

# THE TERRITORY IS NOT THE MAP

## PLACE, DELEUZE AND GUATTARI, AND AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY

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At the beginning of “1227: Treatise on Nomadology—The War Machine” in *A Thousand Plateaus*, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari contrast chess with Go in terms of the relation between the pieces and the kind of space they create. “Chess,” they maintain, “is a game of state . . . chess pieces are coded; they have an internal nature and intrinsic properties from which their movements, situations, and confrontations derive.”<sup>1</sup> Go, on the other hand, has pieces that “are pellets, disks, simple arithmetic units, and have only an anonymous, collective, or third-person function: ‘It’ makes a move.” Chess has a “milieu of interiority,” in other words, it takes its set of meanings from the previously defined “essence” of each piece. The space it creates is striated. Go, on the other hand, has a milieu of exteriority. The space in Go is smooth. It is a war without battle lines, without boundaries, without aim or destination, without departure or arrival. Chess “codes and decodes space,” while Go “proceeds altogether differently, territorializing or deterritorializing it (make the outside a territory in space, consolidate that territory by construction of a second, adjacent territory. . .).”

Deleuze and Guattari here follow in the theme of other plateaus, tracing nomadic subjectivities and exploring the contingent, multifarious ways they come into themselves. The Treatise on Nomadology, while perhaps the most famous plateau, focuses on the contrast between the “interiority,” or essentialism of the State versus the “exteriority” or nomadic qualities of the war machine. But this is “set up” (to the extent that anything is really set up for Deleuze and Guattari) by the plateau immediately preceding, “1837: Of the Refrain.” This plateau does not concern the social-philosophical problems of the emergence of subjectivity

in the face of a coercive nation-state, but rather begins by considering the roots of the experience of territory.

The concepts of the refrain and of nomadic philosophy give us a clue to a way to rethink African philosophy. The project of this essay is to consider ways in which we might think of African philosophy outside of the metaphors of maps used by both modernist and also some postmodernist writers, the first to delineate and define area and establish ownership and citizenship, the second to clear space and allow for possibilities. The first project of mapping, which has been the explicit or implicit project of the majority of African philosophy, leaves African philosophy forever at the edge of Western thought, defining its territory by that already claimed. The second project, meant to resist that sense of entitlement, ends up avoiding discussions of subjectivity even as it tries to avoid any hint of essentialism. We find out what we might choose, at the expense of knowing what we do choose. The result in the first case is a map that has little legitimacy, and in the second a map that has little use. The alternative, I would like to suggest, is to rethink both the metaphysical and the postmodern addiction to the notion of space, and instead suggest that the concept of place holds more hope.

The title to this essay is an obvious play on words. “The map is not the territory” is a common expression that indicates the limits of representation. It suggests that we can never fully nor properly represent or capture the world. Jorge Luis Borges imagines a map that is a 1:1 representation of the territory it is supposed to represent.<sup>2</sup> Of course, if we broaden our conception of a map, we can imagine maps that are much larger than the territory—“maps” of subatomic reactions, the genome, and so forth.

These maps define the boundaries, internal interactions, and identity of the territory in question. Maps, at least the ones common in the modern age, start with abstractions, and fit the “territory” into a numerical or conceptual grid. To suggest that the map is not the territory is to recognize that the territory is more than the abstractions of the map.

In turning the metaphor around, I want to turn the function of maps themselves around, and with it, turn around the way we think of African philosophy. Instead of mapping it, either explicitly through a set of “trends” or some other device that allows us to determine who’s in and who’s out, to defend borders and claim territory, I want to start with the notion of territory instead. In short, I want to argue that place, the place we find ourselves in and which has meaning to us, precedes space, the bounded and abstractly defined territory.

Deleuze and Guattari will serve as an unexpected door into this topic. Unexpected, because they are heirs of Western philosophy, and explicitly draw on Western themes. Unexpected also because of some comments made in their final collaborative project about “geophilosophy,” about the origins of philosophy. Nevertheless, they suggest a way to think placially that may be of value to African philosophy.

Several aspects to the issue of place must be addressed. First, what do we make of Deleuze and Guattari’s seeming inappropriateness? Second, what is a place? Third, what is *this* place, the place out of which African philosophy comes? Fourth, how do we clarify the concepts available at this place, that is, how do we dwell in this place?

### **Geophilosophy: “Thinking Takes Place in the Relationship of Territory and the Earth”**

In *What Is Philosophy*, Deleuze and Guattari use the term “geophilosophy” for a philosophy of the earth, one that recognizes the ebb and flow of life.<sup>3</sup> We, as individuals and as a species, define and redefine our territory,

thinking and rethinking our relationship to the earth. We find ourselves in this flux, yet are not obliterated by its uncertainty.

On a cursory reading, it may seem that Deleuze and Guattari are arguing for the priority of Greece in the history of philosophy. They identify Greece as a unique point in the history of thought, a point at which there was sufficient organization to give relative safety to thought but sufficient porousness to allow seepage of ideas from the outside. Greece has a set of necessary characteristics for the development of philosophy. They identify three such characteristics: immanence, friendship, and opinion.<sup>4</sup> “Immanence” concerns the “international market” in which those who have been alienated by the “empire” are able to find freedom and mobility. It is the interaction of people outside of the structures of state. To be sure, Greece had its city-states, but these contained highly diverse interaction and interchange. “Friendship” refers to the pleasure people take in association, both in the connections and the rivalries that it affords. And thirdly, Greek society made “opinion” possible, or a freewheeling exchange of views and conversation. These possibilities do not appear in an empire, for empires are governed “arborescally,” while Greece operated “rhizomatically.” Philosophy can only emerge under the horizontal life of rhizomes, not under the vertical life of trees.

The place of philosophy, then, is the place that is made possible by these conditions. Deleuze and Guattari do mention that philosophy emerges in cultures other than the West, but they maintain that philosophy proper is essentially a Western artifact. “Chinese, Hindu, Jewish, or Islamic” philosophy are possible, inasmuch as thinking may take place on a plane of immanence that can be populated by figures as much as concepts,<sup>5</sup> but philosophy in these contexts is really pre-philosophical. While Deleuze and Guattari do not think there is any internal necessity to philosophy, they do argue that in the case of non-Greek planes of immanence other outcomes such as religion or wisdom are possible. As well, the milieu in the

non-Greek planes of immanence are not the interaction of concepts, but the reflection of concepts on the non-philosophical.

This seems to make Deleuze and Guattari less than useful in a project that is meant to theorize African philosophy. However, it is important to be clear about exactly what they are saying here. In suggesting that Greek philosophy has a kind of priority, we are not led to a debate about the possibility that Greek philosophy originated in Egypt. This is not an historical argument that they are making, but an essentially philosophical one. Just as Hobbes need not (and should not) be read as saying that there really was a time in the history of humanity that a state of nature existed, so Deleuze and Guattari are not necessarily saying that philosophy is historically traceable only back to Greece; indeed, they say that “philosophy was something Greek—although brought by immigrants.”<sup>6</sup> Rather, we should pay attention to the conditions they suggest as essential to its development. John Rajchman puts it this way:

One might say it was Deleuze’s intuition that we might now see philosophy as having—or as having had—*no* intrinsic “home” or “land” or “civilization,” and that we might then rethink its geographies and borders in terms of an odd potential that keeps arising in different times and places, released through many circumstances and contingencies. Thus in his “geophilosophy” Deleuze says that philosophy *might* well have started elsewhere than in Athens and with Plato, for, instead of origins, philosophy has only a “milieu” or “atmosphere,” favored by certain conditions such as those provided by the “colonizing democracy” of Athens, which brought itinerant strangers into its agora to encounter Socrates.<sup>7</sup>

None of this suggests that Deleuze and Guattari can unambiguously be used in a project such as this. They still do use Greece as their prime example of the source of philosophy, and they do explicitly mention non-Western philosophies as being pre-philosophical. Deleuze and Guattari are reacting to their own

tradition, and their usefulness to African philosophy must be seen in this light. Nevertheless, they provide the possibility of thinking about place as a key concept, which allows us to get out of the metaphysical presumptions that both Western and most African philosophy finds itself encumbered with.

Still, we should also be aware of their commitments as expressed in this chapter. The benefit of dealing with a concept such as that of place, is that there is less of a tendency to subsume the particular origins of the concept under some supposed universal such as space. Nevertheless, all concepts have their history, all are answers to a particular set of questions that have a context. So, the task will not be to excise any particular concept of its Western (or any other) bias, but to bring its particular origins to light, and in that way hope that its use in conversation with other territorial assumptions will give us another component in the task of asking about what it is to do philosophy in this *African* place.

What can we gain from Deleuze and Guattari’s discussion of geophilosophy? Geophilosophy emerges from the milieus that act and interact. These milieus become territory, which itself is deterritorialized through the creative power of the refrain. There is no essence to place; it cannot be used as a trump card by anyone to assert ownership or entitlement. Deterritorialization, and its counterpart, reterritorialization, becomes possible because the refrain, the reflective habits that show us for who we are, continually re-think our place in all its forms, re-configure it to be adequate for the times, and ultimately “release it to the Cosmos.” Place becomes something more than simple location, but less than essence, entitlement, or citizenship. It cannot be identified by a map, it is not reducible to power alone. Yet, despite Deleuze and Guattari’s privileging of Greece, the conditions become available for philosophy to appear, and to be seen as having appeared, outside of the West.

But we are ahead of ourselves. We have seen how it is not impossible that Deleuze and

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Guattari could be part of the conversation about place and African philosophy. How, then, is it possible? Put another way, as our second question: What is a place?

### **Now We Are At Home.**

#### **But Home Does Not Pre-Exist.**

The question of the nature of place has been the focus of a great deal of recent thought. The chief analyst and synthesizer has been Edward Casey,<sup>8</sup> who produced a very fine phenomenological analysis in *Getting Back Into Place* and a synoptic and magisterial historical overview of the origins, subsumption under the concept of space, and eventual re-emergence of place in *The Fate Of Place*. Many others, in a variety of disciplines, have also contributed to the discussion of the nature of place.<sup>9</sup> What has not been sufficiently investigated, however, is not so much the question of the nature of place, but the place(s) from which philosophy can and does come.<sup>10</sup> Where, placially, is African philosophy located? Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* proves useful for this task.<sup>11</sup> Two ways emerge from that work for thinking about place—the relatively well-known “Treatise on Nomadology,” and the lesser known idea of the refrain.

The nomad traverses a territory, not as one who is traveling between different points or toward destinations, but as one who “relays” between intermediate points. The nomad is not the migrant, who goes from one point to the next,<sup>12</sup> but rather one whose space is distributed openly and indefinitely. The place of the nomad, then, is not a point but a trajectory and a region. The nomad's space is such that they do not need to orient themselves by means of fixed land-points:

Here one moves not only in accordance with cardinal directions or geometrically determined vectors but in a “polyvocality of directions”—directions that are as much heard as seen, and in any case not merely posited as exigencies of theory. On the high sea, or in the windswept desert, one *listens to* direction, *feels it*, as much

as one sees it (sometimes, as in an Arctic storm, one cannot discern directional markers of any kind, and yet a native to the region *knows* how to get to places). . . . One finds one's bearings *where one is*, that is, in the very place, the local absolute one occupies—without counting.<sup>13</sup>

This does not re-introduce the concept of space, though, because there is nothing abstract about the region of the nomad. The nomad does not “move around” a predetermined space; indeed, the nomad should not be defined in terms of movement at all (381). The nomad “does not depart, does not want to depart, who clings to the smooth space left by the receding forest, where the steppe or the desert advances, and who invents nomadism as a response to this challenge” (381). “One does not move *to* a dwelling but *dwells by moving*, that is, by transition from place to place within (or, again, *as*) a region.”<sup>14</sup>

The nomad continually deterritorializes, in that this person re-produces the environment at the same time as he or she is produced by it. Nomad “make the desert no less than they are made by it” (382). This is demonstrated most effectively by the second entry-point to Deleuze and Guattari's concept of place in the preceding plateau, “1827—Of the Refrain.” The refrain is an auditory notion, a repetition that determines a territory. The refrain is a song that organizes and fends off chaos, that draws from the earth a set of contingent meanings that lead to identity.

“From chaos, *Milieus* and *Rhythms* are born” (313). The milieu is a codification of repetitions, a limitation and rhythmatization on the chaos (which itself is the milieu of all milieus). When we are at home, we have a set of rhythms that define a place as home, and in fact when we are away from home, we often find ourselves setting up familiar rhythms to make a new place into home. There are codes—items are placed in a way meaningful to those that know a place as home, and only partially accessible (if at all) by others. But these codes are never fixed; if they were, this would just be an exercise in structuralism.

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First, we change them just by living in and with them. Second, the milieus are constantly interacting with each other, changing the coding of the rhythms we have set up. It is not that I as a reflecting subjectivity set out to model the world in my image, in some Hegelian manner. My subjectivity lies in the set of rhythms and repetitions I have found to be useful.

But perhaps most importantly, the milieu is not simply an external location of meaning for the self. This does not easily fall into the traditional tension in interpretation theory, between (post) structuralism, in which meaning lies outside the self as a function of independent relations, and hermeneutics, in which meaning lies inside the self in an ontological moment. Paul Ricoeur dialectically overcomes this split,<sup>15</sup> but Deleuze and Guattari will not settle for a dialectical answer. Instead, the answer comes as an almost Humean proto-phenomenology. (Deleuze, after all, wrote on Hume early in his life.)<sup>16</sup> The self is nothing, quite literally, apart from its habits; yet the self is not in any way reducible to the overlapping spaces created by externalized meaning-structures in the world.

Place (to use a word not used by Deleuze and Guattari) is not just a choice taken within the set of possibilities that a negotiated or claimed space allows. It is the interaction of milieus into a territory. This territory cannot be mapped any more than the range of a bird can be mapped. The range of the bird is just wherever it goes. We can, after the fact, produce conceptual grids which account for where the bird has been, and we can, as the result of knowledge of repetition, have an idea of where the bird will go (there is habit, after all), but the map comes after, not before. Philosophy is not reducible to biology; biology is always already philosophical, and if it is so for the bird, it is all the more so for humans.

The milieu, for Deleuze and Guattari, is not a singular phenomenon.<sup>17</sup> Our world is layered by milieus of various sorts. We begin by marking our places, extending ourselves by the use of objects, language, gesture, and so forth. Our

bodies do not stop at our skin, they stop somewhere beyond, where our space becomes identified as ours. This can expand or contract based on the clothing we wear, the way we spread out our belongings out around us on a table, or the language we use. The milieu constantly changes, and is constantly layered.

Territory is not the same as the milieu. Territory, as MacGregor Wise puts it, is the “accretion of milieu effects.”<sup>18</sup> Milieus are constantly shifting, while territories are more bounded. A territory

is not a milieu, not even an additional milieu, nor a rhythm or passage between milieus. The territory is in fact an act that affects milieus and rhythms, that “territorializes” them. The territory is the product of a territorialization of milieus and rhythms. (314)

A territory is the interrelation of many milieus. It is, in a sense, a stance taken on milieus. It is not our site, but our situation. Milieus are the meanings of objects, while the territory is the expression that becomes possible through the objects. Animals (and this plateau is full of examples from the animal world) mark their territory using a variety of signs, including urine and excrement, odors, and sounds. The specific objects used to sign these (the milieu) may change (certainly in token, and likely also in type), but the territory itself remains the same over the change of milieu-objects, just as one’s home may be populated with different objects over time, while at the same time maintaining the home’s homeliness.

At the same time, while territories are more stable, Deleuze and Guattari more often speak of “territorialization,” “deterritorialization,” and “reterritorialization” than of territory by itself. Territory becomes an action, and just as milieu markers may shift, so too can territory. Home (to use Macgregor Wise’s term) remains beyond the shift in markers, but it also changes. Home is a territory or place of comfort (I hesitate to use the word “space,” as Wise does, because of its problematic history),<sup>19</sup> but it is by no means a static place.

What is place? Deleuze and Guattari outline a “new classification system” to account for the “machine” that territorializes. This classification system is one of different sorts of refrains:

1. *Milieu refrains*, which have at least two parts, one of which answers the other;

2. *Natal refrains*, or refrains of the territory, “where the part is related to the whole, to an immense refrain of the earth.” These refrains mark the disjunction between the earth and the territory (lullabies, drinking songs, hunting songs, work songs, military songs);

3. *Folk and popular refrains*, “tied to an immense song of the people, according to variable relations of crowd individuations that simultaneously bring into play affects and nations (the Polish, German, Magyar, or Romanian, but also the Pathetic, Panicked, Vengeful, etc.)”;

4. *Molecularized refrains*—the sea and the wind, which are tied to the Cosmic refrain;

5. *Cosmic refrain*. This final refrain should not be seen as transcendence. Perhaps the best example of this is one which ends the plateau: “In Schumann, a whole learned labor, at once rhythmic, harmonic, and melodic, has this sober and simple result: *detrterritorialize the refrain*. Produce a detrterritorialized refrain as the final end of music, release it in the Cosmos—that is more important than building a new system” (350).

These refrains are not particularly milieus, nor are they territories. They are the rope that ties together sets of territories and milieus together. It is significant that the “refrain” is an auditory metaphor. Deleuze and Guattari consider the visual metaphor, as used in visual art, and find it limited (347–48). The refrain is “eminently sonorous.” They argue that visuality, and particularly color, tends to connect too closely to the territory with which it is identified or which it marks. Sound does not signify or communicate values, but rather it “invades us, impels us, drags us, transpierces us. It takes leave of the earth, as much in order to drop us into a black hole as to open us up to a cosmos. It makes us want to die” (348). Sound

moves us in ways that visuality, and particularly color, do not.

The refrain is a repetition, the song of the bird repeated, but not verbatim. Repetition necessarily contains difference,<sup>20</sup> yet what is important is its resonance, the sympathetic vibrations that occur in a territory that give it life. The refrain is a catalyst, a to-and-fro movement. It “fabricates time” by its rhythm. “The refrain remains a formula evoking a character or landscape” (349). In other words, place is created through the repetitions in which we do not simply react to the interplay of meanings of the objects that create territory, but actively voice a position in the midst of the overdetermination that territory affords.

Wise characterizes the choice that the refrain allows as “habit.” Habit is the sort of repetition that admits variation (indeed, requires it), but through which we are recognized for who we are. Habit is not necessarily simply a function of individual will—there are habits that are cultural, as well as individual. These habits, taken together, are who we are. There is no “core,” no essence of self apart from the habits we are. “There is no fixed self, only the habit of looking for one.”<sup>21</sup> Yet, habits are not just blind instincts. They are reflective continuities, the same produced differently, containers for a self that is nothing without them. Jacob Boehme, the seventeenth century mystic, speaks of a will to “power, color, and virtue”<sup>22</sup> that produces *Gefassete*, a German neologism that combines *Gefäß*, a container, with *fassen*, to grasp.<sup>23</sup> The container is produced from the inside, and exists as a temporary (one might say, nomadic) representation of the self. To the extent that this container ossifies, what is contained is lost. It will move on, one way or another. The question is, whether the successive containers can keep up.

The place is not, then, a home in a Heideggerian sense, one which we yearn for, from which we are *unheimlich*. Our wandering is not the condition of being lost; rather, being still is being lost. Wandering is our human condition, and movement binds our territory together in a way that remaining stationary can-

not. The bird that sings the refrain sings by habit, reacts to its environment but also asserts itself to create its environment. Its repetition produces its place, itself.

This suggests that any list of place-attributes will not succeed. We cannot identify “home” any more than the bird can map out in advance its territory. It is constantly in the process of deterritorializing and reterritorializing. This does not suggest that there is no home, but simply that home cannot be rendered as either a nostalgic source or an eschatological or utopian finality. We are, in the final analysis, *homo viator*, but we cannot understand that in terms of the garden from which we were banished, nor the heaven for which we might yearn, nor the desires of a subterranean subjectivity.

While we may not be able to give a list of place attributes, we may nevertheless be able to recognize the disruptive force that we might describe as home. The following example comes immediately after Deleuze and Guattari’s discussion of chess and Go:

Luc de Heunsch analyzes a Bantu myth that leads us to the same schema: Nkongolo, an indigenous emperor and administrator of public works, a man of the public and a man of the police, gives his half-sisters to the hunter Mbidi, who assists him and then leaves. Mbidi’s son, a man of secrecy, joins up with his father, only to return from the outside with that inconceivable thing, an army. He kills Nkongolo and proceeds to build a new State. “Between” the magical-despotic State and the juridical State containing a military institution, we see the flash of the war machine, arriving from without. (353)

The “magical-despotic” state (the original, traditional empire governed by Nkongolo) and the juridical state containing a military institution (the new state produced by Mbidi) are divided by a rupture, a “war machine,” an element of exteriority that does not work by the internal rules of the state, but cannot be conceptualized. The war machine is doomed to fall into the regularizing impulses of some state. It is the rupture that is the refrain, which is the smooth space of Go. The bird that marks its ter-

ritory with a refrain engages in habit, but it is not the habit of the state institution. It is not about interiority. Its refrain is governed not by instinct, but by the vagaries and contingencies of what is outside; yet, there is repetition. The nomad will have to deal with striated space, and indeed the nomad’s desert will be overtaken by the State, but at the same time, the State will be overtaken by the desert.

### The Territory is not the Map

Third question: Where is *this* place?

Deleuze and Guattari bring us to this place through the game of Go, the refrain, and the idea of territory. All these offer us a way of thinking about the fundamental question of African philosophy, which is not the unanswerably metaphysical “What is African philosophy?” or worse yet, “Does African philosophy exist?” but rather: “What is it to do philosophy in this place?” Specifically, we have the beginning of an answer to the question, “what place are we in?”—or perhaps, “what place can Africa philosophize from?” Working out a notion of place that relies on contingency avoids a notion of entitlement that simply mirrors Western presumptions, and has formed the basis of much African philosophy to this point. African philosophy, like that of any other place, is earned through reflection on the concepts made available in the place that creates an identity. These concepts should not be thought as necessarily unique, tied to some notion of the uniqueness of consciousness, language, history, tradition, social organization, or so forth. This search for uniqueness, or the “myth of purity,” is self defeating, in that the purity will never be proven to the satisfaction of those who are skeptical, and does not need to be proven to those who are already committed to the idea that African philosophy is a coherent enterprise. So, instead of searching for purity, or for an *Ursache*, or *Ding-an-sich*, it is more useful to think about the questions that can arise when we consider the place we are in.

If what has been said to this point is true, that African philosophy should not look for the

space established by modernist maps to orient itself (as this space is abstract, defensive, and always already looks to the areas on the map already claimed), and it should not look to place as defined statically, a kind of “home” in a nostalgic or hopeful sense. “The map is not the territory” suggests that the representation is not identical to that which it represents. Its inversion, as has already been mentioned, suggests that territory, that which is earned by nomadic action within a set of milieus, cannot be represented by a map. Maps, at least in their usual understanding, make the world abstract. The abstract categories come first—lines of longitude and latitude, scales and conventions. Into these abstractions the earth fits. The earth is governed by the abstractions. The nomad, the bird singing the refrain, the piece in Go, none of these are governed by abstractions. All these are irreducibly concrete, yet not as particulars. Abstractions, then, become the carcasses (or perhaps more in the spirit of territory markers, the excrement) of thought, not thought itself. Maps tell us who is in and who is out, who owns what and whose laws one must obey. Deleuze, if he has maps at all (and some writers do talk about maps in this context, but in a radically different fashion, much closer to how I am talking about the notion of place),<sup>24</sup> is not concerned about ownership, but about accounting for the ways in which concepts might emerge, and the way one might understand one’s world given a set of contingent actions. In this, perhaps unexpectedly, Deleuze and Guattari come close to Gadamer. While Gadamer’s notion of tradition would not carry much weight for them, and there would be little sympathy for his lingering hints of transcendence, the idea of contingent understanding based on local conditions begins to look close to Gadamer’s concerns.

So where is this place? When African philosophy endeavors to set its concepts free into the Cosmos, those concepts that emerge from its milieus and defines its (temporary) territory, it has for the most part started with the concepts and tried to find their origins. This is not so different than the impulse of many

thinkers from around the world, and may account for the suspicion toward the lack of textual tradition that most people see within African history. If we need to legitimate the concepts by finding their roots, by thinking “arborally,” to use a Deleuzian metaphor, we will naturally be concerned if those roots are unavailable. African philosophy has found text-substitutes, or text-analogues, to make up for this. So, collective oral tradition, sages, an “African mind” or “African consciousness,” a unique cultural or linguistic history have all been used to substitute for the seeming lack of textuality. This, though, just plays the space game.

This place, the set of nomadic vectors that describe this place, cannot easily be given in a list. The point is not to try to come up with a new description, as if we were going to try to define the robin as a bird that has *this* territory. But perhaps what is more useful is to think about where the field has been, where it has asserted its territory, deterritorialized and reterritorialized, and what kind of refrains emerge. I am not suggesting that we just need to give an account of the battles engaged in and the entitlements claimed. Thinking about philosophy in Africa needs to be more than giving a history (and by implication a justification) of philosophy in Africa. History

is always written from the sedentary point of view and in the name of a unitary State apparatus, at least a possible one, even when the topic is nomads. What is lacking is a Nomadology, the opposite of a history. (23)

History becomes another map, another way of charting and defending space and determining citizenship. Deleuze and Guattari’s point is that this preoccupation, if left as the sole task of philosophy, actually stands against generating concepts that are the life-blood of philosophy. It should be noted that Deleuze and Guattari never say that striated space (chess, arboreal thought) ought to be forsaken or ignored,<sup>25</sup> but rather that smooth space (nomadology, go, rhizomatic thought) needs to be present, or we have lost what it is to do philosophy.

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This African place from which we philosophize does not particularly need to establish a historical account of the conditions under which philosophy takes place. Whether that is a matter of arguing for the existence of philosophical texts in ancient or historical Africa, or arguing for the inclusion of patterns of thought available in non-western text-analogues (proverbs, the wisdom of sages, the structure of language), in themselves these will remain ambiguous about the existence of philosophy itself, because philosophy is not a point in history. To borrow a phrase, philosophy is as philosophy does. This place, then, is not reducible to the points on the way.

There are two senses in which place is relevant to African philosophy. First, it is relevant as a way of rethinking the object of reflection in African circles. If we are not looking for a fundamental source of thought, a static “place” that is a site on an abstract map, but rather a region created by refrains, the object of philosophy changes. While passing attention has been given to the dynamism of African thought, most of the attention has been spent showing the longstanding continuity and stability of tradition. Ironically, the dynamism itself has been made into a static object of investigation. Instead of supposing that a rooted, striated space can guarantee the legitimacy of African philosophy, my argument here has been that such a search focuses not on philosophy itself, but on its carcasses, or put even more crudely (but perhaps more accurately, in that the metaphor of carcasses might suggest dualism), its excrement. If this excrement was taken as a refrain, an incremental (nomadic) marker of territory, we might be able to see the dynamism. The State-apparatus always has to try to subsume the nomad, but in fact can never completely accomplish this. Unfortunately, the excrement is usually taken as an end in itself, and we end up thinking that African philosophy is a matter of interiority, like chess, like the State. Interiority must cede to exteriority; excrement must cede to increment.

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The second way in which place is relevant to African thought is in the nature of thought itself, as opposed to that which engenders it. Philosophy generates concepts, it does not simply analyze them or uncover them. This is a fact usually forgotten not only by African philosophy but philosophy anywhere. It is behind the charges still made by some Western philosophers, that African philosophy is simply warmed-over Western philosophy. It is also behind the impulse to resist that argument by identifying the uniquely African and uniquely philosophical aspects within African philosophy. Neither side generates new concepts, but simply defends the stock of existing concepts. In neither case is there any real deterritorialization and reterritorialization.

African philosophy becomes moribund if it does not create concepts. Creation does not imply “ex nihilo” production, nor does it imply that there are no lines of contact or influence outside of itself. It means that, like the nomad or the singing bird, there is a direct response to the specificity of the place or region. Instead of defining what these are, the next section suggests examples and directions of research.

### **To Dwell as a Poet or as an Assassin?**

Paul Virilio’s question, quoted by Deleuze and Guattari, leads us to our final question: how do we clarify the concepts available at this place? In other words, what might African philosophy look like if it paid attention to the habits of those who in-habit? How might we dwell as poets, making the milieu of thought available to the Cosmos, rather than as assassins, “bombard(ing) the existing people with molecular populations that are forever closing all of the assemblages, hurling them into an ever wider and deeper black hole” (345). The assassin produces concepts and strategies of training, control, and ultimately annihilation of the people, while the poet produces concepts that bring forth (in a phrase reminiscent of Nietzsche) “the people yet to come,” the people who can navigate their shifting territory.

The argument I have made to this point has tried to focus on the disruptive, nomadic nature of African philosophy. I have not given an account that has a teleology—we are not at the point of having “won” a space on a map, and can now go about writing the kind of history that victors write. If we take seriously this notion that philosophy reflecting on Africa must be about exteriority rather than interiority, how does this affect the kinds of projects worth doing?

1. For one thing, the search for the “African identity” or the “African concept of the person” would become a dead end. Didier Kaphagawani, in a posthumously published essay critiquing some African concepts of the person, takes issue with trying to use communalism as a metaphysical guarantor of African personhood.<sup>26</sup> Communalism, he argues, is a dynamic feature of the actions of Africans themselves, and is therefore

not an ontologically stable entity. It is a collaborative life-world which brings into sociation forces, meanings, and agents of varying gender, age, and influence to construct their space, their *habitus*.<sup>27</sup>

Despite his use of “space” where it seems place would be more appropriate (*habitus* is the place we find ourselves in, not the space of possibilities), his point is well taken, and could be extended. Personal identity is not about interiority, nor is it about mapping the terrain in such a way that the African “self” can be told apart from other selves. Instead, the first task is to identify the refrains Africans use to create home, and to establish territory.

2. Following on Kaphagawani’s questioning of the communal as the basis for the African sense of self, we might take the issue further: what place does the individual have in the public realm in African society? Hannah Arendt argues that the *polis* is the model of the public realm.<sup>28</sup> This suggests a specifically Greek model for human interaction, which may well not apply to African life. What place is established by collective action in (both traditional and modern) African society?

3. The habits that are the milieu, or the process of deterritorializing and reterritorializing, must command more attention. This would suggest a new theory of tradition, one that does not rely on identification and recovery, but rather on recognizing the habits that have lived on. In this sense Gyekye’s admonition that tradition is adopted by the daughter generation rather than handed down by the parent generation is apt.<sup>29</sup> While he continues to try to essentialize tradition, at least he has recognized that dealing with the current ways that we “mark our territory” is the entry point to African philosophy that can treat Africans as persons rather than as cultural or anthropological curiosities.

4. Boniface Abanuka gives an excellent example of how African experience can be reterritorialized, in his discussion of ancestors.<sup>30</sup> Unlike Kwame Gyekye, who regards talk of ancestors as an unnecessary and perhaps harmful conservative force in African society,<sup>31</sup> Abanuka tries to see this as a kind of refrain that produces territory from chaos. He does not take it in metaphysical terms (“do ancestors exist or not?”), but rather addresses the question of how to deal with the exigencies of life, not so that the individual slavishly follows the details of the ancestor’s example, but so that the individual can creatively deal with new circumstances. The good things that come to the community come through the creative actions of individuals, and the example of the ancestors shows just what could be the case, rather than simply holding the individual to a rigid set of societal norms.

Ancestors, then, do not simply hand down rigid laws, and they are not simply a conservative force on society. Abanuka comes very close to Deleuze and Guattari’s argument by recognizing the contingent and creative aspect of ancestors. Far from being retrogressive, he shows that the ancestors are a kind of refrain, one that breaks apart and reconfigures itself, and contributes to the territory.

5. As has already been mentioned, the place “Africa” is the answer to a set of questions. These questions are worth raising. Mudimbe

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has begun this task in his *The Invention of Africa* and *The Idea of Africa*. But it is not enough to just raise the questions, as if that will settle for all time the perfidy of the West. Let us grant that guilt, and then ask what refrain is now continuing to mark this territory?

6. Gadamer's concern for practical philosophy is suggestive for African philosophers. Most discussions of practicality in philosophy have revolved around identifying the conceptual roots of perennial problems in Africa, and proposing solutions. Again we might look to Gyekye's *Tradition and Modernity*, particularly his discussion of corruption. Odera Oruka also has written a great deal about this. The problem has been that practicality has been conceptualized in terms of influence within a technocratic bureaucracy. "If only we can make the concepts clear," so the argument goes, "we might be able to effect social change." But what if this isn't true? How can philosophy truly be practical in Africa?

The refrain is not simply an account of the construction of existing territory, but also a way of creating new concepts that might have an effect, that might "create a people" in the way an artist needs a people (346). This is a new opportunity for philosophers, not to expertly wield yet another tool in a society that has seen too much of tools, and of experts, but to create concepts that deterritorialize existing ways, and reterritorialize. Philosophers need to sing new refrains, not simply imagine new tools.

7. If philosophy reflects on the constant process of deterritorializing and reterritorializing, and if this happens as Deleuze and Guattari suggest, when the milieus interact in various ways, it would be worth producing new configurations to generate new concepts. The unspoken assumption of much African philosophy, even when it has tried to look inside itself, is that its milieu includes Western thought. This has limited the scope of questioning, and thereby limited the set of concepts available. One relatively easy (although almost completely ignored) way to break out of this would

be to consciously pursue intercultural dialogue between Africa and other traditions of philosophy than the West.

8. Deterritorialization, in Deleuze and Guattari's sense, is an ambiguous term. It can point to the positive aporias of thought, that make new concepts possible. It can also refer to the dangerous and violent affronts to thought that are imposed by the outside. African philosophy has been acutely aware of the outside affronts—Fanon theorizes it well, and a host of other thinkers, quite rightly, have argued that not only the land but also the mind must be decolonized. Less attention, though, has been paid to the positive aporias of thought, the production of new concepts. My argument here has been against relying on the negative, spatial logic to establish African philosophy, and the main reason has been that this does not produce new concepts.

9. Following Deleuze and Guattari (and for that matter, Gadamer and Kierkegaard as well), the relationship between repetition and difference could be explored more fully. In what ways are concepts repeated in different forms, in what ways is there consistency over change? In African philosophy, the relative lack of a textual tradition has meant that other sources for thought have been explored, including oral tradition, the wisdom of the sages, proverbs and sayings. These sources have always been seen as second-best to a written tradition, at least as far as philosophy is concerned. But the Western written tradition itself can be seen as a set of repetitions, refrains that have produced new concepts. To use the tools of recovery that the West has used may not be all that useful when dealing with a tradition that draws on other versions of the refrain, more overtly related to the auditory. Thus, attending to the kind of refrains that typify African territories may yield new forms of access to those refrains. This is what is happening in sage philosophy, although it has become encrusted with Anglo-American philosophy. At its best, it tries to imagine new ways of access to new refrains.<sup>32</sup>

10. Theories of tradition and modernity (and for that matter, postmodernity) abound, usually as map lines of demarcation between preconceptual, unreflective, uncreative “African” thought and truly conceptual, reflective, and creative “Western” thought. Nomadic thought would turn this on its head. Deleuze and Guattari:

It is true that the nomads have no history; they only have a geography. And the defeat of the nomads was such, so complete, that history is one with the triumph of States. We have witnessed, as a result, a generalized critique dismissing the nomads as incapable of any innovation, whether technological or metallurgical, political or metaphysical. Historians . . . consider the nomads a pitiable segment of humanity that understands nothing: not technology, to which it supposedly remained indifferent; not agriculture, not the cities and States it destroyed or conquered. It is difficult to see, however, how the nomads could have triumphed in war if they did not possess strong metallurgical capabilities. . . .

History has always dismissed the nomads. (394)

Success has been closely circumscribed by Western standards—success in technology, for instance, or in the stability of the State apparatus. But we philosophical nomads may find different ways of understanding success, not totally unrelated to these standards but also not beholden to the historical accounts that write out nomads, and Africa, by definition. Kwame Gyekye, in *Tradition and Modernity*, contributes to this rethinking by pointing out the ways in which tradition and modernity are not so hermetically sealed, indeed the ways in which they continue to require each other to operate.

These suggestions are by no means meant to be exhaustive, but suggestive. Once the tools are found to examine what it is to do philosophy in this place, we may well be able to chart (yes, even map) a new course, one that does not rely on abstractions, assertions, or defensiveness, but rather can work from the phenomena and conversations that present themselves.<sup>33</sup>

## ENDNOTES

1. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), p. 353. Henceforth references to this work will appear in the text in parentheses.
2. Jorge Luis Borges, “Of Exactitude in Science,” in Borges, *Collected Fictions* (New York: Viking Press, 1998).
3. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 87–88.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 93.
6. *Ibid.*
7. John Rajchman, *The Deleuze Connections* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000), p. 40.
8. Edward Casey, *Getting Back Into Place* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993); *The Fate Of Place* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).
9. A sample of a few recent works would include Marc Augé, *Non-places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, trans. John Howe (London: Verso, 1995); Robert Harbison, *Thirteen Ways: Theoretical Investigations in Architecture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997); Lucy Lippard, *The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society* (New York: The New Press, 1997); Jeffrey Malpas, *Place and Experience: A Philosophical Topography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Jeffrey Walsh, “The Value of Place Meaning: Practical Applications for the Future.” *Parks & Recreation* 35 (August 2000): 42-51; David Seamon and Robert Mugerauer, *Dwelling, Place and Environment: Toward a Phenomenology of Person and World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).
10. I have written about this question in connection with Derrida. See my “Debt and Duty: Kant, Derrida, and African Philosophy,” *Janus Head* (Winter 2001): 109–24.

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11. It is worth noting that Deleuze and Guattari are only one source for interrogating place in recent philosophy. Casey, in chapter 12 (“Giving a Face to Place in the Present: Bachelard, Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari, Derrida, Irigaray”) of *The Fate Of Place*, gives a brief and by his own admission incomplete overview of recent scholarship on the issue. These theorists do not produce a unified or coherent outline of the concept, and that is probably all to the good, as unity and coherence itself may be the virtue of spatial, not placial thinking. This is not to say that incoherence and contradiction are now valued, but that attending to the particular places from which philosophy emerges may require that we initially (and perhaps permanently) suspend the impulse to rationalize concepts before they can be used. Deleuze and Guattari provide for this: they were inclined to think that people should use the concepts that emerge from their writing, rather than interpret them. That is my intention here.
12. One good portrayal of migrant-thought can be found in Vincenzo Vitiello’s description of Moses in the desert. Vincenzo Vitiello, “Desert, Ethos, Abandonment: Towards a Topology of the Religious,” in Jacques Derrida and Gianni Vattimo, *Religion* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), pp. 136–69. Vitiello describes Moses as a stranger to all lands, one whose home is in the desert, and thus has no home ( p. 139). As the opposite of home, the desert takes on all the dangers and threats we would expect, and life exists mainly for the promise of the future. This depiction is not of a nomad, but someone whose existence is oriented toward a goal, even if that goal is not yet known. God, then, becomes the guide in the absence, for Vitiello. The nomad, on the other hand, has no recourse to transcendence, even that of a negative theology.
13. Casey, *Getting Back Into Place*, p. 304.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 307.
15. Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: University of Texas Press, 1976).
16. Gilles Deleuze, *Empirisme et subjectivité: Essai sur la nature humaine selon Hume* (Paris: Press universitaires de France, 1953).
17. An excellent discussion of this can be found in J. Macgregor Wise, “Home: Territory and Identity,” *Cultural Studies* 14 (2000): 295–310.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 298.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 300.
20. Indeed, earlier, in 1968, Deleuze had written *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), which extensively addresses this very point.
21. Wise, “Home,” p. 303.
22. Jacob Boehme, *Mysterium Magnum* 1:6–7.
23. *Ibid.* 1:4.
24. Indeed, the introduction of *A Thousand Plateaus* discusses maps at some length. See pp. 12ff.
25. “The two spaces in fact exist only in mixture: smooth space is constantly being translated, transversed into a striated space; striated space is constantly being reversed, returned to a smooth space” (*A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 474)
26. Didier Kaphagawani, “Some African Conceptions of Person: A Critique,” in Ivan Karp and D. A. Masolo, eds., *African Philosophy as Cultural Inquiry* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2000), pp. 66–79.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 77.
28. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (New York, Anchor Books, 1959), chapter 1: “The Public and the Private Realm.”
29. Kwame Gyekye, *Tradition and Modernity: Philosophical Reflections on the African Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 221
30. B. Abanuka, *A New Essay on African Philosophy* (Nsukka, Nigeria: Spiritan Publications, 1994).
31. Gyekye, *Tradition and Modernity*, pp. 257–58.
32. See my “Thinking Wisdom: The Hermeneutical Basis of Sage Philosophy,” *African Philosophy* 11 (June 1998): 57–71.
33. An earlier version of this essay was delivered at the conference on “Africana Philosophy” at DePaul University in March 2000. That version will appear in *Philosophy Africana* 5 (March 2002).

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