Reviews

Simon O'Sullivan (2006) *Art Encounters Deleuze and Guattari: Thought Beyond Representation*, London: Palgrave.

With the rise of installation and performance art the theoretical model of representation has become strained. Consequently, the methodology of art history has struggled to develop a new vocabulary and conceptual framework to respond to and articulate the shifts that have in large part taken place since the 1960s. There are of course some exceptions to this such as the writers of *October* magazine and many of the works published by Zone Books. Primarily, the difficulty lies in how we respond to a new style of art that confounds the categorical distinction between a subject and object. Works of art that resist their own status as 'objects' and demand the viewer's participation for their completion quite simply turn their backs on a mimetic relationship to the world. It is this very situation that Simon O'Sullivan charts in *Art Encounters Deleuze and Guattari: Thought Beyond Representation*.

Commencing with a distinction between representation and the encounter, O'Sullivan brings to our attention how with the former our belief systems and the knowledge we may have accumulated about the world remain intact. From here he argues that if we follow the Deleuzian sense of what it means to think, then with representation we do not actually think at all because we fall prey to habit. In contrast, the encounter in the way O'Sullivan intends it, cracks open our habitual ways of being and acting in the world to expose and affirm the new. It is here where he suggests art history has a lot to learn from the Deleuzian conceptual apparatus, advocating that 'we need to repeat the energy and style of his writing without merely representing his thought'. (3) Living up to this task, he constructs a philosophy of affective aesthetics: one that is no longer concerned with problems of beauty and aesthetic judgement, but rather the issue of

how we can identify the excess to which art gives rise. In this regard, he notes that the effect of an affective art practice is not always aesthetic. It is here where he begins to create a pagan philosophy of art focusing on its asignifying character. Pinpointing the difficulty of thinking beyond a representational framework, he introduces other paradigms that have been used in the past by artists and art historians, the most common of which is poststructuralism. Whilst poststructuralism may interrogate the dualisms underpinning representation, such as subject/object or signifier/signified, he claims that it 'often merely entails the reversing of the binary, or the putting under erasure (the deferral) of the privileged term'. (15) Using a wonderfully clear explanation of Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the rhizome, he suggests an alternative to the poststructuralist model, which is to think through art's connections by attending to its rhythms and the blocks of sensation that constitute its creativity.

O'Sullivan defines art as a series of productive encounters that are best understood as a 'meeting, or collision, between two fields of force, transitory but ultimately transformative' that force us to break with habit. (21) In typical Deleuzian fashion he invites the reader to think of art as a machine, shifting our attentions away from the meaning of the work onto what it can *do*. Looking to minor art, those practices that are not completely outside the world nor entirely part of it, he follows its creative dimension. In what may seem an odd case study in the context of a book on art, he looks to the work of the Red Army Faction (RAF). Studying the creative power of guerrilla tactics, he contests the reactive nature of negative critique and advances a notion of the artistic war machine, one that underscores the political dimension of contemporary art at the level of subjectivity (how subjectivity is produced). What he finds especially interesting about Baader and Meinhof is how dissent and the affirmation of the new are implicated in one another. He subsequently uses this observation to consider the broader ontological problem of subjectivity arguing that the connection between art and living a creative life has a political undercurrent, insofar as it encourages us to produce our own subjectivity instead of taking it as an a priori given.

Pursuing the question of creativity further O'Sullivan looks to the earthworks of Robert Smithson. Following Brian Massumi's lead he notes that the process of becoming-natural indicative of Smithson operates along a 'seeping edge', as Massumi calls it, between the virtual and actual. The immanent realm of virtual differences and the creative selection of all these that constitute the actual, avoid the trap of transcendence. Here he contends 'art practice can be positioned at that "seeping edge" between the existing state of affairs and a world "yet-to-come" '

(105). In what is a sensitive and poetic discussion of Smithson's work and his writings, he points to art's becoming; an object in the process of durational blending as it combines with the duration of a variety of bodies: art work, viewer, and environment. What is missing here though is some discussion of the more majoritarian aspects of Smithson's practice, for instance when he poured 1,000 tons of asphalt over a ledge for his *Asphalt Rundown* (performed in Rome, 1969). This kind of work is particularly offensive for environmentalists and one that I find to be especially patriarchal, having more to do with dominating the landscape than with a minoritarian affirmation of it. Furthermore, whilst the descriptions of Smithson's work are certainly literary the specifics of some of the pieces discussed are sparse. Issues of scale are important considerations in *Spiral Jetty*, producing their own blocks of sensation. For instance, the fact that the work is a 1,500 foot long path of limestone rocks and earth are details that would have enhanced O'Sullivan's use of the concept of duration. Also, the heated debate around whether or not to 'preserve' the *Spiral Jetty* once it reappeared from being submerged under water would have helped him expand upon some of the points raised in the previous chapter on how to apply the concept of the 'minor' to contemporary art, making that discussion less abstract and more pragmatic.

Similarly, in his discussion of Gerhard Richter O'Sullivan generally refers to his *Abstracts* but a reader unfamiliar with the artist's work would benefit from some more detailed discussion of particular works in the series; this would also rescue what at times are rather vague connections to the Deleuzian concept of the event. In a similar vein, more could be made of how Richter works with groups of paintings and in dialogue with other artists to enhance the discussion of difference and repetition. That said, O'Sullivan makes some important revisions to Deleuze and Guattari's disparaging view of conceptual art as put forward in *What is Philosophy?* He cogently argues the philosophical dimension of conceptual art is its strength. For instance, it is not just informative in the way it creates sensations instead of concepts, whereby the viewer's opinion decides whether or not a sensation materialises, rather he suggests conceptual art has more in common with Deleuze and Guattari's discussion of philosophy than it does with art.

This book is an important contribution to the field of art history and the growing scholarship around Deleuze and Guattari. O'Sullivan introduces the reader to a variety of difficult concepts, using these to interrogate the limits of representation. He identifies the moments when art not only stammers, but also when it makes us stammer along with it, and it is here where the revolutionary dimension of art is exposed. Art, he

claims, inspires us to move beyond the familiar and into strange and unknown territories, or as Deleuze (following Foucault) might say: into the realm of unthought.

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Gilles Deleuze (2006) *Two Regimes of Madness*, ed. David Lapoujade, trans. Ames Hodges and Mike Taormina, New York: Semiotext(e).

Félix Guattari (2006) *The Anti-Oedipus Papers*, ed. Stéphane Nadaud, trans. Kélina Gotman, New York: Semiotext(e).

Since the publication of the first of two volumes of Deleuze's occasional texts *L'Île Déserte et autres textes* (Paris: Minuit, 2002, translated by Mike Taormina as *Desert Islands and Other Texts, 1953–1974*, New York: Semiotext(e), 2004), Deleuze scholars have been treated to a veritable treasure trove of heretofore largely inaccessible texts, and the latest addition, the publication in 2003 of the second volume, *Deux Régimes de fous* (occasional texts from 1975 to 1995), has now been complemented with its translation. At the same time, a new volume has been added to the Deleuze-Guattari archive: published in 2004 in France as *Les Écrits pour L'Anti-Oedipe* and attributed solely to Guattari, *The Anti-Oedipus Papers* offers a fascinating inside view of the process of collaboration between Deleuze and Guattari in developing the work that would become *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*.

Two Regimes of Madness shows the extraordinary range of written and spoken projects in which Deleuze was engaged from the early 1970s onwards, as one can determine from an overview of both *Two Regimes* and the publication of *Negotiations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993; *Pourparlers*, Paris: Minuit, 1990):

- sixteen solo and four collaborative articles (occasional essays, political interventions and homages; more on these below);
- nine prefaces to foreign editions of his own works, and more importantly, five prefaces or postscripts to works by other writers: Henri Gobard's *L'Aliénation linguistique* (Paris: Flammarion, 1976); Jacques Donzelot's *La Police des familles* (Paris: Minuit, 1977); Toni Negri's *L'Anomalie sauvage: puissance et pouvoir chez Spinoza* (Paris: PUF, 1982); Jean-Clet Martin's *Variations – La Philosophie de Gilles Deleuze* (Paris: Payot and Rivages, 1993); and Eric Alliez's *Les Temps capitaux* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1991);
- six affirmative book and film reviews: Daniel Schmidt's film *L'Ombre des anges* (1976); Alain Roger's *Le Misogyne* (Paris: Denoël, 1976);