environments influence genes, such that we cannot site any one of these milieus as the determining instance of all the others.

What Deleuze and Guattari's set of distinctions allows us to think are these various levels of scale and their interactions at one and the same time. Thus, from the standpoint of the plane of expression, we might examine the molar structural aggregates composing a social system, looking at how these molar organizations rebound back on individuals, generating forms of embodiment, affect, and consciousness. This, for example, is what Foucault does when he discusses Docile Bodies in *Discipline and Punish*. Yet at the level of the plane of content, we might think the statistical aggregates out of which these structures are formed, the populations that split off and form feedback relations between their aggregates, gradually producing social forms and themes as a result of their interaction. The various associations that occur within these statistical aggregates thus govern their tendencies of change. For instance, we might think of the aleatory association of people in the blogosphere, where unrelated people all over the globe encounter one another, begin to engage one another's work (often surrounding figures from entirely different traditions), such that certain themes, norms, and questions begin to emerge that would not have otherwise been present in an ordinary academic environment.

Between these different levels we can think the relations of feedback, where social systems are forced to respond to aggregates that form at the level of content or where aggregates of persons are forced to respond to effects of social systems. Again, we might think of how the academy responds to the productions of the blogosphere as they begin to filter into conferences, classrooms, academic journals, etc., and how the blogosphere deals with the molar form-producing machines of themes that dominate departments and journals, placing constraints on publications and lines of inquiry that must be navigated like so many selective pressures. We can think of what occurs when an element individuated within one system is placed in a new context or territory-- a Lacanian, for example, suddenly forced to express his claims to Frankfurt

theorist --and what emerges as a result. Similarly, we can think about what occurs when elements of code are taken from one territory and placed within another category, as when a concept is shifted from one territory to another, or when a strand of DNA from one species is picked up in another species through a virus. Far from finding monolithic unities governing these interactions, we instead find a constantly buzzing and amorphous cloud that has dominant tendencies here and there, but which also has emerging tendencies and aggregates that might transform the organization of the whole... And between all these various strata, we find relations of feedback and interaction, as elements of structure constantly respond to one another in point, counter-point relations. In short, this sorting increases the levels at which our analyses can take place as well as our ability to discern possibilities of change. All of this will become important in examining how music presents itself to us today.

I hope I will be forgiven this long foray through social ontology and questions of individuation. Hopefully the preceding will help us to situate the questions of music that make up the theme of this conference. Clearly, in relating the question of music as it manifests itself today to agency, it is implicitly being claimed that music functions as one of those mechanisms or operations by which social subjects are produced. As I hope to show, the way in which these questions are approached is very different depending on whether we focus on distribution and consumption, or whether we focus on musical production.

In her essay “Ubiquitous Listening and Networked Subjectivity”, Anahid Kassabian, focusing on musical *distribution* and *consumption*, argues that our relationship to music has undergone a fundamental shift under post-industrial consumer capitalism. According to Kassabian-- and I certainly do not disagree --music has become ubiquitous. Today we encounter music everywhere, such that it makes up the constant background of our activities. We play

music on our car radios as we drive to our destinations. Music is pumped through the speakers of restaurants, shopping malls, and mega-stores. When we fiddle about our homes and apartments, we turn on the radio. People walking down the street or on the train often look as if they are carrying their own diving or astronaut suits, always wearing their headphones as if these were life support devices that protect them from the external milieu in which they are enmeshed. Music also makes up the background of commercials, television shows of all kinds, and films.

Music, in short, is today everywhere. Where, in prior historical settings, music had very specific sites and was an event, today music makes up the texture of everyday life. Were this to be expressed in phenomenological terms, it could be said that the intentional relationship we entertain to music has changed as well. In previous socio-historical milieus, music occurs in specific times and places. One might hear music at church, or witness the performance of an opera or an orchestra, or might join together with others in songs. Within such a milieu, our consciousness is a consciousness *of* the music. That is, our attention is directed towards the musical event and other activities are set aside and fall into the background. However, when music becomes ubiquitous, it is no longer the object of our consciousness, but instead comes to accompany all of our activities. Music is something alongside our activities. We do things to music.

However, while music is no longer the object of our intention in most instances, Kassabian contends that this mutation in how we relate to music also generates a new form of subjectivity. According to Kassabian, contemporary subjectivity is no longer defined as an individual or discrete subjectivity, but rather subjects under post-industrial capitalism are characterized by what she calls a “ubiquitous subjectivity”. As Kassabian puts it,

Its attendant subjectivity is not individual, not defined by Oedipus or agency or any discrete unity. The listener of this third selling is no mere subject, but rather a part of an

always moving ever-present web. S/he is not a listener of a genre first and foremost, but rather a listener *tout court*. Ubiquitous music is cable that networks all of us together, not in some dystopian energy-producing array *à la The Matrix*, but in a lumpy deployment of dense nodes of knowledge/power.²⁸

Kassabian illustrates this idea by analogy to the SETI@home project. To increase its computer power, the SETI program uses home computers from various people around the world.

Presumably, then, ubiquitous or networked subjectivity is such that we all are "...a little lump or node in an enormous array of [listening] activity."²⁹

Beyond remarking that this new form of subjectivity is no longer Oedipal or characterized by discrete agency, Kassabian says precious little as to just what this networked subjectivity is, how it functions, and why it is significant. A moment later she compares this form of subjectivity to *Star Trek's* Borg, remarking that "...we are uncomfortable being unhooked from the background sound of ubiquitous subjectivity... We prefer to be connected, need to listen to our connections, can't breath without them. We already live a network we insist on thinking of as a dystopian future."³⁰ It seems to me that there are a couple of points worth asking in response to Kassabian's observations about contemporary listening. First, in what way is her analogy to the SETI@home program and the Borg apt and in what ways, perhaps, does it fail? Putting on my psychoanalyst's cap for a moment, the previous quoted passage seems to indicate a vacillation in the consequences she draws from this thesis. On the one hand, she compares this state of affairs to that of the Borg. We associate *Star Trek's* Borg with the absence of agency, where every individual member is a node in the collective, without any thought or agency of their own. Yet on the other hand, Kassabian says "[w]e already live in a network we *insist* on thinking as a dystopian future." Her use of the verb "insist" suggests that she has

²⁸ Anahid Kassabian, "Ubiquitous Listening and Networked Subjectivity", ECHO: a music-centered journal, Volume 3, Issue 2 (Fall 2001), pt. 24.

²⁹ *Ibid.* (modified).

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pt. 27.

reservations about thinking this state of affairs as dystopian. For instance, when discounting another person's position we often say "why do you *insist* on thinking this way?", as if to say the person is thinking a particular way despite all sorts of evidence and reason to the contrary. Perhaps, in juxtaposing the observation that we are already living this network with the observation that such networks are described as dystopian, Kassabian is implying that maybe this is not a dystopia after all. Second, to what degree can it be said we have shifted from an Oedipal account of subjectivity that is discrete, individual, and unified, to a networked or ubiquitous form of subjectivity? It is ironic that Kassabian evokes the psychoanalytic conception of subjectivity, for the central thesis of psychoanalysis from Freud on is that subjectivity emerges only in relation to the social field. That is, Oedipal subjectivity *is* a networked subjectivity.

As I remarked earlier in this paper, one of the central problems for capitalism is the problem of how to reproduce the conditions of consumption. When Kassabian compares contemporary subjectivity to the Borg or the SETI@home, it appears that she is referencing something along these lines, where a shift in the contemporary form of distribution generates a new milieu of individuation where all of us contribute to one great machine, both consuming that machine and producing that machine. If this is a fair representation of her position, Kassabian's thesis can be said to be a variation on what I call "strong" or "monolithic" theories of individuation. Articulating a similar thesis, Horkheimer and Adorno, in "The Culture Industry", remark that,

From every sound film and every broadcast program the social effect can be inferred which is exclusive to none but is shared by all alike. The culture industry as a whole has molded men as a type unflinchingly reproduced in every product. All the agents of this process, from the producer to the women's clubs, take good care that the simple reproduction of this mental state is not nuanced or extended in any way.³¹

³¹ Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, New York: Continuum Books, 1972, pg. 127.

Filtered through the relentless medium of the culture industry, subjectivity is modulated or individuated as a particular type, with specific affects in response to specific stimuli, specific desires and aspirations, and specific forms of consciousness. At the level of the plane of content, this shift required certain transformations to become possible. One of the essential features of music is that it is iterable. We can memorize music, write it down, and repeat it at different times and places. What is unique to our time is the emergence of recording and communications technologies, that make this repetition dependent not on individual humans, but which allow music to be repeated or reproduced indefinitely throughout the world and on repeating loops. Under these monolithic theories of individuation, determination moves from the top down. The culture industry thoroughly individuates social subjects, making them what they are, without feedback from the individuated agents or these agents effecting individuations on the culture industry. In *Empire*, Negri and Hardt will refer to the way in which we tend to think of the media system in terms of the Wizard of Oz, where there is a man behind the curtain controlling and designing everything *as if* there were a point of central control.³² This would also be a way of reading Pynchon's *Crying of Lot 49*, where Oedipa believes there is a secret to the social order that she can find if she only looks hard enough. From a Lacanian perspective, as horrifying as such a monolithic, all-controlling, order might be, the belief in such an order, in the existence of the big Other, is nonetheless preferable to the alternative: that the big Other does not exist and that the chaos we see, the lack of well defined social codes and rules perpetually leaving the outcome of our wagers in social action uncertain, is all that the social is. That is, that the social is this chaos with islands of relative stability but without an Apollonian code underlying it that would make it all clear. Paradoxically, monolithic theories of individuation would be ways of reassuring us by convincing us that there is a code, that the social is calculable.

³² Michael Hardt & Antonio Negri, *Empire*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000, pgs. 322-323.

While music has always played an individuating role with regard to human beings-- in the form of ritual music, nursery rhymes sung to children, folk songs, and national songs --music and other forms of media now function as milieus of individuation on a greater scale than ever before. As Attali puts it, “[a]ll music, any organization of sounds is then a tool for the creation or consolidation of a community, of a totality.”³³ The consolidation of a community is also the production of a subjectivity or what Deleuze and Guattari call territorialization. This function can be seen clearly in American highschools, where different social groups distinguish themselves according to musical genre. Thus you have your punks, alterno-kids, headbangers, rappers, hip hop kids, pop kids, neo-hippies, and so on. Following Deleuze and Guattari’s thesis that the refrain is that by which a territory is drawn, these different social universes form so many territories. One does not first have a particular form of consciousness and way of feeling and *then*, identify with a particular type of music. The various musical genres also territorialize various affective spaces, forms of embodiment, forms of micro-politics, and forms of consciousness. For example, the punk loves or dreams of love differently than the pop enthusiast. This is not simply a matter of differing tastes, but is an active formation that takes place in and through the relationship to the music. Accompanying the musical identifications, entire markets also open up. Not only do the highschool students purchase variants within their genres, but they buy clothing, jewelry, etc., as they form themselves according to the territorial motifs of their genre.

These sort of territorializations function in far more subtle ways throughout our digital culture. Today we find music being reterritorialized on the image and the image deterritorializing music. Deleuze argues that the present is the most contracted moment of the

³³ Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 206, pg. 6.

past. In this connection, it can be said that sound and image function as citations, producing certain affects and desires. Recently, for example, Honda has been advertising a mini-van with all sorts of 60s music and imagery in the background. On the one hand, the mini-van is the quintessential expression of bourgeois family life, the very end of a variety of different freedoms. However, in territorializing 60s music on the mini-van, the van itself becomes an index of something else: the revolutionary spirit of the 60s, coupled with free love and experimentation with drugs. The hope is that there will be a sort of metonymical exchange of properties. Of course, even though all these indexes are formed through our media consumption, we are still, nonetheless, driving a mini-van. It is in this way, I think, that we can talk about a networked subjectivity. Through a weaving of narratives, images, and music, expressive territorial spaces are produced with their own accompanying desires, affects, and forms of subjectivity. We get a web of indexicals-- in C.S. Peirce's sense of the word --around which our own subjectivity is organized and activated. As this web is woven, it becomes difficult to determine what desires, affects, forms of consciousness, if any, are our own and what are complex productions of this ubiquitous media that surrounds us.

In his post "When the Music Stops: Distributed Agency and Listening After Music", Ian Biddle asks whether there might be a distributed agency that corresponds to distributed subjectivity.³⁴ Biddle begins by observing that there seems to be an opposition between agency on the one hand, and ubiquity on the other hand. Where ubiquity functions as a monolithic regime of individuation, there can be nothing but automatism and slavery such as we find in the Borg. Where, by contrast, we have subjectivity, in its Cartesian form, we have agency and the possibility of action. We have freedom. Biddle wonders, by contrast, whether a distributed

³⁴ Ian Biddle, "When the Music Stops: Distributed Agency and Listening After Music", Blah-Feme, <http://blahfeme.typepad.com/blahfeme/2007/01/index.html>

agency might be possible. In closing this paper, there are two points that I would like to make. First, if I have devoted so much attention to the question of individuation, then this is to suggest that the idea of a discrete subjectivity is a myth or optical illusion of sorts. To put matters paradoxically, the Cartesian subject was already a distributed subjectivity. It could only emerge under very specific historical circumstances and was a way in which social being was lived in these circumstances. What we witness today is not a difference in kind, but a difference in degree. As thinkers such as Lacan and Deleuze and Guattari teach us, subjectivity is always-already distributed in the sense that subjects are always already individuated within a social field. This observation, I think, significantly changes the nature of the question. Instead of supposing that there has been a shift from an age in which we were agents to an age in which we are enslaved Borg, we should instead look at the collective distributions, the collective networks, which historically have produced change within a social system. Revolution is always the work of a collective agent, a collectivity, a group in formation, or what Sartre called a subject-group. Some possibility begins to resonate in the social field that was not visible there before. What are the conditions under which this occurs? Returning to Deleuze and Guattari's different milieus and the ordering of content and expression, we must not hesitate to look at all the levels of scale, from the most monolithic individuating machines to those barely perceptible aggregates just beginning to emerge.

Second, and in close connection to this first point, to what degree does what I have here called "monolithic or strong theories of individuation", emerge from focusing on mechanisms *distribution* to the detriment of production? When we focus on distributed media, we are inevitably led to questions of *receptivity* or the receiving body. Historically in aesthetics, receptivity has been associated with *passivity*. Impressions are something I passively receive and

undergo, that then give form to me in a particular fashion. Once we have made this move, an entire implicit Skinnerian theory of learning is not far in the offing. Lurking in our minds are images of cookie cutters pressing themselves into dough. Yet as I have tried to show, the field of individuation is something that must constantly reproduce itself and that exists at various levels of scale, where no one level of this system overdetermines all the others. Might a very different set of questions emerge were we to look at production instead of distribution? Musical production takes place at a variety of different levels of significance and scale. It can be found in everything from the play-list on ones iPod and the mixed tape composed for ones beloved, to musical collectives surrounding a particular bar like CBGB's in New York during the late 70s and early 80s. These collectives begin to produce their own "speciation", there own territories, which generate new forms of embodiment, affect, and consciousness. To what degree might these aleatory networks in processes of becoming challenge striated machines of individuation that strive only to reproduce existing territories and their linkage to existing modes of production. Or, to put it more dramatically, to what degree might such aggregates of production make good on Attali's thesis: *...every major social rupture has been preceded by an essential mutation in the codes of music, in its mode of audition, and in its economy.*³⁵

³⁵ Attali, pg. 10.