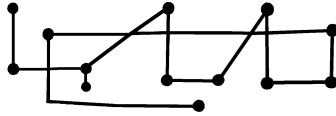


*MILLE PLATEAUX, YOU TARZAN:*  
A MUSICOLOGY OF  
(AN ANTHROPOLOGY OF  
(AN ANTHROPOLOGY OF  
*A THOUSAND PLATEAUX*))



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INTRODUCTION: ABOUT TP

**I**N THE BEGINNING, or ostensibly, or literally, it was erotic. *A Thousand Plateaus* (“TP”) evolved from the *Anti-Oedipus*, also by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (“D&G”), who were writing in 1968, responding to the mini-revolution in the streets of Paris which catalyzed explosive growth in French thinking, both on the right (Lacan, Girard) and on the left. It is a left-wing theory against patriarchy, and by extension, even against psychic and bodily integration, pro-“schizoanalysis” (Guattari’s *métier*) and in favor of the Body Without Organs.

Eat roots raw. The notion of the rhizome is everywhere: an underground tubercular system or mat of roots, a non-hierarchical network, is the ideal and paradigm. The chapters in TP may be read in any order. The order in which they are numbered and printed cross-cuts the temporal order of the dates each chapter bears (e.g., “November 28, 1947: How Do You Make Yourself a Body Without Organs?”). TP preaches and instantiates a rigorous devotion to the ideal of multiplicity, nonhierarchy, transformation, and escape from boundaries at every moment. TP is concerned with subverting a mindset oriented around an identity which is unchanging essence, but equally subversive of the patriarchal move towards transcendence. This has political implications—as it does in the ultra-right and centrist philosopher Plato, who originally set the terms of debate. Given a choice, though, between one or many Platos, D&G would pick a pack of Platos.

How does the program of TP, folded (as well as expressed) at many levels into its writing and dissed “organization,” avoid conflict with its anthropological structuralism? Like the work of Claude Levi-Strauss (e.g., *the Raw and the Cooked*, *La Pensée Sauvage*), TP proceeds by way of paired and opposed terms: Rhizomes vs. hierarchical trees; Territorialization vs. Deterritorialization. TP has a quasi-spatial dimensionality as metaphor (immanent  $n$ -dimensional “planes of consistency” vs. the  $n + 1$  overview which conceals a motion towards transcendence within itself); Striated vs. Smooth space; Monadology and Nomadology; and so on. However, polarities or pairs are not themselves rhizomatic, presenting another possible conflict. We will explore this issue later on.

The poetry of the language of TP is part of its message: things, people, bodies, concepts ooze, slide around, morph into each other, and generally engage in a kind of climax-free erotic play. The rhetoric is strong and persuasive, as well as being pervasively sensuous. It exhorts, preaches, orders us around (more than a hint of S&M), all for our enjoyment. TP is a brilliant and inspiring book that has been very influential, partly because these philosophers are *practicing on us and on themselves*.

#### BATESON’S IDEAS

In order to analyze the world of the TP in a way that connects with music, we begin with the thinker D&G credit with the concept of “plateau” in their sense, the anthropologist Gregory Bateson, whose work influences TP rhizomatically. According to D&G, Bateson

uses the term “plateau” to designate something very special: a continuous, self-vibrating region of intensities whose development avoids any orientation toward a culminating point or external end. Bateson cites Balinese culture as an example. . . . “Some sort of continuing plateau of intensity is substituted for [sexual] climax,” war, or a culmination point. It is a regrettable characteristic of the Western mind to relate expressions and actions to exterior or transcendent ends, instead of evaluating them on a plane of consistency on the basis of their intrinsic value.<sup>1</sup>

The reference in TP is to Bateson’s 1949 essay, “Bali: The Value System of a Steady State.”<sup>2</sup> In it, Bateson is concerned to refine his theoretical concepts of “ethos” and “schismogenesis” for the understanding of cultures and societies, by studying a counterexample, Bali, which does not fit well into his previous generalizations.

Already in the 1930s, Bateson was thinking in terms amounting to a kind of “systems theory” or “cybernetics” of culture, pre-dating even the von Neumann game theory and “information theory” that Bateson adapts and adopts to some extent once they in turn were elaborated in the 1940s. In a 1935 article called “Culture Contact and Schismogenesis,”<sup>3</sup> Bateson discusses the factors that promote unity and differentiation among cultural groups. Differentiation is referred to three kinds of “schismogenetic” process: symmetrical, complementary, and reciprocal. In symmetrical schismogenesis, there is what can be described as positive feedback in a system such that behavior by one part of the system stimulates similar behavior by another part of the system, parts being individuals or groups. In common variant of this pattern, each cycle of new behavior tends to rise in intensity, as in bragging contests or “the dozens,” causing a progressive escalation. The escalation can be open-ended in theory, but more often leads to some crisis or catharsis, such as laughter, sexual climax, war, sacrifice, or the expulsion of an emissary victim, which changes the pattern of interaction. The crisis itself is then *meta-systematic*: it changes the system. You will recognize that my description of escalating schismogenesis alludes to later developments such as the far-right theorizing of such thinkers as René Girard, strands which also had their roots in the 1930s.<sup>4</sup> Schismogenesis of this kind—symmetrical and escalating—is then a theory of mimetic rivalry.

Bateson’s “complementary schismogenesis” is a system in which the behavior of each part stimulates behavior in the other part which is *different in kind*, but which itself stimulates further behavior of the first kind by the first part, and so on. For example, part A may behave

aggressively, stimulating not aggression but submissive behavior by part B, which only leads to more aggressive behavior by part A, and more submissive behavior by B, and so on. If the aggression and submission ramp up so that they tend toward extremes of intensity, this would be an *escalating* complementary schismogenesis. As in escalating symmetrical schismogenesis, this leads to a crisis and a change of system. A guy is hitting on a girl in a bar, she keeps demurring, he keeps pressing on, but eventually she tells him to get lost, or walks away to find another guy, or she goes home. Bateson later asserts that “all the modes associated with the erogenous zones . . . define themes for *complementary* relationship.”<sup>5</sup> Erotic activity as an escalating complementary system would be “bounded by phenomena comparable to orgasm,”<sup>6</sup> and further, Bateson says that human behavior in any escalating schismogenetic system may be *motivated* by a wish on the part of each actor for the *release* of the crisis or catharsis.

“Reciprocal schismogenesis” is a variant of complementary schismogenesis in which parts A and B of the system may each of them behave in more than one kind of way, having a larger repertory of behavior, but in which there are set patterns of response to each stimulus no matter who is responding. For example, party A may act aggressively, in which case party B always acts submissively in response, but party B may also act aggressively, in which case party A always acts submissively in response. Or, some individuals in party A and party B at times act aggressively, but each response from some individual in the other party would be submissive, in which case the statistics might work out so that the system is balanced. Or some actions might be erotic, with specific erotic responses, and so on. Every time a knee is caressed, the knee is pressed against the other’s thigh. Or, the foot under the toilet stall wall. Another example might be a fully developed free trade system between two economically developed nations, in which each nation both sells and buys the full range of goods. Clearly, reciprocal schismogenesis can be homeostatic rather than schismatic, and may be a very large system involving more than two parties and much more complex patterns of behavior than some sets of invariant stimulus and response pairs. We see that the patterns of symmetrical and complementary schismogenesis Bateson starts out with are elementary extremes of the full range of systemic activity, but useful perhaps as hypotheses and building blocks. Current economic theory does address systemic complexities, but in a context that is a game of maximizing a single variable for each actor, and therefore is inherently what I have been calling an escalating system.

The motivation for Bateson’s paper on Bali is that “*Schismogenic sequences were not found in Bali.*”<sup>7</sup> In anthropology in 1949, “conven-

tionally, . . . we . . . show how the value system implicit in the social organization is built into the character structure of the individuals in their childhood.”<sup>8</sup> Given the hypothesis, which Bateson continues to assert, that “human beings have a tendency to involve themselves in sequences of cumulative interaction”<sup>9</sup> that is, schismogenesis, what cultural training can account for individuals behaving so as to maintain a steady-state system, within the multidimensional value space of a cultural game that is not concerned simply with maximizing any single variable? That is the problem of Bali.

At this point, we are all remembering D&G and their rhizomatic schismoverse, that somehow combines schismosis, that is, differentiation, even within each individual psyche, with the maintenance of a non-escalating and non-hierarchical multidimensional system. A thousand plateaus. I am going to give you an extended quote from Bateson’s Bali article:

The most important exception [to schismogenesis] occurs in the relationship between adults and children. Typically, the mother will start a small flirtation with the child, pulling its penis. . . . This will excite the child, and for a few moments cumulative interaction will occur. Then just as the child, approaching some small climax, flings its arms around the mother’s neck, her attention wanders. At this point the child will typically start an alternative cumulative interaction, building toward a temper tantrum. The mother . . . will . . . [enjoy] the child’s tantrum. . . . The perhaps basically human tendency toward cumulative personal interaction is thus muted. It is possible that some sort of continuing plateau of intensity is substituted for climax as the child becomes more fully adjusted to Balinese life. This cannot at present be clearly documented for sexual relations.<sup>10</sup>

There are a number of problems with this excerpt, and with the way D&G use it in TP. In this excerpt, you will have noticed that “the child” is, for Bateson in 1949, both an “it” and male. How many field observations support this “typical” case of mother–boychild interaction? Any observation of this kind is at the same time very much an interpretation. Is this nurturing scene at the basis of Balinese society only a fantasy of the Anthropological Gaze?

Gregory Bateson was married to the famous anthropologist Margaret Mead. One can easily imagine—he does not reference Mead’s research in this area—the field research that might corroborate his hypothesis for Balinese sexual activity—that it consists to some extent of plateaus, not

orgasms. Not all plateaus: since there are still Balinese, there must have been some orgasms there. This extension of Bateson's main assertion is the focal point of D&G's reference and construal of the term "plateau," though it is only a speculative aside in Bateson.

It is interesting what D&G *add* to this concept. I will quote parts of my earlier quote from TP and comment on them separately. They say that Bateson "uses the term 'plateau' to designate something very special: a continuous, self-vibrating region of intensities." What exactly is a "self-vibrating region"? This is not in Bateson's vocabulary. D&G say, "It is a regrettable characteristic of the Western mind." Schismogenesis is now a characteristic of Westerners, not humans in general—which would have made Bali a non-problem for Bateson. And it is a regrettable characteristic. Finally, when D&G want us to "evaluate [actions] on a plane of consistency on the basis of their *intrinsic value*," are D&G asserting the impossibility of any other system than the one making up this particular plane of consistency? Is the schismoverse universal after all?

There seems to be here a romanticism of the exotic, a sort of orientalism of the South Pacific, being invoked in the service of a political agenda. Sexual climax = war? In "How Do You Make Yourself a Body Without Organs?" TP makes the sexual program explicit. The chapter is a brilliant, detailed, lyrical poem of praise to masochism and drug addiction, both climax-free, with a few half-hearted asides to the effect that both of these can lead to death.

*A cargo ship unloads a thousand Platos into a tropical jungle. A Tarzan finds one starving in the jungle, and takes it home to his hut to feed. The Plato, needing conversation, gives Tarzan Greek lessons. The Plato gets so excited every time Tarzan shows progress that he flings his arms around Tarzan's neck, upon which Tarzan always wanders away looking for fruit. Eventually, the Platos learn not to get too excited, and enjoy life in the jungle.*

#### BATESON IN TP

There are, however, important aspects of Bateson's anthropology that do seem to be reflected in TP. And we can look at TP reflected in the mirror of Bateson. We can ask about TP: What is its game? What is the "value system implicit in the social organization" of TP, and how is that value system "built into the character structure of the individuals"? As we shall see, this amounts to asking: *What kind of machine is TP?* This question is at once Batesonian, D&G-ian, and music-theoretical.

Bateson says: “The mammalian value system is not simple and monotone, but may be exceedingly complex. ... we know that the animal does not strive to maximize its supply of any [one of the things it needs to live], but rather is required to maintain the supply of each within tolerable limits. Too much may be as harmful as too little.”<sup>11</sup> The game played by any animal, such as a human being, has a multidimensional value system in which maximizing any single variable is not a good idea. This would be a complex system involving interactions or dependencies among all the parameters, that might be homeostatic were it not also the case for humans at least that people learn, and learning can even be second-order learning, Bateson’s “deutero-learning,” which may change the game. Such a system characterizes both the internal economy of each animal, and the society of animals, so there is an analogy between the internal and the external, the individual and the plural.

#### THE TP MACHINE

If making such assertions is a Batesonian game, it is equally a game explicitly played by TP, pervasively. The internal system of the body is de-organized into what D&G call a “machinic assemblage” in the chapter called “BwO”; the boundaries of individual being are made to flow in the chapter “Becoming-Intense, Becoming-Animal, Becoming-imperceptible”; the realm of the molecular and the molar is leveraged into the realm of “Micropolitics and Segmentarity”; the Treatise on Nomadology constructs a system comprising the State and the War Machine. The internal is the external, the bodily is the formal, and the personal, of course, is the political. The Levi-Straussian value space D&G construct in TP uses many paired-term quasi-dimensions to set up its multidimensional value space. Maximizing any single variable is not a good idea: “You have to keep enough of the organism for it to reform each dawn. . . . You don’t reach the BwO, and its plane of consistency, by wildly de-stratifying. . . . Those empty and dreary bodies . . . *had emptied themselves of their organs* instead of looking for the point at which they could patiently and momentarily dismantle the organization of the organs we call the organism.”<sup>12</sup>

The machinic assemblage is D&G’s operative version of the rhizome. “There are lines of articulation or segmentarity, strata and territories; but also lines of flight, movements of deterritorialization and de-stratification. Comparative rates of flow on these lines produce phenomena of relative slowness and viscosity, or, on the contrary, of acceleration and

rupture. All this, lines and measurable speeds, constitutes an *assemblage*.”<sup>13</sup> An “abstract machine . . . constitutes and conjugates all of the assemblage’s cutting edges of deterritorialization”;<sup>14</sup> it is diagrammatic, operating by function.

The world-system proposed by TP is a break from the status quo. It is meant to be revolutionary. Something has to make the world change, has to deterritorialize this world of status quo. The system of TP incorporates machinic assemblages, as we have seen, and perhaps itself could be characterized as a machinic assemblage, if we dared to make a (w)hole of it (with or without the “w”). “A machine is like a set of cutting edges that insert themselves into the assemblage undergoing deterritorialization, and draw variations or mutations of it.” “The machine may . . . open the territorial assemblage to interspecific [cross-species] assemblages. . . . Or it may go beyond all assemblages and produce an opening into the Cosmos. . . . It may be necessary for the release of innovative processes that they first fall into a catastrophic black hole. . . . *Machines are always singular keys that open or close an assemblage, a territory.*”<sup>15</sup> D&G might as well be talking about themselves, about the role of *A Thousand Plateaus*. The machinic assemblage of TP is the means by which its revolutionary value system is “built into the character structure of the individuals.” TP *operates* on us to produce a thousand plateaus. D&G are practicing what they preach, and they are practicing on us, using their TP machine.

#### THE TP MACHINE, THE BATESON MACHINE, AND THE NET

How can we theorize the TP machine? We have shown, I hope, that it is a Batesonian kind of machine, a multidimensional non-escalating system, operating in a Batesonian kind of way, showing “how the value system implicit in the social organization is built into the character structure of the individuals” by actually *operating* to build the machine into the individuals. But we now know more about machines than was known in Batesonian times.

The algebraic structure of any machine is that of a semigroup action. Recall that a *semigroup* is a set of elements  $S$  with an associative binary operation mapping  $S \times S$  to  $S$ . A *monoid* is a semigroup with an identity. A *left [right] S-act* for any set  $A$  is a mapping from  $S \times A$  to  $A$  where each pair of elements  $(s, a)$  maps to  $sa$ , where  $1a = a$  and  $(ts)a = t(sa)$  for all  $a$  in  $A$  and  $s, t$  in  $S$ . Where the identity is missing from  $S$ , this is called a *semigroup act*; where the identity element is present in  $S$ , this is a *monoidal act*, or *M-act*. An *S-act* is also called an *S-automaton*. It is a machine.



A *semiautomaton* is an automaton without outputs. It is modeled as an act over a monoid in a natural way. In this case,  $A$  is the set of states, and  $S$  is the input monoid. In this way, in the theory of  $S$ -acts, we might as well speak of semiautomata instead of  $M$ -acts. The standard general algebraic theory of machines extends this construction to automata that do have input and output.<sup>16</sup>

“Transformational networks” are then semiautomata, whether they are restricted to Lewin-nets, or more restricted to  $K$ -nets, or opened up as the more general kind of polysemic and noncommutative Net described in my “Cool Tools” paper. As semiautomata, they resemble Batesonian systems. In any Net, the algebraic entity whose transformations label the arrows of the Net *acts on* the set of things from which the contents of the nodes are drawn, in this precise sense of mathematical action.<sup>17</sup>

This perspective sets the stage for thinking of the TP machine as a music-theoretical Net. We can formalize the TP machine by means of  $S$ -acts and  $M$ -acts as a polysemic and noncommutative Net or semiautomaton. In the other direction, we can import the TP-machine into music theory: a Net is a rhizomatic machine that never gets anywhere, but maintains itself in itself—a plateau. The TP machine is a transformational network in which the concept of “transformation” transforms in a way that is true to David Lewin’s *epistemology of the act*: knowing is doing. The action may be magical: “The Wolf-Man’s pack of wolves also becomes a swarm of bees, and a field of anuses, and a collection of small holes and tiny ulcerations.”<sup>18</sup> The arrow from the pack of wolves to a field of anuses, the arrow from the pack of wolves to a swarm of bees. The TP machine itself acts on everything in the world, particularly including us. Building itself into us, the TP machine perpetuates or even replicates itself, like some swarm of futuristic war machines.

Modern game theory, following along the lines suggested by Bateson (“deutero-learning” and so on), has to some extent formalized more realistic “sophisticated” games in which each player modifies its strategy according to its best guess about how the other players are modifying theirs, given the basic game structure and history of play.<sup>19</sup> Such economic game theory is of course formally related to, and to some extent derived from, the “cybernetics” of Bateson’s era and to more modern “systems theory” and mathematical theory of machines. However, modifying the basic game structure as play goes on would be a more radical, and still quite realistic, kind of system, though harder to formalize usefully due to the level of abstraction required. And there is a further step within the game frame, unavailable to Bateson since the

mathematics was not yet invented: given a cultural or musical-piece machine—or the TP machine—what is the structure of its temporal evolutions as the game is played? Chaos theory provides the math to describe such a complex dynamical system.

What the Net does not model is Bateson's "deutero-learning," which alters the system during its operation. This meta-systematic effect can transform the system into a different system by increments. The TP machine models this internally by its *ligne de fuite*, the line of flight, and alludes to such effects by its many metaphors of freedom, such as deterritorialization. But every deterritorialization is a reterritorialization. The TP machine is the world, so that there is no exit from it from within it. One could only hard-reboot into a different operating system.

NOTES

1. Deleuze and Guattari 1987 (TP), 21–2. TP’s rhetoric, as you will notice in the final sentence, is occasionally sermonizing. And expanding on this later, “A plateau is a piece of immanence. Every Body Without Organs is made up of plateaus. Every BwO is itself a plateau in communication with other plateaus on the plane of consistency. The BwO is a component of passage” (TP, 158).
2. Bateson 1972, “Bali,” 107–27.
3. Bateson 1972, “Culture,” 61–72.
4. René Girard 1977.
5. Bateson 1972, “Bali,” 110.
6. Bateson 1972, “Bali,” 111.
7. Bateson 1972, “Bali,” 112.
8. Bateson 1972, “Bali,” 123.
9. Bateson 1972, “Bali,” 115.
10. Bateson 1972, “Bali,” 112–3.
11. Bateson 1972, “Bali,” 122.
12. TP, 160–1.
13. TP, 3–4.
14. TP, 141.
15. TP, 333–4.
16. See Kilp, Knauer, and Mikhalev 2000, 43–5.
17. Rahn, John 2007a, 2007b.
18. TP, 249.
19. See for example Fudenberg and Levine 1998, Chapter 8.

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