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Introduction

Three Beginnings

In place of an introduction I want to offer three different beginnings.

About the encounter

Something in the world forces us to think. This something is an object not of recognition but of a fundamental *encounter*. (DR 139)

An object of an encounter is fundamentally different from an object of recognition. With the latter our knowledges, beliefs and values are reconfirmed. We, and the world we inhabit, are reconfirmed as that which we already understood our world and ourselves to be. An object of recognition is then precisely a *representation* of something always already in place.¹ With such a non-encounter our habitual way of being and acting in the world is reaffirmed and reinforced, and as a consequence no thought takes place. Indeed, we might say that representation precisely stymies thought. With a genuine encounter however the contrary is the case. Our typical ways of being in the world are challenged, our systems of knowledge disrupted. We are forced to thought. The encounter then operates as a rupture in our habitual modes of being and thus in our habitual subjectivities. It produces a cut, a crack. However this is not the end of the story, for the rupturing encounter also contains a moment of affirmation, the affirmation of a new world, in fact a way of seeing and thinking this world differently. This is the creative moment of the encounter that obliges us to think otherwise. Life, when it truly is lived, is a history of these encounters, which will always necessarily occur beyond representation.

Rupture and affirmation are then two moments of the same encounter, two moments that only seem opposed if considered in the abstract, outside of actual experience. Art, in breaking one world and creating

another, brings these two moments into conjunction. Art then is the name of the object of an encounter, but also the name of the encounter itself, and indeed of that which is produced by the encounter. Art is this complex event that brings about the possibility of something new.

This book explores a variety of just such event-encounters with a diversity of objects. Objects that I have chosen, or that in some senses, have chosen me. My encounter with these objects has helped form who I am. To this extent the book is a kind of personal archive, a history of my encounters within the expanded field of modern and contemporary art. Indeed, I would argue that exploring these event-encounters can only be written about on such a basis, from personal experience. Another way of saying this is that I am presenting an inventory of works that have forced me to thought, in the sense that they have offered a moment of inspiration or enthusiasm, or have provoked a question – set a challenge – to what was already in place. In much of what follows these objects and practices are only implicit (more often than not they appear in the footnotes), and lead instead to general statements concerning art. It is only in the last three chapters that I look in depth at three specific practices that have been important to me, and that I would say operate ‘beyond’ representation. These latter practices are either non-figurative, located outside the gallery, or simply outside the field of ‘art’ as it is typically understood. They are all involved in questioning accepted assumptions about the world. We might even say that each produces a different kind of world, whether it be through a painting, an earthwork or indeed a form of collective collaboration.

However, there is also a second encounter that this volume tracks. An encounter with the thought of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari.² It is in this sense that Chapter 1 operates as yet another introduction, concerned as it is with my own context and investments in the Deleuzoguattarian project. Deleuze and Guattari’s writing can itself be positioned as an experiment in thinking differently, ‘beyond’ representation. Their collaborative projects, and their single authored works, offer us a ‘new image of thought’, one in which process and becoming, invention and creativity, are privileged over stasis, identity and recognition.³ My own encounter with this new image of thought has itself had a rupturing and creative effect on me. It has challenged previous ideas I had about art, about philosophy, and indeed about my self, and in so doing has produced a new way of looking at the world and of positioning my own practices within that world. It is in this sense that I feel it is crucial always to foreground how we encounter Deleuze and how we think about his thought. This is especially the case given the increasing

growth in 'Deleuze studies'. Indeed, it seems to me to be of critical importance to keep alive a certain style of Deleuze's thought without over-academicising his writings or endlessly repeating his own words. We need to repeat the energy and style of his writings without merely representing his thought. For me this difficult project, to which I contribute here, entails giving attention to the pragmatic and constructive nature of Deleuze's thought whilst at the same time creatively bringing it into contact with other worlds and always with our own projects and our own lives. If such an encounter ruptures, then it also entails the opening up of new worlds, new territories.

A third encounter therefore follows from the first and second, namely one between Deleuze's thought (and specifically the concepts he created) and the expanded field of modern and contemporary art. Indeed, it is a key assumption of mine that many of such practices require a turning towards conceptual resources that themselves question traditional philosophical assumptions and procedures (and in this respect I attend also to some of those whom we might call Deleuze's allies, those figures who also think art differently (again, more often than not these parallel encounters appear in the footnotes)). We might note an apparent contradiction inherent in this third encounter. On the one hand it implies an attempt to set out what might be called a Deleuzian methodology, especially insofar as this might relate to the visual arts. And yet it also foregrounds those very assemblages that always and everywhere disrupt pre-established methods and systems and in so doing put new conditions into play (Deleuze's thought itself being one of those new assemblages).⁴ Indeed, the desire to outline a Deleuzian methodology is to my mind somewhat wrong headed. One might be able to extract such a method or system but this would be to render Deleuze's thought inoperative, to freeze it in, and as, a particular image of thought, to capture its movement, precisely to *represent* it. It would, in the final analysis, be to make an object of recognition out of what has the potential to disrupt this self-confirming mechanism. In order to avoid this systematisation of Deleuze the book proceeds in a rather piecemeal fashion, jumping from one aspect of Deleuze's thought to another, picking up the same threads in different contexts and repeating key notions with different emphases. Indeed, rather than giving a systematic overview of Deleuze, the volume offers a series of thought experiments – different attempts at bringing Deleuze into contact with different milieus. In fact, the volume, and especially the last two chapters, might be said to attend to certain *resonances* between the field of philosophy (specifically Deleuzian) and the field of art and art history (specifically modern and

contemporary).⁵ The idiosyncratic nature of these encounters and conjunctions is a result of my own particular orientation, my own particular 'situatedness' within both of these fields. Each chapter is then also the record of a particular development – a journey – in my own ongoing project of attempting to think art beyond representation.

Relations of adjacency/intention

The ideal for a book would be to lay everything out on a plane of exteriority of this kind, on a single page, the same sheet: lived events, historical determinations, concepts, individuals, groups, social formations ... The war machine-book against the State-apparatus-book. (*ATP* 9)

Forward looking art history and theory has often focussed on, and utilised, models from psychoanalysis or post-structuralist notions of textuality and allegory – on the one hand Jacques Lacan, on the other Jacques Derrida and Paul de Man. Indeed, this 'linguistic turn', originally of literary theory, has itself radically redefined the objects and practices of art history, as evidenced for example by the publication in the 1980s of *The New Art History* and the ongoing debates of *October* journal.⁶ However, it might be argued that this radicality has in some cases become a new kind of orthodoxy and that its conceptual resources are less relevant to many modern and contemporary practices that operate away from this textual paradigm. As such, one of the intentions of this volume is to explore, via Deleuze, another way of thinking art, beyond the 'horizon of the signifier', beyond textuality, but *not* through a return to traditional aesthetic theory or indeed to previous artist-centred models. We might say that this involves a further turn from the linguistic, a turn towards matter and to the expressive potentialities of the latter.

This book might then be positioned at the intersection of two fields: the ever-growing secondary texts on Deleuze's writings and the field of modern and contemporary art theory. As regards the first context the book might be said to operate as a corrective to those that focus exclusively either on the philosophical or the scientific aspects or implications of Deleuze's thought, and in so doing often relegate (or indeed disavow) the contributions Guattari made to their joint projects, especially in his focus on the pragmatic and aesthetic business of producing one's own subjectivity.⁷ In terms of the second context, it is hoped that the book might operate as an introduction to Deleuze and Guattari for those working within the field of art history and theory. The book is also an intervention

into this latter field, hence its sometimes polemical tone. It makes the argument that there are possibilities for art and thought beyond representation, and indeed beyond the latter's critique and crisis (those deconstructive approaches which almost despite themselves can stymie thought). In relation to this, a further intention of the volume is to attend to art not considered by Deleuze himself, in fact to utilise Deleuze's concepts in general (and not just his own writings on art) to think through more recent practices (practices that perhaps Deleuze himself, with his particular tastes in art, would have been less inclined to explore). It is only through such an act of betrayal, I would argue, that Deleuze's real relevance to the expanded field of visual art can be mapped out.

What follows is then in part a commentary and introduction but only in so far as this allows other adventures to be put in motion.⁸ As far as this goes the volume is certainly not typical art history, but it is not purely philosophical either. In fact it operates as a kind of bastard take on philosophy, a smearing or blurring of certain conceptual resources into other specifically non-conceptual areas (precisely in order to renew thought). In relation to this the volume is itself strategic. It is less concerned with 'getting Deleuze right' than in producing compatibilities and alliances. As Deleuze and Guattari remark, a book 'is not an image of the world' but rather 'forms a rhizome with the world' (*ATP* 11). It is hoped that this book, at least in part, might do justice to this notion connected as it is to other milieus and orientated as it is against a certain state formation: representation.

Synopsis

If you don't admire something, if you don't love it, you have no reason to write a word about it. (*DI* 144)

The book then is a journey through the work of Deleuze, which involves five 'takes' on the conjunction 'Deleuze *and* art'. Each take is of a different nature, one might even say of a different speed. Certainly the first two chapters, which were written much earlier than the last three, are more polemical, more position statements than anything else. They also, I think, capture some of the excitement I felt when coming into contact with Deleuze for the first time. They are written from 'within' – and against – a certain style of art history, one that, as the first chapter makes clear, I had become increasingly hemmed in by. All art history might be said to operate through representation (it reads its objects), but it was particularly a more deconstructive attitude – that representation was always already always in crisis – that produced the

cul de sac I found myself in. We might say then that the first two chapters perform the same argument – against/beyond representation (and its critique) – but from two different directions. Chapter 3 shifts the terrain somewhat and also the style of the book. In this chapter I continue to think about Deleuze and art, but in a less obvious, one might even say more transversal, manner. The final two shorter chapters change the style again. They are more philosophical and might be considered more case study based in that they attempt to produce an encounter between some of Deleuze’s conceptual resources and specific examples of art practice. A word also about the footnotes. They record my readings around art and Deleuze and as such constitute an archive project in themselves. They are also often quite lengthy. I would ask the reader to indulge this and only follow these digressions when they constitute a point of interest.

Chapter 1 begins with an account of my own beginning in relation to Deleuze’s thought. I make no apologies for this except to say, again, that as a reader of Deleuze my personal investment inevitably orientates my attitude to, and ‘application’ of, Deleuze, and, as such, requires at least some foregrounding. In this chapter I introduce the encounter between art and Deleuze via a working through of the concept of the rhizome and a broad thinking through of how this might relate to the practices of art and of art history understood together as a form of expanded art practice. We might say that the principle of this chapter is connectivity, which in itself involves the theorisation of art practice as a form of *bricolage*. I am particularly interested here in developing a machinic notion of art as that which operates on a variety of signifying but also asignifying registers. The chapter in general operates as an intervention (within the field of art history) and also as a manifesto (for future art practices and histories perhaps) rather than as a description of those practices already in place. In relation to the rest of the volume, this is where I deal with Deleuze and Guattari’s joint project of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*.

In Chapter 2 I switch my focus to Deleuze’s concept of affect. This chapter also looks briefly at two of Deleuze’s philosophical precursors, Henri Bergson and Baruch Spinoza, and at some of those individuals that we might call Deleuze’s contemporary allies, specifically Georges Bataille, Michel Serres and Jean-François Lyotard (the latter is in fact a constant presence throughout the book). In this chapter affect is thought in two ways: as the effect of art on the body and as that which constitutes the art object. In both cases affect is orientated against an overemphasis on signifying regimes, but also against habit and opinion. In the first part of this chapter the approach is to build up a polemical case for introducing

a notion of affect into the discourse of art history. I am keen here to correct the overemphasis on ideological critique and semiotic approaches to art by attending to the affective dimension of the art experience. We might see this as a return to a notion of the aesthetic albeit a specifically immanent one. The second section of this chapter narrows the focus further to the actual art object. In particular, it involves a reading of Deleuze's book on Francis Bacon, a working through of the chapter on art in *What is Philosophy?*, and some ideas on how to take these two philosophical analyses further. This is particularly the case with the notion of 'probe-heads', a strange quasi concept that I return to in the final section of the book. This chapter ends with a very brief coda, as a short corrective, on the allegorical aspects of art.

Chapter 3 concerns itself with ideas of the political within art practice. Here I attempt to theorise the political effectiveness of art beyond what might be called typical Marxian frameworks. The chapter begins with a working through of Deleuze and Guattari's important notion of the minor (from their book on Kafka) and some thoughts on how this might be usefully 'applied' to contemporary art. I am interested here in an art practice that calls its audience into being, and in so doing produces a different kind of (political) subjectivity. The chapter goes on to briefly look at Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's *Empire*, and specifically at ideas of dissent and affirmation. The second section of this chapter changes tack somewhat and involves an excursus away from art. Here I look at Deleuze and Guattari's important notion of the war machine, and at a historical example of guerrilla warfare, the Red Army Faction. I am interested here in what lessons might be learnt for an artistic war machine from this specifically politically engaged formation. In general, this means attending once more to the 'production of subjectivity', and it is to this that the third and last section of the chapter turns (Guattari's ethicoaesthetic project and Deleuze's own thoughts on a 'world without others').

With Chapter 4 the terrain becomes more philosophical. Here I am interested in working through Deleuze's concept of the virtual (borrowed from Bergson) and of the 'plane of immanence'. At the same time I attempt to bring these into contact with a specific art practice, in this case the work of the artist Robert Smithson. For me Smithson's work operates as an exemplar for much of what I say about art in this book, perhaps especially because it involves such a focus on the matter of art (whether that be rocks, words or film), and also because of its creative power of fabulation. Smithson's work might also be positioned on that edge between the virtual and the actual, a place that for me very much defines art's field of operation. This chapter then is about a moment, the late 1960s, when

both an expanded art practice (Smithson's) and a new image of thought (Deleuze's) were being produced. In this chapter I might be accused of deliberately misreading Deleuze in so far as I utilise his ideas on philosophy to think about art. In a sense then the chapter is an experiment in taking Deleuze's philosophical concepts into other realms, other milieus, and in allowing these other fields to 'feed back' on Deleuze.

The fifth and final chapter attends to perhaps Deleuze's most complex work, *The Fold*. Once more I attempt to produce an encounter between this most difficult of concepts and an art practice, in this case the paintings of Gerhard Richter. I am interested here in the notion of painting, and especially the act of painting, as a kind of folding. I am also interested in Deleuze's idea of the Baroque as a fractal account of the world and of subjectivity (the two floors of the Baroque house). It is specifically through Richter's 'Abstracts' that I attempt to think this Baroque texturology. This experiment involves attention being given to the future-orientated nature of Richter's Abstracts and to what we might call their world-building character. We might also see this as an attempt to rescue Richter's paintings from that melancholy apparatus of capture that positions them as works of mourning. In choosing to write on Richter I realise that I enter into an already well-constituted discursive field situated around the paintings, and, as such, my remarks are often made in opposition to other commentaries (again, especially in the footnotes). The chapter goes on to read the last sections of *The Fold* alongside certain ideas of the Situationist city, for it seems to me that Deleuze's notion of a 'new' and expanded Baroque parallels, and can be productively conjoined with, the unitary urbanism of Ivan Chtcheglov, Guy Debord and others. This particular encounter also returns us to the terrain of Chapter 1 and to notions of interconnectivity. The chapter ends with a very brief consideration of art and new technologies in relation to Deleuze's closing comments in the book on *Foucault*. This last area demands a book in itself and I attend to it only to mark the possibility of this future project.

The book concludes with three endings. The first involves a brief consideration of fabulation, or what we might call the myth-making character of particularly contemporary art (and an even briefer look at two case studies). The second involves some reflections on the book itself, and on what it means to write a book on Deleuze. The third is an attempt at a different style of writing, something more inventive: a manifesto of an imagined future collective that restates the arguments of the book in programmatic, aphoristic and fictionalised form.

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