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GILLES DELEUZE AND FÉLIX GUATTARI, *A THOUSAND PLATEAUS [MILLE PLATEAUX] (1980)*

The edition used here is Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, London: Continuum, 2004.

Become clandestine, make rhizome everywhere, for the wonder of a nonhuman life to be created.

(Deleuze and Guattari 2004b: 211)

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*, first published in 1980, is the second book after *Anti-Oedipus* (1972) in the *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* series, a key work in post-structuralist thought. Arising from its authors' involvement in the revolutionary events of May 1968, and theorising a *modus operandi* in reaction to the inevitable 'return to the status quo', *A Thousand Plateaus* is philosophically profound and wickedly surreal. It draws the reader into a parallel universe where everything familiar and fixed – the everyday world of faces, objects and propositions – is detached from its moorings and cast adrift into new territories. Its own identity as a book is cast aside – the premise is that it is not a book at all. Each chapter is a 'plateau' of intensities which the reader will experience on its own merits. Nor is it a work to be *understood*, being rather 'a tool for which a new use must be invented' (Deleuze and Guattari 2004b: 209); a work which, by its authors' own admission, will reward being dipped into as much as being read cover-to-cover. Its democratic, political and practical nature has made it an important work for artists,

architects and philosophers. John Rajchman notes that *A Thousand Plateaus* proposes:

a style of thought that might be called 'empiricist' or 'pragmatist'. It puts experimentation before ontology, 'And' before 'Is.' ... Deleuze and Guattari declare that multiplicity, more than a matter of logic, is something one must make or do, and learn by making or doing.

(Rajchman 2000: 6)

This 'and' of connectivity is captured by one of the defining images in *A Thousand Plateaus* – the *rhizome*. The rhizome spreads by accretion, multiplication and underground connections. It is '... and ... and ... and ...' in nature. In contrast to the 'arborescent' growth of ideas, which depends on the centrality of the tree-trunk from which concepts grow like branches, rhizomatic growth implies no such centrality. For a work of art, the centralising reference point may be the purity of an artistic medium. A rhizomatic approach, however, would not hesitate to connect with other media, or even other areas of practice outside of art. The rhizomatic web of connectivity Deleuze and Guattari propose constitutes a pattern or potential for creative, philosophical and political action.

Since the publication of *A Thousand Plateaus*, its philosophy has supported an extra-disciplinary art aesthetic, insofar as such practice is liberated from the historical confines of traditional media and modes of production and consumption. Art forms new relations with other art and non-art forms, establishes new territories and new ways of thinking, acting and becoming. An example of this approach is found in the work of the Swiss artist Thomas Hirschhorn, whose temporary *Bataille Monument* (2002) in Kassel incorporated a library, snack bar, TV studio and webcams, as well as a signature cardboard and packing tape sculpture. 'I am not interested in "quality",' says Hirschhorn. 'I am interested in "energy"' (quoted in Rappolt 2003). Here, real affects are the result of artistic practice – a practice which furthermore does not lead purely into exegesis, but which physically manifests the potential of its politics. This becomes a materialist and grounded art, one which prioritises practice over theory, and pragmatics rather than dogma.

For Deleuze and Guattari rhizome development works by undermining co-ordinates as soon as they manifest as settling and confining tendencies. In this process, we are on a 'line of flight' which leads to unforeseen possibilities:

art is never an end in itself; it is only a tool for blazing life lines ...
all those real becomings that are not produced only *in art*.

(Deleuze and Guattari 2004b: 208)

However, in contrast to enhanced contexts and potentialities for art, tyrannical potentialities of and for art and philosophy are defined by Deleuze and Guattari in various ways. One such definition is through the *face* and *faciality*. The *face* is a 'monstrous hood' which acts as a 'deviance detector':

it is not the individuality of the face that counts but the efficacy of the ciphering it makes possible ... [a face] is a man *or* a woman, a rich person or a poor one, an adult or a child, a leader or a subject, an 'x' or a 'y'.

(Deleuze and Guattari 2004b: 194, 196)

The *face* is metaphor, but also real, performing and creating its historical function with every new manifestation of itself – it is the 'abstract machine of faciality' (Deleuze and Guattari 2004b: 196). It has historical co-ordinates: the birth of the *face* is Year Zero, the year of Christ, with which the depiction of the white man's face appears and goes into mass production. The *face* monopolises relations and turns them into power relations. For Deleuze and Guattari, the tendency towards *faciality*, towards binary definitions which constrain new growth and subordinate 'deviance', must be fought against. *Faciality* colonises even the activity of the rhizome if the rhizome becomes a kind of dogma, a strategy to be imposed or 'applied'. Even the rhizomatic position of there being 'no right position to take' can ossify into a rigid stance or predetermined procedures. But the tyranny of *faciality* can become a starting point to move from, or the humus within which the rhizome evolves. In *Francis Bacon – the Logic of Sensation* (2005) Deleuze draws an affirmative philosophy of face-becoming-animal, face-becoming-imperceptible out of Bacon's work (thereby avoiding the rhetoric of angst and alienation in discussions of Bacon's work). 'Yes, the face has a great future, but only if it is destroyed, dismantled' (Deleuze and Guattari 2004b: 190). Rajchman (2000: 214) notes that in Bacon's effaced portraits, Deleuze discovers an intention to express something which exists prior to figuration, illustration, or narrative. Deleuze and Guattari propose a kind of abstract empiricism, in which art manifests something that exists before codes, subjects and significations are formed.

A Thousand Plateaus is a political, ethical, social and aesthetic critique, in which different disciplines are continually made to interpenetrate one

another. Deleuze famously spoke of 'approaching an author from behind and giving him a child that would indeed be his but would nonetheless be monstrous' (Deleuze and Guattari 2004b: ix). This image of a discipline giving birth to something alien to itself suggests that an artistic idea may mutate into something beyond its initial frame of reference. This notion of 'becoming' is employed in artistic and wider contexts by Deleuze and Guattari.

In addition to the *face* and rhizome, a panoply of metaphor, reference and concepts are employed in *A Thousand Plateaus*. There is an eclectic breadth to the book: geology, D. H. Lawrence, H. P. Lovecraft, mathematics, Spinoza, textiles, Antonin Artaud, nomads, war machines and birdsong are amongst the numerous themes layered into a colourful, cumbersome and bewildering array of dazzling passages. *A Thousand Plateaus* does not attempt to become a canonical, central work with which to approach art and ideas. Nor does it attempt to explain the ways things are, as if from a position of authority. This would be to contradict its own premise. Rather, in presenting itself as a singular creation to be taken on its own merits, it challenges the reader to do something with it, to make an affect. By asserting the creative against the judgmental, Deleuze and Guattari avoid proposing a rule or system by which art or affects can or should be measured.

There is a 'call to arms' quality in the book – we are urged to 'get past the wall and get out of black holes' (Deleuze and Guattari 2004b: 189). New practices of art and thought, less constrained by the tyrannies of arborescence, *faciality*, state philosophy or representational thinking are suggested. The aesthetics that *A Thousand Plateaus* calls for are of real consequence:

the stakes here are indeed the negative and the positive in the absolute: the earth girded, encompassed, over-coded, conjugated as the object of a mortuary and suicidal organisation surrounding it on all sides, *or* the earth consolidated, connected with the Cosmos, brought into the Cosmos following lines of creation that cut across it as so many becomings.

(Deleuze and Guattari 2004b: 562)

The proliferation of 'over-coding' in theoretical discourse can threaten to smother creative vitality: art can be filled at every turn with interpretation and association of ideas that are highly variable in productiveness and significance. Perhaps, as philosopher Slavoj Žižek (2003) suggests, the time is ripe to take Deleuze at his word. Artists should take Deleuze and Guattari from behind to create vitally new or

monstrous becomings that short-circuit over-coding and representational thinking.

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ARTHUR DANTO, *THE TRANSFIGURATION OF THE COMMONPLACE. A PHILOSOPHY OF ART (1981)*

Arthur C. Danto, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace. A Philosophy of Art*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981.

The Transfiguration of the Commonplace is generally considered one of the most important works of philosophical aesthetics of the twentieth century. In this book, Arthur Danto not only develops a methodology that has proven very influential (his so-called method of 'indiscernibles'), but he also makes a substantial and original contribution to a wide range of philosophical debates, including those focusing on the nature of depiction, artistic interpretation, the notion of style, and most notably, the definition of art. While each of these topics will be of interest to art historians who wish to reflect on their own discipline, there are (at least) three additional reasons why this philosophical milestone deserves a broad cross-disciplinary readership.

First, Danto's philosophy of art is deeply historicist in that he emphasises and builds upon the fundamental contextual and historical nature of art. Second, he presents a wealth of examples, drawn from both traditional and contemporary art, to illustrate and corroborate his theories, thereby manifesting his profound engagement with, and knowledge of, the history of art and the world of contemporary art. Third, Danto is an