

# ***A Thousand Plateaus: 3: The Geology of Morals***

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See also Manuel DeLanda: [THE GEOLOGY OF MORALS: a neomaterialist interpretation](#)

Cited numbers refer to English translation page numbers; letters to full paragraphs on those pages.

Major divisions of the plateau:

- •A General Theory of Stratification (40a-45)
- •The unity and diversity of a stratum relative to substances and forms (45a-57)
- •The variation between strata relative to content and expression (57a-64a)
- •Three problems [and a final distinction] remaining for Challenger (64b-72)
- •Summary/recapitulation and end of frame narrative (72a-74)

Framing narrative:

Professor Challenger's lecture, mixing geology and biology according to his simian disposition (40a). Denounced by the audience; Challenger's discipline named; Challenger introduces terminology of his friend Hjelmslev (42b). Challenger admits digression, but no way to distinguish digressive and nondigressive (49a). Most of the audience had left by end of second section. Challenger had changed: dreaming of program for computers, an axiomatic for stratification; addresses himself to memory only (57a). Challenger rushed by line of time on third (human) stratum (63a). Challenger wants to go faster and faster; but no one left. Challenger deterritorializing on the spot (64b). Challenger finishing up; suffocating; pincers; oozing fluid; animal voice (72). Flight of Challenger: leaving for the plane of consistency. Panic is creation (73a).

## A General Theory of Stratification (40a-45)

### I. Elementary terminology (40a-40c)

#### A. BwO and Strata (40a)

1. Earth = BwO [= plane of consistency] [=limit of deterritorialization of all strata]
  - a. unformed, unstable matters and flows
  - b. free intensities [=relative regions w/in a plasma field]
  - c. nomadic singularities [=thresholds; bifurcators for phase changes]
2. Strata [=thickening, slowing down of flows of BwO/plane of consistency]
  - a. Giving form to matters
    - (1) imprisoning intensities [=forming discrete bodies out of plasma field]
    - (2) locking singularities into systems of resonance/redundancy [forming "habits"]
    - (3) producing molecules on body of earth and organizing them into molar aggregates
  - b. Acts of capture
    - (1) Operate by coding and territorialization
    - (2) Judgment of God
3. But the earth flees, becoming destratified, decoded, deterritorialized

#### B. Paired strata; (40b)

1. Stratum/substratum
2. Surface of stratification
  - a. "more compact plane of consistency between two layers"
  - b. = machinic assemblage [actualizing of self-organizing process]
    - (1) Facing strata = interstratum
    - (2) Facing BwO or plane of consistency = metastratum

### II. Key concept: Double articulation: God is a Lobster (40c-42a)

#### A. Conceptual distinction of the two articulations:

1. First articulation: sedimentation
  - a. Selection/deduction from unstable particle flows of metastable molecular units (= substances)
  - b. Imposition of statistical order of connections and successions (= forms)

2. Second articulation: “folding” [cf. De Landa Thousand Years 290n82: should be “cementation”]
  - a. Establishes functional structures (= forms)
  - b. Constructs molar compounds that actualize these structures (= substances)
- B. Double articulation is not same as substance / form distinction (41a)
  1. Substance = formed matters
    - a. Forms imply codes
    - b. Substances as formed matters refer to territorialities
  2. Each articulation has a code and a territory; thus each has substance and form
  3. Each articulation has its type of multiplicity
    - a. First articulation = supple, more molecular [NB: the relative term], merely ordered
    - b. Second articulation = more rigid, more molar, organized
      - (1) Overcoding
      - (2) Centering, unification, totalization, integration, hierarchization, finalization [goal-orientation]
  4. Intra stratum relations
    - a. Between segments in same articulation: binary relations
    - b. Between segments of both articulations: biunivocal relationships
  5. “Structure”: sum total of these relations and relationships (but not the last word of the earth)
- C. Example of double articulation on the level of the organic stratum (41b)
  1. Skipping diversity of other strata [but these are doubly articulated as well]
  2. Making the body an organism is a phenomenon of double articulation on different levels
    - a. Morphogenesis
    - b. Cellular chemistry
    - c. Genetic code
- III. New terminology introduced by the question of disciplinarity (42a-45a)
  - A. Hjelmslev and his net: matter, content/expression, form/substance [nonlinguistic] (43a)
    1. Matter = plane of consistency or BwO
    2. Content = formed matters
      - a. Substances = matters as chosen
      - b. Form = order of choosing
    3. Expression = functional structures (relative invariance); singing the glory of God
      - a. Form = organization
      - b. Substance = compound so established
    4. First/second articulation is content/expression
      - a. Isomorphism w/ reciprocal presupposition [=relation of content/expression]
      - b. Always a real distinction [in the thing: scholastic terminology], but not pre-existing the relation
      - c. By contrast, form/substance is only a mental or modal distinction
  - B. Relativity of content/expression (44a)
    1. They are only two variables of the function of stratification
      - a. Vary from one stratum to another
      - b. Intermingle
      - c. Multiply and divide ad infinitum w/in same stratum
    2. Articulations of content and expression are each double
      - a. Intermediate states: levels, equilibriums, exchanges
      - b. Form and substance of content as expression for other form and substance [at lower level]
      - c. Thus each articulation is already double
    3. Example on the organic stratum: proteins and nucleic acids
    4. Resources necessary to make this conceptual machine work:
      - a. Real distinction
      - b. Reciprocal presupposition
      - c. General relativism

The unity and diversity of a stratum relative to substances and forms (45a-57)

- IV. The question of the unity and diversity of a stratum (45a)
  - A. Unity of composition of a stratum
    1. Same molecular materials
    2. Same substantial elements
    3. Same formal relations
  - B. Difference within stratum
    1. Different molecules
    2. Different substances

3. Different forms
- V. History of the question of unity and diversity of a stratum (45b-49a)
  - A. Geoffrey Saint-Hilaire's grandiose conception of stratification (45b)
    1. Matter flowing through space: same on all strata
    2. Processes of material relation
      - a. Combustion: division on plane of consistency
      - b. Electrification: constitutes strata
    3. Specific unity of composition of organic stratum: the single abstract Animal; single machine
      - a. Same molecular materials, elements (anatomical components), formal connections
      - b. Different organic forms, organs, compound substances, molecules
    4. Principle of unity and variety of organic stratum
      - a. Isomorphism of form, but no correspondence
      - b. Identity of elements or components, but no identity of compound substances
  - B. Epistemological dialogue of the dead in puppet theater style (46a-47)
    1. Geoffrey: isomorphism proved by "folding"
    2. Cuvier: irreducible axes, types, branches
    3. Vialleton: what is it that "folds"?
    4. Geoffrey: need to consider "degrees of development or perfection"
    5. Baer: degree of development is not same as type of form
    6. Vialleton: must consider embryogenesis, which is not same as phylogenesis
  - C. Politics of epistemology (47a)
    1. Cuvier: man of power and terrain; Euclidean space
    2. Geoffrey: prefigures nomadic man of speed; topology
  - D. Darwin's contributions to a science of multiplicities (47b-49)
    1. Transformation of two factors explaining diversity w/in a stratum (47b)
      - a. Degree of development — speeds, rates, coefficients, differential relations
      - b. Types of forms — populations, packs, colonies, collectivities, populations
    2. Forms as statistical results of populations (48a)
      - a. Increased divergence of form leads to increased efficiency of occupation of a milieu
      - b. Relationship of embryogenesis and phylogenesis is reversed
        - (1) Embryo does not match a form pre-established as fitting a milieu
        - (2) But a population has range of relative forms to experiment with
    3. Degrees of development as global and relative equilibriums or rates or differential relations (48b)
      - a. Degrees of development are not pre-existent degrees of perfection on pre-established scale
      - b. But differential relations / coefficients [btw selection and mutation] yielding advantages
        - (1) Thus progress can be made through simplification, not just complexification
        - (2) Thus populations and differential relations are productive of form
          - (a) not individuals matching a pre-existent form
          - (b) nor individuals progressing along a pre-existent continuum of perfection
- VI. Unity of composition of a stratum (49a)
  - A. Materials
  - B. Substantial elements (change in organization)
    1. Materials furnish an exterior milieu (exterior to compounds, but w/in the stratum)
    2. While the elements form an interiority
      - a. Example of crystals
      - b. Example of organic stratum
    3. Principle: interiority and exteriority are relative to the stratum in question
  - C. Formal relations or traits:
    1. Limit/membrane between materials and elements that regulates exchanges and transformations
    2. And thus defines the formal traits of that stratum
  - D. There is thus a single abstract machine constituting unity of stratum [=central layer or ring]
    1. Called Ecumenon [vs. Planomenon of plane of consistency]
    2. [abstract machine = set of self-organizing processes relative to a stratum]
    3. [machinic assemblage = that which actualizes these processes to produce a physical stratum]
- VII. Diversity w/in a stratum: fragmentation into epistrata and parastrata (50a-52)
  - A. Stratum already has multiple levels, and center/periphery relations; thus intermediate states [=epistrata]
    1. Between exterior milieus and interior elements
    2. Between substantial elements and their compounds
    3. Between compounds and substances
    4. Between different formed substances (substance of content vs substance of expression)
  - B. Re: its unity of composition, a stratum consists only in its substantial epistrata

1. Shatter its continuity
  2. Fragment its ring
  3. Break it down into gradations
- C. History of the level of the membrane/limit [=annexed or associated milieu] (51a)
1. Source of energy different from alimentation
    - a. Capture of energy sources (respiration)
    - b. Discernment of materials (perception)
    - c. Fabrication or nonfabrication of corresponding compounds (response/reaction)
  2. Associated milieus closely related to organic forms [process of structuration] (51b)
    - a. Form constituted in associated milieus
    - b. Form develops in intermediate milieus
    - c. Form experiences itself in milieu of exteriority
- D. Parastrata: relation to milieus
- E. Stratum exists only in its epistrata and parastrata:
1. these are strata in their own rights
  2. Ecumenon [formal identity of stratum] exists only as shattered into epistrata and parastrata
- VIII. Return to Darwin's contributions (52a-54)
- A. Parastrata and forms: populations and codings (52a)
- B. Epistrata and degrees of development: rates/differential relations of de/re-territorialization (53a)
- IX. Populations are the "subject" on strata of coding/decoding and of de/re-territorialization (54a)
- A. Aleatory cause from exterior milieu of modifications of code
1. Effect on interior milieus decide if they are to be popularized
  2. De/re-territorializations determine selection of modifications
- B. Modifications have associated milieus
1. Deterritorialization of exterior milieu
  2. Reterritorialization of intermediate/interior milieus
- C. Territorial signs
- D. Line of flight
- X. Absolute deterritorialization, absolute line of flight (55a-57a)
- A. Distinguished from relative deterritorialization:
1. Attempted escape from strata brings either breakthrough or fall back into strata
  2. Two modes of existence of abstract machines:
    - a. Ecumenon: binding, stratifying
    - b. Planomenon: line of flight: flows of absolute deterritorialization [=life; = desiring production]
- B. Characteristics of absolute deterritorialization (56a)
1. Not a matter of speed, but of nature
    - a. Stratifying via epistrata and parastrata
    - b. Jumping from one singularity to another
      - (1) via nondecomposable/nonsegmentary line:
      - (2) metastratum of plane of consistency
  2. Is not in excess or beyond; does not come suddenly or afterward
    - a. What is primary is the line of flight toward the plane of consistency, the Earth as the BwO
    - b. It is the strata that are residue: the question is stratification in the first place, not destratification
  3. Perpetual immanence of absolute deterritorialization w/in relative deterritorialization
    - a. Machinic assemblages [regulating stratification] also have edges of absolute deterritorialization
    - b. Plane of consistency is immanent to strata [always there as resource]
    - c. Two states of abstract machine are two different states of intensity [lower intensity w/in strata]

The variation between strata relative to content and expression (57a-64a)  
 Nature of the real distinction of content and expression varies from one stratum to another

- XI. Geological, crystalline, physiochemical: resonance btw strata differing in order of magnitude or scale (57-8a)
- A. Here, content is molecular and expression is molar :
1. Factors to consider:
    - a. Greater or lesser number of intermediate states btw molecular and molar
    - b. Greater or lesser number of exterior forces or organizing centers in molar
  2. These factors are in inverse relation and form limit-cases
- B. Need for subtleties of medieval scholasticism and theology (58a)
- XII. Organic strata: autonomous expression (58b-60)

- A. Preserves, even amplifies molecular / molar relation
  - B. Expression becomes linear, unidimensional even in segmentarity
  - C. Both expression and content are molecular and molar: linearity leads to flat multiplicities
  - D. Consequences of autonomous expression (59a)
    - 1. Organism has increased power of deterritorialization
    - 2. Threshold of deterritorialization of the "sign"
    - 3. Can now reproduce itself
    - 4. No longer mere inductions, but now transductions
      - a. Amplification of resonance btw molecular and molar
      - b. Functional efficacy of interior substances
      - c. Proliferation/interlacing of forms independently of codes
        - (1) surplus value of code
        - (2) transcoding
        - (3) aparallel evolution
- XIII. Alloplastic strata: modifies external world (60a-64a)
- A. Form of expression becomes linguistic [rather than genetic, as on organic strata]
  - B. Properties of human being are properties of this new distinction of content/expression
    - 1. Leroi-Gourhan's analyses: hand/tool as content; face/language as expression
      - a. hand not just an organ but a coding, a dynamic structuration, a dynamic formation
      - b. hand as general form of content: major threshold of deterritorialization: an accelerator
      - c. correlative deterritorialization of the milieu: steppe as selection pressure
      - d. complementary reterritorializations
    - 2. Language as new form of expression [=set of formal traits of new expression] (61a)
      - a. diversity of formal languages
      - b. diversity of formable substances
      - c. intensive map
        - (1) mouth as deterritorialization of snout
        - (2) lips as deterritorialization of mouth
        - (3) breast/lips are reterritorialized on each other
      - d. selection pressures of the steppe milieu
  - C. Characteristics of vocal signs (62a)
    - 1. Temporal linearity [vs spatial linearity of genetic code]
    - 2. Overcoding/translation [vs inductions and transductions]
      - a. Ability of language to represent all other strata
      - b. That is, scientific world [=translation of flows, particles, codes, territorialities into language]
      - c. This overcoding is why in language form of expression is independent of substance
      - d. This gives rise to "imperialist pretensions" of language
  - D. Technological content / semiotic or symbolic expression (63a)
    - 1. New relation of content and expression:
      - a. Content: technical social machine: states of force/formations of power
      - b. Expression: semiotic collective machine: regimes of signs
    - 2. Intermediate state of abstract machine: from 3rd stratum, reaches to the others
      - a. Ecumenon: enveloped in a stratum
      - b. Planomenon: develops in its own right on plane of consistency
    - 3. This [seeming freedom from mechnosphere] is illusion of man, caused by overcoding of language
    - 4. But the new distribution of content/expression is no illusion:
    - 5. Different regimes of signs/formations of power = different strata in human populations
  - E. The brain/CNS as exterior milieu, as population (64a)

Three problems [and a final distinction] remaining for Challenger (64b-72)

- XIV. Terminological: use of term "signs": Are they on all strata where there is form of expression? (64b-68a)
- A. Three kinds of signs:
    - 1. Indexes: territorial signs
    - 2. Symbols: deterritorialized signs
    - 3. Icons: signs of reterritorialization
  - B. No system of signs common to all strata [not even as semiotic "chora"]
    - 1. Signs only when there is real & categorial distinction btw form of expression and forms of content
      - a. here the abstract machine can "write," that is,

- b. extract regime of signs from language
- 2. In natural codings, abstract machine remains enveloped in the strata
- C. Must beware the danger of imperialism of the signifier affecting language itself, all regimes of signs
  - 1. The claim that all signs are signifiers
  - 2. Creates even more effectively [than imperialism of language] the illusion of direct contact w/ strata
  - 3. Key to all theories of signifier: Redundancy (66a)
  - 4. Implicit model for "signifier enthusiasts": word and thing (66b)
    - a. signifier extracted from word; from thing a signified in conformity and hence subjugated
    - b. Foucault: example of more nuanced approach using content/expression and form/substance
    - c. conclusion: we are never signifier or signified; we are stratified
      - (1) do not oppose words/things as corresponding
      - (2) nor signifieds/signifiers as conforming
      - (3) but distinct formalizations in unstable equilibrium or reciprocal presupposition
- D. Restricted method of dealing with signs (67a)
  - 1. Forms of expression w/o signs (e.g., genetic code)
    - a. signs do not equal language in general
    - b. but are defined by regimes of statements: real usages or functions of language
    - c. signs are not signs of things but signs of de/re-territorialization, marking thresholds
  - 2. Regimes of signs w/o signifiers
    - a. signifiante characteristic of only one regime
    - b. not the most interesting, but the most pernicious, cancerous, despotic and steeped in illusion
- XV. Content / expression not reducible to base/superstructure (68b)
  - A. Parallel formations in [reciprocal] presupposition: accomplished by a.m. and by m.a.
  - B. Pyramidal image is distorting
    - 1. Content, including form of content, becomes economic base of production
    - 2. Assemblages become first story of superstructure (State apparatus)
    - 3. Regimes of signs and forms of expression become second story (ideology)
- XVI. Mechanosphere, not evolution of strata (69a-72a)
  - A. Definition of Mechanosphere (end of 71a)
    - 1. set of all abstract machines and machinic assemblages
    - 2. [=self-organizing processes and concrete means of reaching thresholds that produce strata]
    - 3. No ordering of stratum/substratum
    - 4. No ordering according to higher/lower organization
    - 5. Plane of consistency: heterogeneous contact w/o metaphor
  - B. Relation of strata and plane of consistency (70a)
    - 1. Cannot be an opposition
    - 2. Rather, the relation of strata and plane of consistency is marked thus:
      - a. Strata are animated and defined by relative speeds of deterritorialization
      - b. Absolute deterritorialization is there from the beginning
      - c. Strata are thickenings on plane of consistency
    - 3. Plane of consistency is everywhere, always primary and always immanent
      - a. plane of consistency drawn by the abstract machine
        - (1) abstract machine both on destratified plane
        - (2) and in each stratum
        - (3) and even half-erect in those strata for which it is form of prehension (alloplastic)
      - b. Plane of consistency is not
        - (1) undifferentiated aggregate of unformed matters
        - (2) nor a chaos of formed matters of every kind
      - c. Specific nature of plane of consistency: brought about by abstract machine; destratification
        - (1) constructs continuums of intensity
        - (2) emits and combines particles-signs
        - (3) forms conjunctions of flows of deterritorialization
    - 4. Contrasting characteristics of strata
      - a. Discontinuous intensities, bound up in form and substance
      - b. Particles divided into particles of content and articles of expression
      - c. Deterritorialized flows are disjointed and reterritorialized
- XVII. Final distinction: abstract machine and machinic assemblages which effectuate it (71a)
  - A. Abstract machine
    - 1. On plane of consistency: constructs continuums, emissions, and singularities
    - 2. Within strata: defines unity of composition and force of attraction or prehension
  - B. Machinic assemblages

1. On a stratum
  - a. Performs coadaptation of content and expression
  - b. Ensures biunivocal relationships of segments of content and expression
  - c. Guides division of stratum into epistrata and parastrata
2. Between strata:
  - a. Ensures relation to substratum
  - b. Brings about corresponding changes in organization
3. In touch w/ plane of consistency: Effectuates the abstract machine
  - a. on a particular stratum
  - b. between strata
  - c. In relation between strata and plane
4. Machinic assemblage necessary for
  - a. Articulations of organic stratum
  - b. Relation btw two strata
  - c. Organism to be caught up by a social field
  - d. States of force and regimes of signs
- C. To repeat, system of strata has nothing to do with: Signifier/signified or Base/superstructure or mind/matter

Summary/recapitulation and end of frame narrative (72a-74)

XVIII. Summary/recapitulation (72a-73)

- A. Basic notions
    1. BwO = destratified plane of consistency
    2. Matter of the plane: Intensive continua / Emissions of particle-signs / Conjunctions of flows
    3. Abstract machine(s): Construct bodies / Draw plane / Diagram what happens [movement from a) to b)]
  - B. System of the strata
    1. On intensive continuum:
      - a. Fashions forms
      - b. Forms matter into substances
    2. Emissions of particle-signs:
      - a. Distinguish expression and content
      - b. Units of expression (=signs) and units of content (=particles)
    3. In conjunctions
      - a. Separate flows
      - b. Assign relative movements and diverse territorialities
      - c. Relative de/re-territorializations
  - C. Identity and difference of strata
    1. Identity: double articulation of content/expression (really distinct & in reciprocal presupposition)
    2. Difference between strata
      - a. Nature of real distinction of content/expression
      - b. Nature of substances as formed matters
      - c. Nature of relative movements
    3. Three types of real distinction [between content and expression]
      - a. Real-formal: [physico-chemical]: orders of magnitude & resonance of expression (induction)
      - b. Real-real: [organic]: different subjects & linearity of expression (transduction)
      - c. Real-essential: [alloplastic]: different attributes & superlinearity of expression (translation)
  - D. Stratum/substratum relation (72b)
    1. Unity of composition of a stratum (Ecumenon): milieu, substantial elements, formal straits
    2. Division into
      - a. Parastrata: irreducible forms and associated milieus
      - b. Epistrata: layers of formed substances and intermediary milieus
    3. Machinic assemblage as interstratum and as metastratum
- XIX. End of frame narrative (73a-74)