

Guattari, consistency and the musical assemblage

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Abstract

The concept of the assemblage is one with great interest for music studies. While a number of authors have previously considered the Deleuze-Guattarian assemblage in relation to a variety of musical repertoires and genres, this paper will focus instead on a more fundamental theoretical question. Considering a musical or a mixed media work as a Deleuze-Guattarian assemblage entails recognising that its 'interest' or 'success' is in some way the product of its consistency in the sense that it constitutes a successful, viable, meeting place of elements from these milieu, of these heterogeneous forces. We might then ask – what exactly do we mean when we speak of the consistency of a musical or mixed media assemblage? Acknowledging that most of the work that has been done in this area has relied principally on the joint theorisations of Deleuze and Guattari, this paper for the most part traces the concept of consistency as it is formulated in multiple places in Guattari's writings. This is undertaken in the conviction that Guattari's various theorisations offer us interesting and productive ways of thinking the consistency of musical compositions and events. The paper concludes with some general remarks on the fluid nature of consistency in musical composition from the turn to atonality to the contemporary situation.

Guattari, Consistency and the Musical Assemblage

Musical assemblages are composed from diverse milieu, of which musical sound is only one component. From this point of view assemblage theory might first be thought of as involving the identification of the forces comprising any given artwork, an activity which itself can be understood as operating on more than one level. More specifically, innovative music is formed from all kinds of unexpected rhizomatic connections operating between social practices, the development of instruments and instrumental techniques, musical systems, notation, performance styles and practices, developments in technology, performance spaces, musical institutions, the recording and reproduction of music, relationships with literature, visual arts and philosophy, and innumerable other factors. Each of these comprises a specific milieu from which elements are reterritorialised to form a musical assemblage. As a form of Deleuzian Spinozism, Amy Cimini notes that «listeners, performers, instruments, spaces, musical forms, and sonorous vibration» can be thought of as bodies of equal value, capable of affecting and being affected by one another, in such a way that analysis of the musical work becomes the task of unpicking the relations of the respective bodies which have reached a unified, composite state in the art work (Cimini 2010: 137). All of which prompts questions regarding the precise nature

of these bodies or ‘sound particles’ or of how we can think them as affecting one another with their ‘micro-movements’ (Cimini 2010: 138, 144).

Considering a musical or a mixed media work as a Deleuze-Guattarian assemblage entails recognising that its ‘interest’ or ‘success’ is in some way the product of its consistency in the sense that it constitutes a successful, viable, meeting place of elements from these heterogeneous forces. We might then ask what we mean when we speak of the consistency of a musical or mixed media assemblage or of musical assemblages as working or as succeeding on the basis of their consistency?

Guattari on Consistency

Deleuze and Guattari devote the final chapter of their book on Kafka to the question ‘What is an Assemblage?’ and the specific question of consistency is articulated at length in *A Thousand Plateaus* (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 327-37) where it is identified as «the manner in which the components of a territorial assemblage hold together» as well as «the manner in which different assemblages hold together, with components of passage and relay». They suggest that

it may even be the case that consistency finds the totality of its conditions only on a properly cosmic plane, where all the disparate and heterogeneous elements are convoked. However, from the moment heterogeneities hold together in an assemblage or interassemblages a problem of consistency is posed, in terms of coexistence or succession, and both simultaneously. (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 327)

In addition to these oft-cited joint theorisations with Deleuze, Guattari embarked on several solo excursions in which he developed his own highly experimental understanding of the assemblage, molecularity, de- and re-territorialisation, consistency and the rest, notably in *The Machinic Unconscious* (2011 [1979]), the posthumously published *Lines of Flight* (2016 [2011]) (which was written around the time of *A Thousand Plateaus*), *Schizo-analytic Cartographies* (2013 [1989]) and his final book *Chaosmosis* (1995 [1992]). Guattari’s reflections on the assemblage are habitually ignored in the work of theorists such as Manuel DeLanda (2016) who, while making frequent reference to *A Thousand Plateaus* and the pre-assemblage *Anti-Oedipus*, as well as several of Deleuze’s solo writings and conversation books, makes no mention of Guattari’s later elaborations of the assemblage. Guattari nevertheless wrote about the assemblage with seemingly endless creativity, re-theorising it in ways that defy simple reduction, and his reflections often touch on the question of consistency.

With this kind of complexity in mind, Andrew Goffey suggests that his work calls for

«experimental use» (Goffey 2013: xvii). In what follows, I present a partial digest of Guattari's statements and concepts that may be most pertinent and productive in relation to theorising the consistency of musical assemblages. Beyond the neglect of Guattari's individual contributions to assemblage theory, it is equally notable that the question of the consistency of the assemblage is not one that has received much attention to date in the general literature never mind in enquiries relating more particularly to music. To some degree then, this is a preparatory study with quite limited goals, namely to set out the range of Guattari's thinking on the consistency of the assemblage, to draw attention to specifically musical examples that are found in his work and to make a number of rather general links with musical compositions that will form the basis of a further enquiry. The discussion of Guattari's theorising of consistency progresses under the headings of (1) molar/molecular/abstract consistencies; (2) diachronic and synchronic consistency; (3) holding together; (4) 'relations of reference and relations of consistency' and finally (5) 'internal, material consistency' and 'formal, diagrammatic consistency'.

Molar/molecular/abstract consistencies

In *The Machinic Unconscious*, Guattari states that while «an assemblage draws its greater or lesser degree of freedom from the formula of its *machinic nucleus*.... the abstract machines that compose it do not have any "real" existential consistency» being «only infinitesimal indications hyper-deterritorialized from crystallizations of a possible between states of affairs and states of signs» (Guattari 2011: 46-7). He sets out three forms of 'existential consistency': (1) *Molar consistencies* in which «redundant elements are strongly crystallized and stratified, allowing flows of redundancies to develop»: (a) «effects of weak resonance (signifying effect)» and (b) «effects of weak interaction (surplus value of stratified codes)» (ibid.: 47). Guattari observes that

what characterizes the molar politics of stratification is the constitution of a world of stratified, identified, or hierarchized objects and subjects, singularities and abstract machines there being held by systems of coordinates that authorize only the minimum degree of freedom necessary for the survival of the assemblages. (Guattari 2011: 48)

(2) With *Molecular consistency*, «elements of redundancy are conveyed by substrates less stratified than the preceding, allowing flows of redundancy to develop» (a) «effects of strong resonance (the semantic field as a whole, the imaginary field, effects that are poetic, mystical etc.)» and (b) «effects of strong interaction (components of passage, such as faciality, refrains)». He recognises that at this level, it is impossible to distinguish between «what forms a part of a component, an assemblage, or a field' since 'all machinic interactions count, all redundancies overlap, and all sign-particle trajectories cross». (3)

With *Abstract (or absolute or intrinsic) consistency*, «machinic elements escape systems of redundancy» and Guattari distinguishes (a) «the consistency of capitalistic abstractions», amongst which he includes Music, «as a cornerstone of signifying resonances and semantic fields» and (b) «the consistency of sign-particles that specifically defines the irreducible nuclei of the abstract machinic possible» (*ibid.*: 49). For Guattari, «this type of nucleus holds in reserve a “potential possible”» and «never dissolves into the universe of fields and components». He concludes that «the machinic *nucleus* that specifies an assemblage is located at the crossing of two types of diagrammatic consistency», namely «the fuzzy set of molecular consistencies (component-assemblage-field)» and «the undecidable abstract machinic set of intrinsic abstract consistency» (*ibid.*: 50).¹

Posing the question «what holds the assemblages and their heterogeneous components together?» (*ibid.*: 146), one to which he returns often, Guattari highlights the importance of rhythm, for example «the synchronization of biological rhythms». He looks to Ludwig Klages's² opposition of 'vital rhythm[s]' with 'more cultural cadences' and his view that «humans were only able to assemble elementary rhythms in free spatial and temporal cadences». As Klages puts it, «Life is expressed in rhythm: Spirit, on the other hand, through means of metric cadences, forces life's rhythmic impulse to yield to the law which is proper to it» (*ibid.*: 146). Guattari notes however that «chronobiology, rather than seeking to “attach” trans-rhythmicity upon spirit and culture, endeavoured on the contrary, to derive it from a composition of basic molecular rhythms». Interestingly, in *A Thousand Plateaus*, there is no mention of Klages. Instead, in the eleventh plateau, '1837: Of the Refrain', after discussion of the 'schema' from Nikolaas Tinbergen's³ *The Study of Instinct* (1969) which involves rhythm, Deleuze and Guattari theorise the possibility of «a superposition of disparate rhythms, an articulation from within of an interrhythmicity, with no imposition of meter or cadence», but relate it to Eugène Dupréel's⁴ theory of consolidation (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 328-29). Furthermore, they note that consolidation is 'creative' and that it is the same as consistency in that «it is the act that produces consolidated aggregates, of succession as well as of coexistence, by means of ... three factors ... intercalated elements, intervals, and articulations of superposition».⁵

The second and final part of *The Machinic Unconscious*, titled 'Refrains of Lost Time' is devoted to Proust's great novel and takes the form of an exemplary assemblage analysis.

¹ In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari state that 'a machine is like a set of cutting edges that insert themselves into the assemblage undergoing deterritorialization, and draw variations and mutations of it. For there are no mechanical effects; effects are always machinic, in other words, depend on a machine that is plugged into an assemblage and has been freed through deterritorialization. What we call machinic statements are machine effects that define consistency or enter matters of expression' (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 333).

² Ludwig Klages (1872–1956), German philosopher, psychologist and a founder of graphology.

³ Nikolaas Tinbergen (1907-1988), Dutch biologist and ornithologist.

⁴ Eugène Dupréel (1879-1967), Belgian philosopher.

⁵ Deleuze and Guattari acknowledge that Dupréel 'elaborated a set of original notions' including ““consistency” (in relation to “precariousness”), “consolidation,” “interval,” “intercalation”” (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 549).

Guattari reconceptualises the overall operation of Proust's novel concisely, stating that while the early part centred on Charles Swann's relationship with Odette de Cr cy constitutes a «generative schizoanalysis (that of weak molar interactions, of stratified objects and relations)», the much lengthier remainder that is focused on the narrator «constitutes a transformational schizoanalytic revision of this primary nucleus» (Guattari 2011: 236). Having linked these two major aspects of the novel together, Guattari next fixes his attention on the so-called 'little phrase' from Vinteuil's sonata, which is so important at key points in the novel, and he traces nine 'little phrase' assemblages, describing «the circumstances, the context that characterizes them, and also the various matters of expression which they set to work». For each one he attempts to identify their «most significant micropolitical results.... for example, a dominant component, a component of passage, a rhizomatic opening, an effect of arborescence, black hole effects etc.» (*ibid.*: 241).

In Guattari's analysis, the first of these nine assemblages, which pertains to Swann's first hearing of the little phrase a year before meeting Odette de Cr cy, 'comes to a sudden halt' as a result of its '*lack of consistency*'. He judges that the «syncretism between contents and expression remain fragile – "impressions" of all kinds which flutter around music are not truly attached to its perceptive texture». The assemblage lacks a «black hole effect» and is restricted to «the default shutdown of existential consistency» (*ibid.*: 245). The third assemblage pertains to that period during which Swann visited Madame Verdurin's salon regularly in order to see Odette there, his visits signalled by the young pianist's playing of the little phrase. While the little phrase now works on him 'like a love potion' since he has 'fallen into Odette's trap', Swann nevertheless «senses that he does not have the "means" for his love» (*ibid.*: 253-4). In his analysis of this third assemblage, Guattari compares Swann with Proust's narrator, judging that «the entire difference that separates them is based on a threshold of consistency which he [Swann] does not succeed in crossing» (*ibid.*: 254), though «the loss of the assemblage's consistency» happens slowly over time, in this case over «several months» (*ibid.*: 257).

Diachronic and Synchronic Consistency

Of a sixth assemblage, which pertains to a moment «years after marrying Swann», when Odette plays Vinteuil's sonata for the adolescent narrator (*ibid.*: 276), Guattari picks up on «two modes of the refrain's existential consistency». The first is «a mode of diachronic consistency», the «various prototypes» of which «are set in orbit by successive assemblages of enunciation» (*ibid.*: 279). The second is «a mode of synchronic consistency» in which «all the forms of refrain act upon one another» (*ibid.*: 280). In the example discussed by Guattari, however, «it is in its final state, that which is the vehicle of the most diagrammatic abstract machinism, which is the most "connected" to all the other components, that it attains an interactive mode of efficiency», and he concludes that «it is

necessary that this final threshold be crossed so that, retroactively, the others can be crossed as well» (*ibid.*: 280).

In *Lines of Flight*, Guattari notes that a schizoanalytic cartography needs to be concerned on the one hand «with the synchronic analysis of the components that constitute an assemblage at a given moment and polarise it towards such and such a behaviour, such and such an arborescent politics or rhizomatic connection» and, on the other hand, with «the diachronic marking out of the generation and transformation of assemblages» (Guattari 2016: 195).⁶ Noting that «the two analytic series will constantly intersect, the same series of questions effectively traversing them both», the task is to consider «links between assemblages that sketch out rhizomatic openings». He suggests that

it is only by taking into account inter-assemblage transformations that one will ... be able to make the true factors of rupture and mutation that work assemblages at the molecular scale and catalyse the “phase transitions” or “percolations effects”... discernible, and thus be able to intervene. (*ibid.*: 195)

As Peter Pál Pelbart puts it, «everything is passage, from one consistency to another, from one complex of possibilities to another, from one assemblage to another» (Pelbart 2011: 79).

A notable example here would be Boulez’s tendency to reuse basic musical material created for one work in a number of others. Joseph Salem writes, for example, of Boulez’s ‘*L’Orestie* genus’, a group of works that are related genetically in the sense that they

all share common “DNA”. In some cases, this means that actual notes and themes are borrowed from one work for use in another; in other cases, it merely clarifies that a certain fundamental sketch (including specific pitch material) was used as the basis for multiple works. In all cases, it means that the works in the *L’Orestie* genus share actual notes and structures with one another that evolve over time. (Salem 2019: 245)

In a similar way, it would be interesting to trace the movement of multi-mediatic and micro-mediatic forces across a series of Georges Aperghis’s more recent music theatre assemblages, notably the oratorio *Die Hamletmaschine* (1999-2000) and the musical spectacles *Machinations*, (2000), *Paysage sous surveillance* (2002), the opera *Avis de tempête* (2004) and the music theatre piece *Luna Park* (2011). Guattari first encountered Aperghis’s work in 1976 and they were in touch until Guattari’s death in 1992. In 1991 Guattari stated that that what he found in interesting in Aperghis’s spectacles was

⁶ In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari write that «the territorial assemblage is a milieu consolidation, a space-time consolidation, of coexistence and succession. And the refrain operates with these three factors» (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 329). Again, with consistency «heterogeneities that were formerly content to coexist or succeed one another become bound up with one another through the “consolidation” of their coexistence and succession» (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 330).

his manner of playing around with elements as it were, chaotically, as a way of writing music, of searching for focal points for creativity, which supposes taking an absolute risk, the risk that nothing will happen, that one will remain in an aleatory void, or perhaps that there might be what I call a 'chaosmic line', which is to say a foundational chaos which deploys not only lines of discursivity, of echoes, baroque elements, but also of referential links, affects, an existential dimension that is non-discursive, that gives itself not in a paradigmatic sense, but as [the] texture of another order. (Guattari 2013: 33; tr. the author)

Aperghis in turn spoke of how he and Guattari had discussed the organisation of chaos, 'how to find identify islands [*îlots*] [and] markers [*balises*] which which to orient oneself' (Aperghis 2013: 39) and conductor Georges-Elie Octors states that «Aperghis's works are hold together by virtue of an internal obviousness which is a kind of flow, flux, fluid» (Octors & Plouvier 2004).

Holding Together

The question of the consistency of the assemblage arises again in *Lines of Flight*, where Guattari states that «a few minoritarian practices don't make a world!», while asking «what will "hold together" this new world, where, in particular, will it draw the consistency of its collective power of labour from?» (Guattari 2016: 51). In what could be an answer to his own question, he writes at a later point in the text:

When abstract machines succeed in escaping the regime of the capitalist economy of flows (that is to say, when they free themselves from the institutional supervision, the equipment of power that hierarchise, ritualise and reterritorialise them according to an abstract and transcendent universal order)... they crystallise the *knot of a problem*, they guarantee the consistency of a "state of fact" which, at the level of concrete machines, will find itself fixed, "contingenced" in history and the social field. They metabolise passageways between different strata, they model the process of subjectivation – without it being a question here of a universal subjectivity – they open up or close down the possible, either by allowing sometimes miniscule lines of flight of desire, to escape, or by setting off revolutions in chain reaction, or by allowing themselves to be taken over by systems of stratification. (*ibid.*: 60-61)

While recognising that «diagrammatic assemblages already exist everywhere in capitalist societies», he notes that «every effort is made to channel their creativity into the dominant territorialities of the system» so that «deterritorialising diagrammatism is ceaselessly recuperated, reterritorialised, hierarchised, impotentiated» (*ibid.*: 99). In musical terms, we think here of the efforts of musicians to work outside of dominant significations in terms of musical systems, traditional instrumental ensembles and institutional

frameworks. Regarding the formation of assemblages and the establishment of consistency, Guattari notes that

machines are abstract in that they extract the points of connection between lines of de-stratification. They establish the univocity of possible connections, where the strata seemed to have to maintain separations eternally... ruptures between strata are brought to light and a passage for the most deterritorialised energy is made possible. (*ibid.*: 121-2)

Machinic consistency is distinguished from logical consistency in such a way that it cannot be subsumed within any «logical category» (*ibid.*: 153) and Guattari notes that

The different kinds of consistency – biological, ethological, semiological, sociological, etc. ... do not depend on structural or generative super-stratum; they are worked from the “inside” by a network of machinic connections. Machinic consistency is not totalising but deterritorialising. It guarantees the always possible conjunction of the most different systems of stratification. (*ibid.*:154)

Guattari also allows that not all of the components comprising an assemblage of enunciation are of equal importance and that «the weight of one in relation to another can vary from one situation to the next» (*ibid.*: 193-94). He recognises also that some

components are organised amongst themselves so as to form constellations that will reappear in a cyclical mode.... they are centred and hierarchised around a point of arborescence, which in some way programs the regularity of this return of the same assemblages and the consistency of an everyday mode and a mode of subjectivation that for better or for worse is always re-centred on the *same* self. (*ibid.*: 194)

In addition to these reappearing elements, he observes that ‘other components behave as “troublemakers” or rather as “reality-troublers”’, making assemblages ‘tip over’, subverting their normal functioning and connecting them to one another in «unforeseen constellations» (*ibid.*: 194). This point appears also in *A Thousand Plateaus* where Deleuze and Guattari, writing of bird songs, note that

from the standpoint of consistency, matters of expression must be considered not only in relation to their aptitude to form motifs and counterpoints but also in relation to the inhibitors and releasers that act on them, and the mechanisms of innateness or learning, heredity or acquisition, that modulate them (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 331).

Schizoanalytic Cartographies

In *Schizoanalytic Cartographies*, on the question of consistency, Guattari distinguishes «two types of relations' within 'the "primordial soup" of the chaotic Plane of Immanence: relations of reference and relations of consistency» (Guattari 2013: 105). Reference concerns «the pure passive connectivity of instances of being-there – whether they are territorialised or deterritorialised». It operates as «holding-together» and entails «co-existence, trans-existence, existential transitivity, transversality» but without anything being «transmitted» and «nothing "passes" between the referring and the referred'». Consistency, in contrast, can be marked by either «infinite speed» or «"decelerated" speed». For Guattari, «"deceleration" (or reterritorialization)» characterises consistency as «a fundamental new dimension of Assemblages, whose operations begin in chaos» (*ibid.*: 106). Where infinite speed is synonymous with «zero consistency» since «the reiteration sequences here are infinitely short», «decelerated and modulated reference speeds» are operative with regard to territorialisation. Indeed,

consistency expresses the fragility and precariousness of connective processes, their relative density, but also their finitude, their transitional, sequential character – which derives ... from the fact that their existential distinctiveness is essentially tributary to contingent arrangements at heterogeneous levels. (*ibid.*: 106)

Furthermore,

under certain conditions ... entitarian apparatuses owe their capacity for opening up to other formulae for arrangement, other axiomatics, other abstract machinisms, their capacity, in short, for quitting a regime of connective passivity so as to attain an active and processual conjunctivity, to fractures of consistency (*ibid.*: 106).

In ontological terms, Guattari states that

Being is the modulation of consistency, the rhythm of putting together and dismantling [montage et démontage]. Its cohesion, if not its coherence, arises neither from an internal principle of eternity nor from an extrinsic, causalist framing that would hold existents together at the heart of the same world. Rather it results from the conjugation of processualities of intrinsic consistency, themselves engaging in generalized relations of existential transversality. (*ibid.*: 107-8)⁷

⁷ Pelbart translates this as «Being is modulation of consistence, rhythm of montage and demontage. Its cohesion, if not its coherence, reveals neither an internal principal of eternity, nor an extrinsic causalist framing which would maintain together beings in the same world, but refers to the conjunction of processualities of consistency themselves intrinsically engaged in generalized connections of existential transversality» (Pelbart 2011: 76).

Guattari further identifies the three functions of «smoothing, acceleration and specificity of effect» as «the correlate of a loss of ontological consistency that is synonymous with a deterritorializing opening onto new possibilistic Phyla» in terms of «the fields of the possible» and «mutations of virtuality» (*ibid.*: 108). He notes the possibility that «the same concatenation of entities ‘can’ engage in consistencies with antagonistic definitions» (*ibid.*: 110). He further tries to specify «the genesis of proto-enunciative processes during their release in the very first steps of the composition of entitarian redundancies in the “primordial soup”» (*ibid.*: 112) and what he describes as «the existential glue proper to the exo/endo-reference relation can be one of cold consistency, or pure passive territorialized connectivity, or of a hot, deterritorialized consistency» (*ibid.*: 113). For Guattari, «what gives Universes consistency ... is the crystallization within them of a singular-singularizing Constellation..., the best illustrations of which are provided by Art» (*ibid.*: 160).

***Chaosmosis*: ‘internal, material consistency’ and ‘formal, diagrammatic consistency’**

In *Chaosmosis* (1992), Guattari notes that «the Universes of referential value confer their own texture on machines of Expression articulated in machinic Phylums» and that «complex refrains, beyond the simple refrains of territorialisation, restates the singular consistency of these Universes». Throughout his writings, Guattari regularly cites musical examples when illustrating the working of assemblages and, in this case, he states that «the pathic apprehension of harmonic resonances based on the diatonic scale deploys the "foundation" of consistency of polyphonic music» (Guattari 2006: 26-7). Again, he suggests that

from acoustics to polyphonic music, there is a divergence of constellations of expressive intensity. They involve a certain pathic relationship, and convey irreducibly heterogeneous ontological consistencies. We thus discover as many types of deterritorialisation as traits of expressive materials. (*ibid.*: 38)

Equally, he defines, among an infinity of forms of alterity, «the alterity of an internal, material consistency» and «the alterity of formal, diagrammatic consistency» (*ibid.*: 45). For Guattari, «musical machines establish themselves against a background of sonorous Universes which have been constantly modified since the great polyphonic mutation» (*ibid.*: 47) and he lists a number of elements constituting the Debussyian universe/assemblage (*ibid.*: 49-50). Finding himself «transported into a Debussyst Universe» or ‘a blues Universe’, he states that he has «crossed a threshold of consistency» and that «this block of sensation, this nucleus of partial subjectivation» which entails a ‘becoming other’ is «not simply a gestalt configuration, crystallising the predominance of “good form”». It is rather «about something more dynamic» which he «situate[s] in the register of the machine, as opposed to the mechanical» (*ibid.*: 93). At the same time, he asks once again

How can we, in this sensory submersion in a finite material, hold together an embodied composition (be it the most deterritorialized, as is the case with the material of music, or the material of conceptual art) and this hyper-complexity, this autopoiesis of aesthetic affects? (*ibid.*: 95).

He possibly attempts something of an answer to this question in an interview with Olivier Zahm. Drawing on Debussy's music as an example of 'an aesthetic machine', he suggests that with its many heterogeneous components – musical, literary, plastic, social, and so on – «this constellation of universes of reference forms an enunciator that gives consistency to the pentatonic notes, to the writing on the paper, to interpretations», and that «there is something that holds all that together», what he calls «the incorporeal nucleus of enunciation» (Guattari & Zahm 2011: 51-2). While asking once again what it is «that makes all the components hang together», he acknowledges that not being an organism it is incorporeal, and while stressing once again that «it is perfectly consistent», he seems unable to go any further by way of an answer. Echoing his earlier ontological speculations in *Schizoanalytic Cartographies*, Guattari states in *Chaosmosis* that «Being is first auto-consistency, auto-affirmation» (Guattari 2006: 109) and he sets out «two types of ontological consistency», namely «heterogenetic being-quality and homogenetic being-matter-nothingness» (*ibid.*: 111). Ultimately, for Guattari, «the work of art ... is an activity of unframing, of rupturing sense, of baroque proliferation or extreme impoverishment, which leads to a recreation and a reinvention of the subject itself» and he concludes that «the consistency of subjectivity» is only «maintained by self-renewal through a minimal, individual or collective, re-singularisation» (*ibid.*: 131).

In Conclusion

The scope of Guattari's reflections provide a number of pointers for rethinking the consistency of various assemblage types that are no longer unified coherently by tonality, key structure, form or text. The working-out of such analyses would not be undertaken in slavish fidelity to Guattari's formulations but would proceed rather in the spirit of experimentation suggested earlier by Andrew Goffey. In *The Machinic Unconscious* and *Lines of Flight* Guattari invites us to think of the musical assemblage as the crystallisation of the knot of a problem and as comprising a machinic nucleus. Consistency can be molar, molecular or abstract and what holds assemblages and their heterogeneous components together can be understood in the opposition of vital rhythms and cultural cadences. Consistency can further be diachronic or synchronic, or again, machinic or logical. Analysis can map the crossing of thresholds, black hole effects, as well as reappearing elements and reality-troublers. In *Schizoanalytic Cartographies* Guattari adds the distinction of relations of reference and relations of consistency; the relationship of coherence and consistency as well as the distinction between «cold consistency, or pure passive territorialized connectivity, or of a hot, deterritorialized consistency». Finally, in *Cha-*

osmosis, we are presented with pathic relationships and heterogeneous ontological consistencies; internal, material consistency and formal, diagrammatic consistency; and two types of ontological consistency – heterogenetic being-quality and homogenetic being-matter-nothingness.

Questions of coherence and consistency arise in relation to the entire spectrum of musical assemblages, from the hyper-organicist model of a Goethian/Beethovenian/Weberian classicism in which everything is related genetically to everything else and no detail is inconsistent with the whole to the Cageian anarchy of letting sounds simply be themselves. Musical systems such as modality and tonality which, despite appearances, are never fixed, provide consistency for compositions created by means of them. This is equally the case for Western art music, jazz, pop as well as traditional and art musics from Africa, Asia and elsewhere, all of which have their own musical systems with their own multiple milieus from which distinctive assemblages are formed.

For Arnold Schoenberg, following Immanuel Kant, the genius of the composer produces something new, the coherence and consistency of which we can rely on, even if it takes a considerable time for this to be widely recognised. While many of Schoenberg's atonal and twelve-tone assemblages have proved hard nuts for many listeners to crack, this was no less the case for long enough with the symphonies of Gustav Mahler, which comprise some of the most elaborate musical assemblages ever produced. While the emergence of atonality in the early twentieth-century posed new questions of coherence and comprehensibility, consistency was assured in many pieces since, despite the relinquishing of tonality and its hierarchies and a freer approach to pitch material, such compositions continued to adhere to many of tonality's strongest conventions including the progression of individual voices, the exact or modified repetition of features and the homogeneity of vertical and horizontal pitch collections. Schoenberg was in no doubt that his new musical assemblages were consistent and coherent and that, even if he was unable to specify the laws governing the functioning of a composition, some kind of underlying logic could be sensed, even if it could not yet be explained. While Schoenberg's experience suggests that the traditional guarantors of coherence and consistency were breaking down or that they were at least at their outer limits, it is nevertheless arguably the case that twenty-first century listeners encounter most, if not all, of the musics mentioned so far in terms of Guattari's molar consistency with its strong crystallisation of redundant elements, its hierarchies and minimal freedom. With Schoenbergian atonality, music entered into more molecular territory but still with many of the gravitational functions and molar aspects of previous music still intact.

For a number of modernist composers working after 1945, the consistency of the musical work was to be grounded in the power of numbers, something that may have been stimulated in part by Schoenberg's turn to twelve-note composition in the early 1920s. Examples include Pierre Boulez's pitch-multiplication procedures, Peter Maxwell Davies's use of magic squares processes, Harrison Birtwistle's generation of random numbers, or

the statistical processes found at times in the music of Iannis Xenakis and others. Unimpressed by this turn of affairs in the Darmstadt composers of the 1950s, Theodor Adorno berated the post-war generation 1956 for replacing the traditional means of musical coherence with mathematical relationships which they equated with objectivity (Adorno 2002: 121-122). Scientific models served equally well as generators of composition and guarantors of coherence and consistency, for example with Xenakis's applications of the Brownian theory of gases, György Ligeti's musical appropriation of fractal theory or compositional approaches based on the inner life sounds, accessible by means of the harmonic series. While these musics are demonstrably coherent/consistent in their formation, this is not always immediately evident in audition and while clearly structured, albeit idiosyncratically, they are nevertheless much more molecular in their consistency.

As Guattari acknowledged, the consistency of a musical assemblage may be provided by the predominance of one parameter, a role that most often historically has been performed by pitch, but this function can just as easily be filled by duration, rhythm, timbre, dynamics, instrumental grouping, spatial position and so on. Stockhausen's group composition capitalised on this principle, as did Boulez's development of signals and envelopes in his later compositions. The primacy of timbre in the music of the French spectral composers, notably Tristan Murail and Gérard Grisey, from the mid-1970s, is another case in point, where the analysis of harmonic spectra became the compositional starting point and the generator of musical material and form, thus guaranteeing consistency and coherence in a completely novel way.

In contrast with the proponents of musical organisation, John Cage came to the view that the works that resulted from his subjective compositional intentions and choices were failures, and he embraced chance operations from 1951 (Pritchett 1993: 1-2), though he was never able to completely erase subjectivity at least at the level of the setting out of options and the means of arriving at musical results. Despite this attempted erasure of intentional compositional organisation, Cage nevertheless acknowledged that he found some performances of his pieces more interesting than others (Cage & Charles 1995: 58-9). He justified his judgement that a particular performance had been beautiful on the grounds that the performers had «performed with great care to make sure that each sound was really itself» (*ibid.*: 129-30). This interest in sounds in themselves was the basis of his criticism of Pierre Schaeffer, and he took issue with the French experimenter's «concern for ... the relationships between sounds» and the inevitability of a return to a more traditional position whereby certain noises could «only go with certain noises and not with others» (*ibid.*: 76-77). In complete opposition to this, Cage worked to create «an entirely new situation, in which any sound or noise at all [could] go with any other». While he accepted that 'things interpenetrate', he believed that «they interpenetrate more richly and with more complexity» when he himself did «not establish any connection» between them (*ibid.*: 78) and he stated that «the function of art at the present time is to preserve us from all the logical minimizations that we are at each instant tempted to apply to the

flux of events» (*ibid.*: 80-81). An extension of this kind of thinking led him to propose (rather mischievously) the possibility of performing all nine Beethoven symphonies simultaneously. With Cage's arrival onto the scene we arguably find ourselves in the domain of a more abstract consistency, marked by the absence of hierarchy and stratified elements, and where sign-particles are much freer in their passage. This more abstract consistency is something that applies to the work of a number of post-Cagean creative figures including Aperghis.

Of course, not every composition succeeds in achieving consistency? Aperghis, noted that his composition *Symplexis* for orchestra and twenty-two jazz soloists (1970), in which the musicians were organised into five groups that were dispersed around the audience, «provoked jeers and whistles, a frightening noise». For Aperghis, the piece «failed» and did not «find its place» (Aperghis, in Gindt 1990: 42). Another example would be Boulez's *Polyphonie X* for eighteen instruments (1951), which the French composer withdrew after hearing a recording of its first performance. At this point we are not so far from the traditional Kantian problem of taste and we might ask who, ultimately, is fit to decide whether or not a musical work, section of a work, melodic line, harmony, sequence of chords, instrumental scoring, structure or form, conjunction of artistic media, has consistency and consequently works or not. Might the question of what it means to say that a piece of music works be ultimately as pointless as seeking, after Duchamp, to identify a work of art? Whatever the answer to this question, there is nevertheless the enduring sense that all musical compositions and improvisations inevitably face such judgements. For artworks that operate within the boundaries of traditional means the vocabulary for an answer already exists. The question becomes much more interesting and insistent with the music of modernity and beyond, where heterogeneous forces come together in unexpected ways and where we can no longer rely on the old answers. It is at that point that we find ourselves asking: how does it all hang together?

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