



## **MACHINIC ADDICTION**

**Jeff Brice**

Cornish College of the Arts [jbrice@cornish.edu](mailto:jbrice@cornish.edu)

### **ABSTRACT**

Machinic Addiction is a virtual design machine, a rhizomatic wandering of web-based, interactive, animated pages. The baroque, hybrid blending of text and image, animation, gaming and 3D graphics serves as a vehicle for investigating philosophical questions and represents a shifting boundary of design today. Are we machines? Are we addicted to the repetitions that lie within a kind of cultural machine? Can life be reduced to code? Are our identities replaced by interfaces to others in a network?

There are 4 interrelated parts, or processual machines, to the schema of Machinicaddiction: 111 (The Folding Machine), 101 (The Resonance Machine), 010 (The Stratification Machine), and 000 (The Smoothing Machine). These schemas are not necessarily sequential, but rather instances in a non-linear process of emergent self-organization. The quadrilateral system of related themes, icons and the visualizations (actualized in their many forms of expression) is a drift through the varied levels of an assemblage.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this essay is to explain why I began the project 'machinicaddiction' and the possible value of such a self-authored visual exploration of a few specific and related philosophical ideas. I have included screenshots of some of the major points of interest to this discussion. Finally, I will conclude with the relationship of Guattari's ethicoaesthetic paradigm to design messaging.

For many years I had a career as an animator, illustrator and designer. This was a rewarding career in many ways working with numerous clients around the country and the world. My work was seen in books and magazines during the height of the print era. My success drew the attention of large corporations, who hired me to do advertising, annual reports and other business collateral and marketing materials.

The success became a kind of addiction. Success and financial reward were the result of my creativity, but the isolating life of a freelancer can feel like being a remote part of a



large corporate machine. This machine was not physical to me, nor did I have a real connection to these companies that hired me as they were located anywhere but where I lived. My employment by them was always limited to a couple of months to complete whatever project they had. The purpose and meaning of this arrangement was beginning to become elusive to me. I became part of a corporate/design/technology assemblage of worldwide locations networked through lines of communication and functioning through the transduction of bits of binary code.

Questioning the corporate mindset led me to the intellectual threads of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. Gilles Deleuze (18 January 1925 – 4 November 1995) was a French philosopher who, from the early 1960s until his death, wrote influentially on philosophy, literature, film, and fine art. Felix Guattari (April 30, 1930 – August 29, 1992) was an institutional psychotherapist, philosopher, and semiologist. They are best known for their intellectual collaborations, most notably *Anti-Oedipus* (1972) and *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980), the two volumes of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*.

I then read authors mentioned in their works and authors who wrote about Deleuze and Guattari. Their body of writings became cascading 'lines of thought' into a seemingly endless assortment of works. Reading Deleuze and Guattari's collaborative effort *A Thousand Plateaus* for the first time, I had the feeling of intellectually coming home. They spoke of machinic assemblages\*, abstract machines\*, and territories\* in describing a variety of phenomenon. (\* astericks indicate a glossary term)

To me, the rhetorical style of these continentalist philosophers is very rich with visual metaphors. They incorporate different domains of study into a common language: Complexity theory, social sciences, semiotics, media theory, geology and aesthetics, all considered within a philosophy that seem to capture the complexity of our time while attempting to address the fundamental question of locating an authentic experience of subjectivity within systems, both virtual and actual.

In visualizing the ideas from the writing of two major philosophers' works, it is my intention to make their ideas more accessible through illustrating them as an interactive rhizome of text, image, animation and video. I am using the same tools and methods that are used for corporate culture to imagine abstract concepts, in opposition to a media culture that seems to engage a less thorough discourse of the tweet and text message or a short viral Youtube video. For me, this is the value in bringing philosophical insights into more of a hypermedia form of expression.

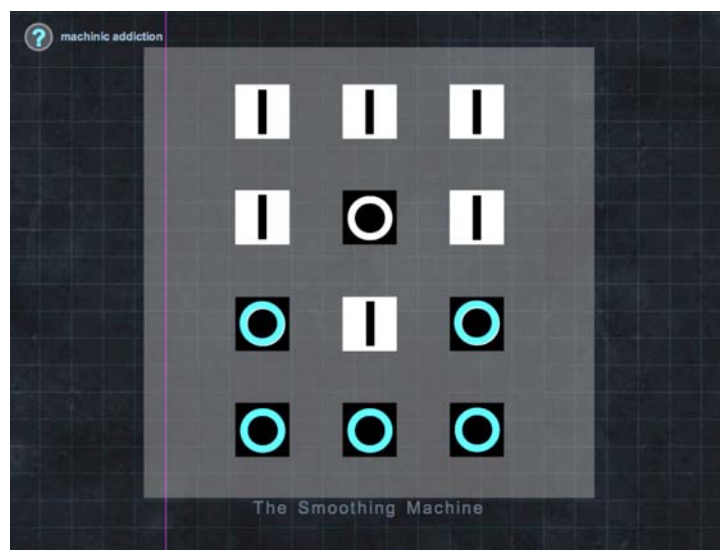


The use of new media is the perfect tool for addressing Deleuze and Guattari's thesis that our subjectivities are constructed through the various machinic assemblages in which we find ourselves embedded. Our lives are shaped by our tools, and a subjective and trans-subjective restructuring is taking place because of the confluence of global capitalism, always emerging technologies and an overcoding of a scientific ethos.

### **MANUAL FOR MACHINIC ADDICTION**

The schema that is the foundation to mechanicaddiction has fascinated me for some time. The simple binary triads of 000,010,101,111 indicates a kind of simple process of transformation. It is reminiscent of cellular automata\* rules for generating visual arrays. Cellular automata follow simple rules to generate complex behavior. In this schema, the transition from 0 to 1 in four stages creates a matrix of 12, or 4 sets of 3. Each set represents a unique place in the process. Through a system of ordering simple combinations in an array, a transformation between a set of 0 and a set of 1 is represented by two intermediate strata.

The four phases of this schema are 000 (the Smoothing Machine), 010 (the Stratification Machine), 101 (the Resonance Machine), 111 (the Folding Machine). Each of these triads is an abstract machine. They operate on all levels and domains of formal expression. Content of this project ties into these abstract machines at different levels and in so doing creates a collection of interrelated pages that have multiple associations. These operations occur as mixtures in the particular actualized set of singularities of machinic assemblages.



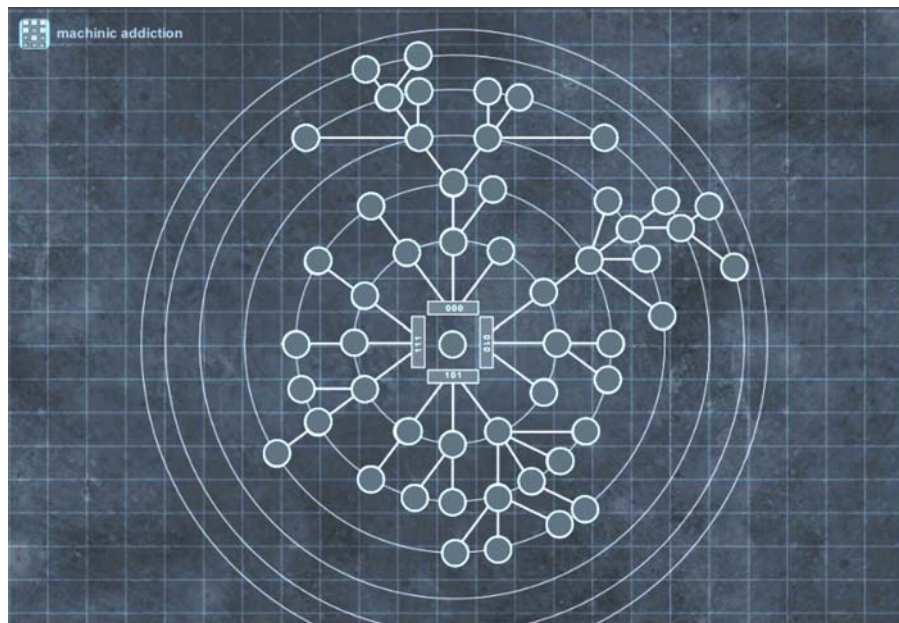
The Main Index Page to [www.machinicaddiction.com](http://www.machinicaddiction.com)



These four abstract machines commonly occur within the vernacular of our everyday conversations. We sometimes “smooth things out” when we are trying to deescalate an argument, or “veg out” when we want to relax. We “fold a subject into a conversation” when we combine one topic with another. We sometimes “resonate with an idea.” We “level up” in games or fit into a specific “level of income.” The metaphors used to articulate these abstract machines are expressions that we commonly use when articulating common social situations. They are also the verbal refrains of abstract machines and existential territories.

### *The sitemap*

This sitemap is a landscape shown in isometric projection. Isometric space is used as a diagrammatic space that eliminates the distortions caused by our subjective viewing perspectives. At the center of the composition is an urban model generated with an L-system\*. As nodes at strategic conjunctions in the flow of goods and services; urban areas are the center of sequential time and technical isometric space. The urban center is a de-stratification machine\* that reorganizes the landscape and restratifies a territory through standards, regulations and laws. In this image, the restratification is represented as stacked planes and linear diagrams. As an apparatus of capture, the city creates order out of chaos through the establishment of frequencies.



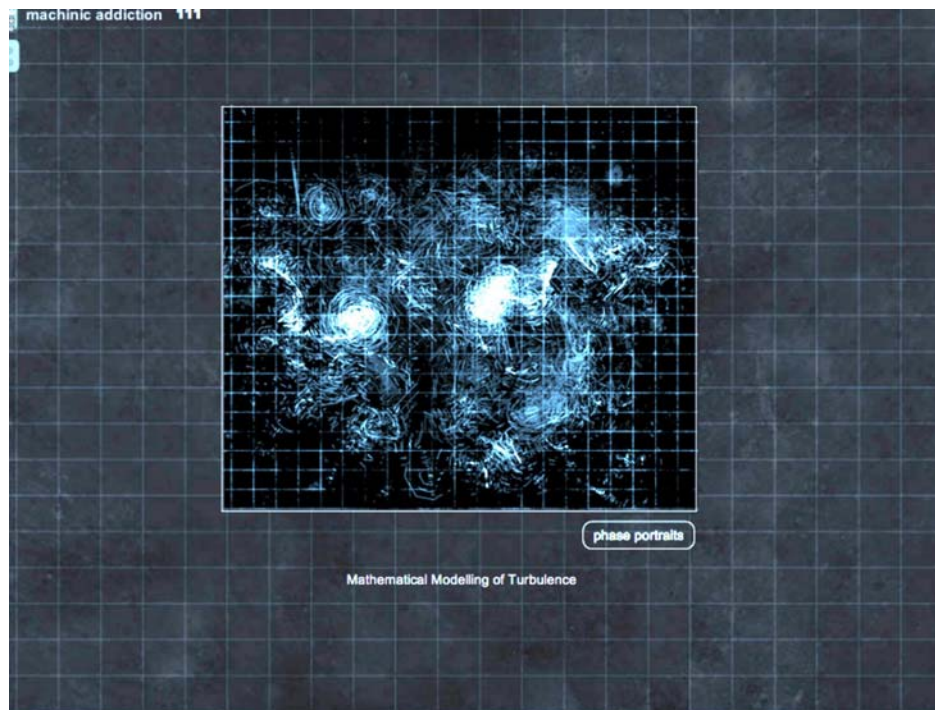
Sitemap

To the right of the stratification machine the information becomes less stratified and



becomes more of a network, a non-hierarchical rhizome of information. The rhizomatic folding machine becomes more flexible, allowing connections to continually adapt and reconfigure and to fold its topology. The folding machine is tethered to the smoothing machine in the lower right corner as a line of flight. The edge of the urban center bleeds out onto a plane of consistency,\* allowing creativity to begin new experimental forms yet to be stratified. These organic growths open new domains of unexplored spaces.

The folding machine also connects to the resonance machine to its left. The wave-like nature of resonance overcodes the urban center into a unified regime of signs. Our media industry constantly innovates the resonance machine, from the tapping into the radio waves through hermetically sealed glass tubes to the high frequency geolocation chips on our smartphones. The overcoding gives coherence to a rich harmonics of groups and subgroups within the population and generates the narratives and tropes we resonate with.



3D Animation of a Strange Attractor

### *Strange Attractors*

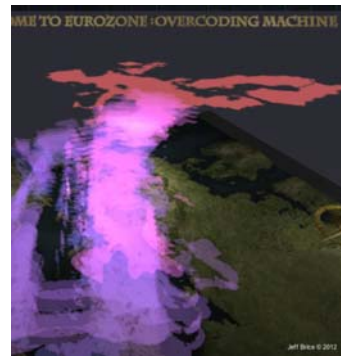
On the most abstract plane of the folding machine is the phase space of the system. The strange attractor \* represents the tendency of the system through its degrees of freedom, represented as a 3D space-time cube. The strange attractor is a chaotic attractor that never settles down into a habit. It folds into itself like whirlpools trying to



channel the overheated activity on all scales. We are witnessing this process through the continual hybridization of technologies, from video to tablet, screens to sunglasses for example. Ontologically it occurs as an unsettled psyche, a subjectivity constantly folding in the bombardment of media propaganda.



Print Image of the Trajectories of a Particle System within a Turbulent Field



From Rome to Eurozone: the Overcoding Machine

This 3D map of Rome visualizes historically defined territories in an interactive timeline. Created in a game engine, the map can be rotated while animating the stacking of territories one on top of another referenced to a temporal vertical axis. As the seat of western ideologies, the Roman citizen is a prime example of an overcoded subjectivity. While the games of the Roman coliseum have been replaced by the five-minute casual games on our tablet devices, we remain overcoded agents.



The stratified citizen of today (below) is overcoded with documentation that ties into various state/corporate machinic assemblages. Our various virtual, digitally-managed overcodings obligate us to the conventions of legal social contracts and rhythms of frequencies of payments. Our credentials are the records of our activities of this information, now being stored in the collective data bank of the cloud.



Documents of Obligation for the Stratified Citizen

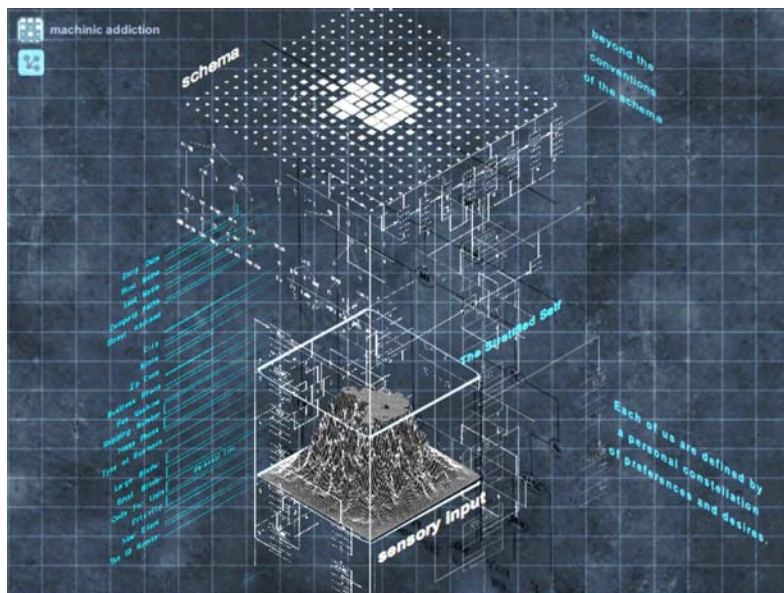
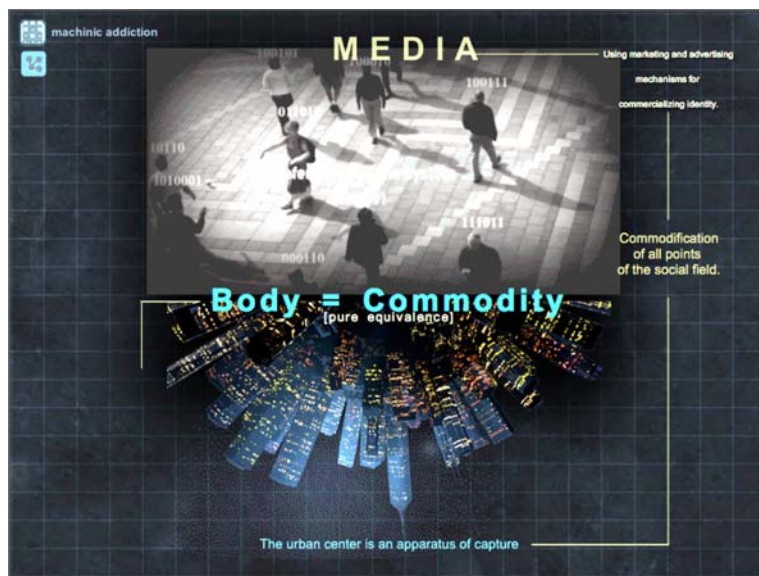


Diagram of the ontological interpretation of sensory input



### 010 The Stratified Shifting Signifier

Above is a visualization showing an abstract machine: a peak of sensory input captured and filtered through the categories, codes and standards of stratified subjectivity. The result is a point attractor of a personal 'I', the illusion of a transcendental self. The point attractor is the shifting signifier of our inner voice: a refrain that gives consistency to our sense of self within the social field. The singularity of the point attractor is one of many included in the territory of a machinic assemblage. This multiplicity folds into various other collective territories through the resonance of language and lines of flight of re/destratification.



Screenshot of a Folding Machine of Media

### 111 The Folding Machine

The individual is subsumed within the collective of the folding machine. Our bodies become commodities in the world-integrated, capitalist system of pure equivalence. Our actions are recorded and fed back into the system as Big Data feeds our desires back to us via media outlets. Urban centers become manufactured brandscapes, and our identities become tied to the social implications of the brands we choose to embrace.

The folding machine is the New Baroque: a turbulence of sign production and reproduction, simulation and simulacra, synthesizing and hybridization. This phase of expression is the breaking out of boundaries in all manner of organic forms. Our current hybridization and synthesizing of technologies is accelerated by the cutting edges of the binary digital languages that seem to fold all other languages into its pure simulation.





### 0 0 0 The Smoothing Machine

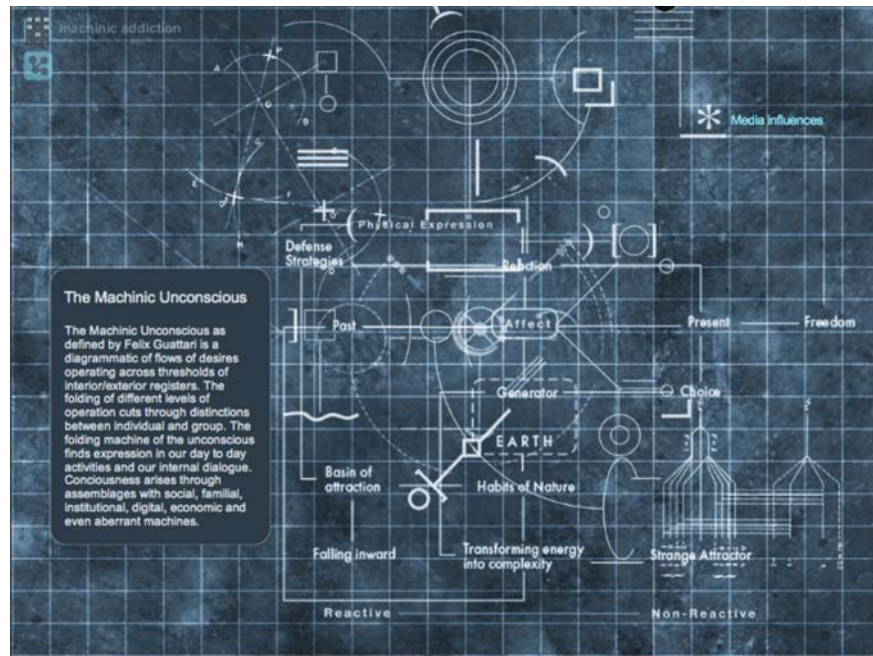
The smoothing machine is the process outside that of stratification. The nomadic tribes that migrate are collectives that live in the uncharted milieus far from equilibrium. Complexity theory examines phenomena of open systems, systems and forms of complexity that elude the ideal of deductive reasoning. Nomadic tendencies are vectors of freedom of choice, and are active through triggering thresholds of complex systems causing bifurcations and enable new territories. They can be modelled but not predicted with accuracy and so are the opposite of habit.

The nomad is the name of the vector of smooth space. The nomad is the tendency towards a line of flight. \* Wandering through uncharted territories outside the state/corporate machinic assemblage, the nomadic line of flight is a war machine of pure creativity. It is in the emergent, self organization of materials that it creates a smooth space of innovation that exists outside of what is already established.



Screenshot of the Nomadic Smoothing Machine

As Deleuze and Guattari observe in *A Thousand Plateaus*; "The war machine's form of exteriority is such that it exists only in its own metamorphosis; it exists in an industrial innovation as well as in a technological innovation, in a commercial circuit as well as in a religious creation, in all flows and currents that only secondarily allow themselves to be appropriated by the State." (p. 360).



Modular Subjectivity

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

In creating Machinic Addiction I sought to use the non-linear, hotlinked narrative of hypermedia to allow the viewer to drift through information, guided by self-determined threads of inquiry. Transmedia is a way to broaden the scope of interaction and narrative through linking to a Facebook blog, standardizing the page sizes for repurposing to ebook publishing and posting videos on Vimeo that can be accessed separately online. This project is smeared across several differently accessed territories and mirrors our own transversality across many machinic assemblages.

By visualizing and gamifying these philosophical ideas my hope is that the viewer will begin to ask some questions about what it is to be a machinic assemblage. The open form of this project allows for the continued additions as a kind of illustrated journal of ideas. As an always unfinished work in progress, it contains pages that are finished and others still in development. It reflects an emphasis on process, an ongoing becoming that is an essential feature of what Guattari calls an "ethico-aesthetic paradigm", a paradigm that is played out in our lives, generated by the choices and decisions we make in everyday realities.

The enactment of an Ethico-aesthetic paradigm takes place in this case in the transformations between the different machines. Our enmeshment with addictions as



habits become spatialized as *habitats* of aesthetic attractors, spread across existential territories. Along with the necessities of conventional entrainment, possible lines of escape open up to uncharted universes of value through creative activity. Designed, anti-productive activity (anti-productive within conventional and market driven ends), mapping new territories of a nomadic war machine is a form of resistance as well as the experience of personal autonomy.

What existential territories and machinic assemblages are you addicted to?

### **GLOSSARY OF TERMS**

Abstract Machines Existing in the virtual plane of consistency, abstract machines are defined by their attractors, thresholds and bifurcations of phase space of complex systems. Because abstract machines are the potentials describing a system, they are actualized through machinic assemblages of heterogeneous elements. Abstract machines are immanent qualities of materials that are discovered by the cutting edge of deterritorialization.

Cellular Automata: A cellular automaton consists of a regular grid of cells, each in one of a finite number of states, such as 0 and 1 an initial state is selected by assigning a state for each cell. A new generation is created according to some fixed rule that determines the new state of each cell in terms of the current state of the cell and the states of the cells in its neighborhood.

Below is Wolfram's rule 110 (which gives a particularly complex pattern that is neither fully repeatable nor completely random and demonstrates an organic order of self similarity)

This class 4 CA Wolfram believes supports enough complexity to be universal.

111 110 101 100 011 010 001 000	-Cell neighbor configurations
0 1 1 0 1 1 1 0	- Resulting values

Destratification Machine pushes a system out of equilibrium towards new formations and basins of attraction.

L-system: A Lindenmayer system, also known as an L-system, is a string rewriting system that can be used to generate fractals with dimension between 1 and 2. L-



systems are used to simulate the growth of urban centers because they mimick the structured yet organic patterns of distribution.

Line of Flight: Vectors of de/reterritorialization, the triggering of a threshold leading to a bifurcation of a new assemblage. They can be the mappings of one complex territory to another, or a complete smoothing out. Freedom and creativity are the result of the creation of new emergent attractors and territories.

Machinic Assemblages "an actualized abstract machne maintaining consistency, that is, the teamwork of heterogeneous elements". *Deleuze and Geophilosophy, A Guide and Glossary* Mark Bonta and John Protevi p. 108

Plane of Consistency is a destratified field of potentiality enabling the emergence of self organized systems. It is the smooth space of creativity.

Strange Attractor: also known as a chaotic attractor with which a variable moves over time representing the evolution of a dynamic system's n-dimensions. The other 3 types of attractors are; point attractor, periodic attractor, and limit tori attractor. The strange attractor never settles down to a point nor gets entrained into habits as the periodic attractor and limit tori attractor.

Territory: Formed out of the rhythmic chaos of the mileu, territories are owned or used through markings. Territories are dynamic systems, always in flux, far from equilibrium. Deterritorialization is a line of flight toward the formation of an emergent new territory as an act of creativity. Reterritorialization is the apparatus of capture, of stratification through content and expression.