

Deleuze, Philosophy, and the Materiality of Painting

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"It's a very very close and difficult thing to know why some paint comes across directly onto the nervous system and other paint tells you a story in a long diatribe through the brain.... A painting has a life completely of its own. It lives on its own, like the image one's trying to trap; it lives on its own, and therefore transfers the essence of the image more poignantly.... In the way I work I don't in fact know very often what the paint will do, and it does many things which are very much better than I could make it do.... Paint is so malleable that you never do really know. It's such an extraordinary supple medium that you never do quite know what paint will do. I mean, you even don't know that when you put it on wilfully, as it were, with a brush—you never quite know how it will go on."¹ – Francis Bacon

"We do not listen closely enough to what painters have to say."²
– Gilles Deleuze

These incisive remarks, made by the painter Francis Bacon in conversation with art critic David Sylvester, illustrate Bacon's lifelong obsession with the question of what paint can say, with what problems, meanings, and intensities actually happen through the material of paint. It is precisely Bacon's artistic efforts to think in and through paint, his effort to elaborate a specifically painterly logic of sensation through a peculiar and arresting form of abstract figural work, that so drew Gilles Deleuze towards his paintings. In Deleuze's 1981 study of Bacon, *The Logic of Sensation*, the artist becomes configured as the modern paradigm of a painter concerned with the expressive materiality of paint and the conveyance of intense modes of sensation which are distanced from the auspices of representation and narration. Bacon's work circumvents narrative relations between figures and concentrates on "matters of fact" or "the brutality of fact." For Deleuze, this enables Bacon to begin to present the possibilities of what can be done with the materiality of paint on its own. His understanding of Bacon's paintings rests on understanding them as conveying a very special type of violence, a violence not of representation but of sensation. For Deleuze, this is a violence associated with "colour and line, a static or potential violence, a violence of reaction and expression" (LS, x). Bacon's paintings are to be under-

stood as an interlocking series of experimental, rhythmic assemblages in vivid colors of flesh and bone. The broken tones of flesh and bone operate as limits to a complex rhythmic interplay where each pushes the other to its limit; bone expands in and through flesh in spasmodic movements and flesh compresses and descends into bone in order to give birth to a heightened sense of the "brutality of fact." As Deleuze writes in *Difference and Repetition*, it is only through a certain abandonment of figuration and representation, signalled by much contemporary art, "that we find the lived reality of a sub-representational domain."³ Yet at the same time, as Deleuze recognizes, this distancing from figuration and representation in Bacon's work occurs within simultaneous elevation of the figure. The disruption of narrative form emerges from the instantiation of entirely new modes of relation between the figures on the canvas, modes that Deleuze denotes as primarily "rhythmic." The composed figure, field, objects, and other figures on the canvas, Deleuze argues, "interrelate in a way that is free of any symbolic undercurrent" (LS, xiv). They are to be understood as rhythmic experiments in painting sensation, a form of experimentation held at a distance from the operative constraints of representation and narration in order to explore the possibilities of what can be achieved with the materiality of paint alone.

For Deleuze, the matter of paint itself has increasingly become the crucial expressive component in the art of painting. A painting is after all made of paint and, for Deleuze, painters recognize that paint has its own specific logic, or indeed multiple logics, its own meanings and expressions, its own analogical language. Deleuze recognizes that the raw material of paint is often felt by the painter to be something deeply alive, to be full of thought and expressive meaning, even before it is formed into the resemblance of a landscape, a head, or other object.⁴ It is a matter of returning to a primal act of painting. Deleuze argues that we must learn to listen to artists and the language they use. Our task becomes one of suspending judgment regarding works of art in order to learn to measure the full implication of the materials and techniques through which the artist has had to negotiate, mediate, and "create."

I attempt in this paper to provide an account of Deleuze's theory of the materiality of art in an effort to clarify his understanding of the art of painting, and in particular his work on Francis Bacon. I begin with an overview of Deleuze's ontology and the intimate role that a sophisticated consideration of the work of art plays within it. This will serve to situate my account of Deleuze's understanding of the materiality of painting and its analogical language of sensation.

Deleuze (often in conjunction with Félix Guattari) developed a radical materialist philosophy by focussing upon what might be called the

material (that is, the radically impersonal and non-human) forces of life. Deleuze attempts to think beyond the human condition, and as a result attempts to commune with the profoundly irrational, chaotic, and unspeakable forces of becoming in life, and to elaborate a philosophical understanding of the conditions of individuation. Deleuze attempts to go beyond the surface fixities of the actual (the existing conditions of current culture and society) and creatively assemble a conceptual discourse capable of conveying those pre-individual impersonal forces, energies, flows, and sensations that specific socio-historical situations block, reify, and domesticate into rational schema and patterns of representation. Deleuze's philosophy attempts to comprehend, either through created concepts or radically revitalized existing concepts, the impersonal forces and flows of becoming, to discover the conditions of ontological genesis and actuality. In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze writes that it is a matter of thinking, in the style of Nietzsche, "an interior of the earth opposed to the laws of its surface" (DR, 7). Ontology becomes a philosophy of the subterranean processes of individuation, or a philosophy concerned with the genesis of individuated entities; it becomes ontogenesis, an ontology of becoming. This is configured as a creative philosophical ontology of what Deleuze terms the virtual. For Deleuze, the virtual is the embryonic and intensive multiplicity of forces immanent to the real and in contrast to the actual: "The virtual must be defined as strictly a part of the real object—as though the object had one part of itself in the virtual into which it plunged as though into an objective dimension" (DR, 260).

Deleuze's approach remains profoundly philosophical (indeed, it ultimately becomes a theory of what philosophy is—a vegetal network of thought that is rhizomatic rather than arborescent⁵) because it posits a rigorous approach to the creation and development of concepts in an effort to think these embryonic and impersonal forces of becoming. It delineates the activity of philosophy through the creation of concepts, as the liberation of thought from pre-existing "images of thought" (the actual) and the construction of new images of thought (the virtual).

Philosophy is thus no longer concerned with providing fixed definitions of essences associated with the actual but with thinking virtual events and processes as the transcendental condition of possibility of the actual. The virtual field is a pre-individual and impersonal zone prior to any idea of consciousness. It is the real, yet virtual, condition of emergence of actualized phenomena. This movement of ontogenesis, from virtual to actual, "always takes place by difference, divergence or differentiation" (DR, 264). Deleuze pursues the emergent and divergent paths of differentiation and becoming from the virtual to the actual. These are lines of creation, "each of which corresponds to a virtual

section and represents a manner of solving a problem, but also the incarnation of the order of relations and distribution of singularities peculiar to the given system" (DR, 264). Genuine creation is always born of the virtual, which it taps as a reservoir. Deleuze writes:

Actualisation breaks with resemblance as a process no less than it does with identity as a principle. Actual items never resemble the singularities they incarnate. In this sense, actualisation or differentiation is always a genuine creation.... For a potential or virtual object to be actualised is to create divergent lines which correspond to—without resembling—a virtual multiplicity (DR, 264).

For Deleuze, each philosophical creation, as an activity of "thinking the virtual" immanently, must be enacted as a counter-effectuation of the phenomenal real. From the actual, or the existing phenomenal state of affairs, the philosophical concept returns upstream to the event, or the virtual. This is where the philosophical concept is truly "at home." Thus, philosophical concepts themselves must be wrested from, rather than being represented on the basis of, the phenomenon. This return upstream to the conditions of experience⁶ amounts to a work of the most careful forensic detection and creation, a work of invention on the part of the philosopher since there can be no pre-existing means of doing so.⁷ The result of this counter-effectuating gesture means that, for Deleuze, there is nothing of the pre-existing personal in art or philosophy. What announces itself in the sensible, what calls for thinking in the violence of the shock and opens onto the act of creation or invention, is radically impersonal—cosmic and virtual. However, it is never merely a question of "breaking out" of the world that exists but of creating the conditions for the exposition of other possible worlds, the heterocosmic, to "break in" in order to introduce new variables into the world that exists, causing the quality of its actuality to undergo modification and becoming.⁸ As he and Guattari write in *A Thousand Plateaus*: "It is through a meticulous relation with the strata that one succeeds in freeing lines of flight, causing conjugated flows to pass and escape and bringing forth continuous intensities" (TP,161). We can identify Deleuze's debt to the ideas of the painter Paul Klee. Klee wrote in his 1924 lecture *On Modern Art*:

The artist surveys with penetrating eye the finished forms which nature places before him. The deeper he looks, the more readily he can extend his views from the present to the past, the more deeply he is impressed by the one essential image of creation itself, as genesis, rather than by the image of nature, the finished product. He says to himself, thinking of life around him: this world

at one time looked different and, in the future, will look different again. Then, flying off to the infinite, he thinks: it is very probable that, on other stars, creation has produced a completely different result. Chosen are those artists who penetrate to the region of that secret plane where primeval power nurtures all evolution. There, where the power-house of all time and space—call it brain or heart of creation—activates every function; who is the artist who would not dwell there? In the womb of nature, at the source of creation, where the secret key to all lies guarded. What springs from this source, whatever it may be called—dream, idea or phantasy—must be taken seriously only if it unites with the proper creative means to form a work of art. Not only do they add more spirit to the seen, but they also make secret visions visible.⁹

Klee held that the artistic plane of composition must be understood as involved in directly engaging a transcendental principle of Life (akin to Deleuze's virtual "plane of immanence" or "interior forces of the Earth") in an enterprise of co-creation. For Klee, the process of actualization in Life is everywhere to be understood as a becoming actual of something primeval and virtual, as a process of organic individuation. Thus, the fundamental process of creation in nature is a continuous actualization of a virtual force. However, this "virtual" is always in some sense held back, in reserve, in absolute immanence (for Klee, it is the "secret place where primeval power nurtures all evolution" [OMA, 49]). The virtual entails an ongoing creative force of natural composition through which the virtual becomes actual. There is a virtual dimension of force that is always immanent within, yet does not resemble, the virtual's subsequent actualization or individuation. While the virtual's actualization occurs in actual bodies as a dynamic process of organic individuation, immanent to that process is a passive non-resembling force of the virtual. The virtual always remains something distinct as the self-forming form, which is grasped independently of any actualization. It is this virtual as a compositional principle of self-forming form that is engaged in an ongoing process of individuation through "difference, divergence or differentiation" (DR, 264). The virtual thus becomes actualized, yet always remains immanent within the actual, a virtual multiplicity always in reserve, still to come.

In their final collaborative work, *What is Philosophy?*, Deleuze and Guattari make it clear that both the natural and artistic planes of composition are to be recognized as creative planes of nature, planes of the actualization of virtual self-forming forms. The artistic plane is a metamorphic "plane of composition of Being," and its object is to engage Life in an enterprise of co-creation. Art's "possible" is the embodied embry-

onic virtual, "the event as alterity engaged in an expressive matter." Art's universe is that of an expressive matter attempting to render the sensations of the embryonic virtual's passage into the actual something palpable or sensible. Art seeks to transfigure the virtual's force upon its own plane of aesthetic composition. In this sense the artist must allow, through an act of co-creation, for a passage of the virtual into her work, for it to become as "sensation." In order to achieve this passage the dominant structures of recognition and rationality must in some sense be suspended or counter-effected by the artist. As Bacon says, "Painting will only catch the mystery of reality if the painter doesn't know how to do it.... I know what I want to do but don't know how to bring it about" (BF, 102). Once such a counter-effectuation has been achieved, the forces of virtual multiplicity become something to be struggled with aesthetically. It must be allowed to breed its different forms, its multiplicities and foldings, in the visual space of the work, without its chaotic and anarchic energy destroying the overall cohesion of that work. For Deleuze, artists understand the creative potential of the sub-representational multiplicity: "Great artists of the fold ... already have a presentiment of a certain kind of animal rhizome with aberrant paths of communication."¹⁰ The notion of co-creation is important with regard to understanding the metamorphic "theater" of art. For Deleuze and Guattari, the aberrant processes undertaken by modernist artists such as Klee, Cezanne, or Bacon, to embody the virtual immanent to the natural plane (within actual Life) is fundamental to all forms of art. The task of all art is to make new forces visible, to formulate the problems they pose, and to incite a kind of creative and experimental activity of thinking around them. As John Rajchman writes, "Artworks complicate things, ... create more complex nervous systems no longer subservient to the debilitating effects of clichés.... They rewire the nervous system, revitalise the brain, releasing us, in mind as in body, from the heaviness of grounded identities and habitual forms."¹¹ It is through a similar kind of cognitive experimentation involving a suspension of the apparatus of conventional representation, a systematic disruption of the faculties, that the philosopher must strive towards a genuine thought of the virtual.

When creating a concept to think the virtual in philosophy, that concept is never simply formed within a pre-existing "art of philosophy"; rather, philosophy is nothing less than the discipline of dynamic, vital, and rhizomatic concept-*creation*. Deleuze and Guattari insist that one can think only where what is to be thought is not already given, when what is to be thought is not governed by the "forces of recognition." The art of philosophy *is* the creation of concepts emerging from a "fundamental encounter" rather than a pre-existing field with a presupposed "image of thought" which is seen as enabling the creation of concepts. Clearly,

what Deleuze and Guattari understand by "creating" involves the activity of the philosopher (whom they describe as the "friend of the concept"¹²), however this creative activity is separate from an "outside" realm (the plane of immanence) which creatively and autonomously self-posit, that is, the vital and infinite self-movement of pure thought. In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze writes of this "outside realm" as that which "forces us to think," as that which is at the basis of a "fundamental encounter":

Its primary characteristic is that it can only be sensed. In this sense it is opposed to recognition.... It is not a sensible being but the being of the sensible. It is not the given but that by which the given is given. It is therefore in a certain sense the imperceptible.... Sensibility, in the presence of that which can only be sensed (and is at the same time imperceptible) finds itself before its own limit, the sign, and raises itself to the level of a transcendental exercise: to the nth power (DR, 176).

For Deleuze and Guattari, the realm of pure thought is a "pure movement," where movement is considered to be the movement of the infinite (WP, 35–40). Since all philosophical concepts have to be first created, this pure movement of thought (and being) must itself be radically concept-less. As Jean-Clet Martin writes:

The concept takes place in silence, in that twilight moment when we are no longer sure what it was we were supposed to understand, when communication is blocked and reflection comes up against its own stupidity—a moment when we don't really know what to think, a moment of difficulty for thought.¹³

The plane of immanence that Deleuze and Guattari initiate is an image of thought as a purely concept-less plane of infinity since "thought demands only movement that can be carried to infinity. What thought claims by right, what it selects, is infinite movement or the movement of the infinite. It is this that constitutes the image of thought" (WP, 37). They thus maintain a strict separation between the conceptual realm and the pre-philosophical plane of pure thought, but crucially this is a differentiation maintained *within* philosophy. The realm of pure thought (as the plane of immanence) is an utterly impersonal, self-positing field of forces which constitutes the possibility of all philosophical thought (that is, the subsequent creation of concepts and their movement). "If philosophy begins with the creation of concepts, then the plane of immanence must be regarded as pre-philosophical ... or even as non-philosophical, the power of a One-All like a moving desert that concepts come

to populate" (WP, 40–1). In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze goes so far as to say that "thought is primarily trespass and violence, the enemy, and nothing presupposes philosophy: everything begins with misosophy" (DR, 176). This pure movement of thought is the crucial non-philosophical element within every conceptually creative act of philosophy. This pure movement is essentially a virtual field in which concepts are produced, circulate, and collide with one another. Not thinkable by itself, it can only be defined and mapped with reference to the concepts that populate it. The plane of immanence is a kind of intuitive ground whose "infinite movements" are fixed by "co-ordinates" constructed by the finite movements of the concepts. The construction of concepts always refers back to this pre-philosophical field of the plane of immanence as "the internal condition of thought, it is thought's 'non-philosophical' image, which does not exist outside of philosophy although philosophy must always presuppose it. It is presupposed not in a way that one concept may refer to others but in a way that concepts themselves refer to a non-conceptual understanding" (WP, 40).

The plane of immanence must be philosophically constructed, yet it is also that which constructs itself through philosophy; it is at once always already there or presupposed and something that must be constructed. The plane of immanence is presupposed only insofar as it will have been posed, but posed only insofar as it will have been presupposed:

Philosophy defined as the creation of concepts implies a distinct but inseparable presupposition. Philosophy is at once concept creation and instituting of the plane. The concept is the beginning of philosophy, but the plane is its instituting. The plane is clearly not a program, design, end, or means: it is a plane of immanence that constitutes the absolute ground of philosophy, its earth or deterritorialisation, the foundation on which it creates its concepts. Both the creation of concepts and the instituting of the plane are required, like two wings or fins (WP, 41).

A philosophy's power is not only measured, as Deleuze claims in his early Spinoza book, by the concepts it creates, or whose meaning it alters, but also by the degree to which it is able to maintain an internalized non-philosophical plane of thought. The creative activity of the philosopher involves an ongoing process of mediation with the vitality of the non-philosophical plane of thought. Conceptual creation as an act of the philosopher and the autonomously self-positing movement of thought are mutually implied. This process is not confined to the co-creative activities of the philosophical realm—a nothing which is created, whether it be a living organism, a work of art, or a concept, has what Deleuze

and Guattari call this "autopoetic characteristic" (that is, an autonomous and immanent movement of becoming) whereby they self-posit or realize themselves. What emerges from a free and creative act also necessarily posits itself.

As Deleuze writes: "Do not count upon thought to ensure the relative necessity of what it thinks. Rather, count upon the contingency of an encounter with that which forces thought to raise up and educate the absolute necessity of an act of thought or a passion to think" (DR, 176).

In *What is Philosophy?*, Deleuze and Guattari write:

THE plane of immanence is that which must be thought and that which cannot be thought. It is the nonthought within thought. It is the base of all planes, immanent to every thinkable plane that does not succeed in thinking it. It is the most intimate within thought and yet the absolute outside—an outside more distant than any external world because it is an inside deeper than any internal world: it is immanence.... Perhaps this is the supreme act of philosophy: not so much to think THE plane of immanence as to show that it is there, unthought in every plane, and to think it in this way as the outside and the inside of thought, as the not-external outside and the not-internal inside—that which cannot be thought and yet must be thought (WP, 59–60).

Deleuze and Guattari reconfigure philosophy as having to preserve the plane of immanence through misosophy, to maintain it through an irreducible relationship to the non-philosophical fields of both the arts and the sciences. More importantly, they argue that the vital creativity associated with philosophy and its conceptual movement in some sense rests upon it being necessarily intertwined with the autopoiesis (the element that creatively self-posit) of those non-philosophical realms.¹⁴ As Rajchman recognizes: "His aesthetic is thus involved in a kind of 'intra-philosophical struggle'; and in all his criticism, we find a peculiar procedure that consists in calling upon the arts to show philosophy the way out of the 'dogmatic image of thought' under which it has laboured" (DC, 116).

For Deleuze, contemporary philosophy constructs its concepts upon the planes expressed by science, art, literature, and modern cinema. Common sense and the powers of recognition are no longer posed as the beginning of a philosophical construction, in the sense that they no longer provide the ground of philosophy itself. For Deleuze, contemporary philosophy has taken on other measures, even those measures that "belong to the order of dreams, of pathological processes, esoteric

experiences, drunkenness and excess" (WP, 41). To an even greater degree contemporary philosophy fashions itself on the ground of "something that does not think," an unthinkable and imperceptible exteriority.¹⁵ This something that does not think returns as a question concerning the possibility of thought itself, the possibility that "I am not yet thinking." Contemporary philosophy poses its own ground in what is exterior to consciousness, what stubbornly remains outside the powers of conventional representation, which, Deleuze argues, "calls forth forces in thought which are not the forces of recognition, today or tomorrow, but the powers of a completely other model, from an unrecognised and unrecognisable *terra incognita*" (DR, 172).

Such a task involves a "pedagogy of the concept" (WP, 12). For Deleuze and Guattari, if we are ever to approach an answer to this problem it must be through analyzing the non-philosophical, preserved in its difference from the philosophical or conceptual. Crucial to this task of the pedagogy of the concept is an analysis of the conditions of creativity associated with philosophical activity, which must necessarily make reference to the sovereign activities of the non-philosophical, the sciences and the arts, each of which presents distinct strategies for thinking and creating. As Rajchman writes:

For Deleuze art may be said to 'make sense' before it acquires significations, references or 'intentions' identified through the institutions of a public 'Sinn' or a common sense.... In all art there is a violence of what comes before the formation of codes and subjects, which is a condition in an expressive material of saying and seeing things in new ways (DC, 124).

One finds throughout their work an exploration of the correspondences and mutual implications between philosophy and non-philosophy, all of which are pursued under the auspices of a pedagogy of the concept. They thus pursue the specific logics of sensation associated with the different fields of art as part of a pedagogic effort to open up the multiple paths of creative differentiation. Hence the multiple nomadic paths associated with these different logics of sensation seek to modulate the definition of philosophy and its task of creating concepts and movement in thought.

The essential affinity here resides in the notion of creativity, that is, the creation of concepts in philosophy and the creation of what Deleuze and Guattari term "percepts" and "affects" in works of art. Their engagement with the arts in *What is Philosophy?* rests upon the view that creativity is primarily a prerogative of the arts, in that within the arts there is a ceaseless process of counter-effectuation with regard to the

creative reproduction of the phenomenal real, towards an experimental thinking, undertaken through material, of the forces of the virtual.¹⁶ Their work emphasizes not the conditions under which a specific work of art is created but how the work can reveal something to philosophy about the conditions of creative practice itself. The focus of their attention with regard to the different misosophical fields of art are questions of expression, creativity, sensibility, and intuition. They privilege in their analyses the autopoietic forces and rhythms present in the work of art, what they consider to be the intrinsic self-ordering associated with the different materials utilized in the fields of art—paint, stone, sound, cinematic movement- and time-image, and language.

Deleuze and Guattari argue that from its inception all art has sought to invent means of rendering visible certain intensities of Life. Through its creative activity art is capable of traversing and penetrating the virtual movement of difference and becoming. Art becomes creatively vital through plunging into the pure immanence of Life, by immersing itself in the field of virtual forces and intensities (in Klee's "womb of nature"). This field of virtual multiplicity is a field without concepts or forms; it is a field capable of dissolving all settled organic forms into pure zones of intensities where one can no longer tell what is human, animal, vegetable, or mineral. It is the counter-effectuated real. Deleuze and Guattari argue that the artist must create plastic methods and techniques for handling the different materials involved in the multiple practices of art in order to engage in an act of co-creation with the vital and autopoietic forces of immanence. This act of co-creation is common to all the arts and is to be broadly understood as involving, first, the "capture" of the virtual and invisible forces associated with the plane of immanence and, second, the rendering of these invisible forces as something actual and sensible. In explaining this function of the work of art they cite Klee, who claimed that the task of modern art was no longer to render the already visible (the pre-existing actual) but to render visible what was invisible (the virtual). This is extrapolated by Deleuze and Guattari into the fundamental task of all art; for all art it is not the mere reproduction of pre-existing visible forms that is primary but rather the "capture" and "rendering visible" of the non-visible forces acting beneath these forms, namely, the "virtual multiplicity":

It is now a question of elaborating a *material* charged with harnessing forces of a different order: the visual material must capture nonvisible forces. Render visible, Klee said; not render or reproduce the visible.... The forces to be captured are no longer those of the earth, which still constitute a great expressive Form, but the

forces of an immaterial, nonformal, and energetic Cosmos (TP, 342).

The arts must capture intensive forces as a "bloc of sensations" which are transfigured and transcribed into the different materials associated with each of the specific fields. Specific fields of art, through their specific material, must create a consistent "being of sensation." Each work of art must become individuated as (using a term borrowed from Duns Scotus) a *heacceity*, or a material "bloc of sensations" as an impersonal "thisness."¹⁷ The work of art is thus radically non- or pre-human yet inseparable from human experience. Works of art must be capable of standing alone, independent of any specific perception and sentiment linked to the human. Yet they must also be capable of presenting us with an affective "fundamental encounter," with the transcendently empirical or the imperceptibly sensible. Thus, the work of art produces through percepts and affects a "bloc of sensations" that we perceive and that affects us beyond the concepts associated with the human. It is these "inhuman" capacities that, Deleuze claims, the artwork instantiates. As Rajchman notes, art is "less the instantiation of a lifeworld than a strange construct we inhabit only through transmutation or self-experimentation, or from which we emerge refreshed as if endowed with a new optic or nervous system. A painting is such a construct rather than an incarnation" (DC, 135).

In this way the work of art is capable of addressing our nervous system directly. It creates a "being of sensation" that exists in and of itself, outside the habitually human, and reveals to us a revitalized state of becoming-nonhuman. This notion of a "bloc," a "compound," or "assemblage" of sensation suggests a sense of independence, a "standing apart," from sensation. To put it another way, for Deleuze and Guattari, the artist must express pure perceptions and sensations that are independent of the pre-existing conceptual identity of any given thing. These pure perceptions and sensations have the effect of destabilizing us, of drawing us out of ourselves by expressing a world, a plane of potential movements and changes that associate our actual existence with something different or external to it, or as Rajchman writes, "to show and release the possibilities of a life":

The artist is always adding new varieties to the world. Beings of sensation are varieties, just as the concept's beings are variations.... In relation to the percepts or visions they give us, artists are presenters of affects, the inventors and creators of affects. They not only create them in their work, they give them to us and make us become with them, they draw us into the compound (WP, 175).

Percepts are not ordinary perceptions. According to Deleuze and Guattari, they are "independent of a state of those who undergo them"; thus, the percept "is the landscape before man, in the absence of man" (WP, 169). Affects do not arise from pre-existing subjects but instead pass through them, revitalizing and reconstructing them. The affect is the "becoming-other," not as a passage from one pre-existing lived state to another but man's vital nonhuman becoming. Affects are not ordinary affections. "Affects are the non-human becomings of man.... [W]e are not in the world, we become with the world; we become by contemplating it. We become universes. Becoming-animal, plant, molecular, becoming zero" (WP, 169). The creation of artworks takes place upon what Deleuze and Guattari call a "plane of composition," which they subdivide into the "technical" (concerning the material of artworks) and the "aesthetic" (concerning sensations) planes of composition. Within the first plane, "the sensation realises itself in the material" (WP, 193); that is, the sensation adapts itself to an organized and regulated matter. In painting, for example, this is the mode of representational, naturalistic, and perspectival art, in which sensations are projected upon a material surface that is always already inhabited by spatial schemata that structure the morphology of the figure. On the second plane, "it is the material that passes into the sensation" (WP, 193). Here we are able to think the autopoietic, self-ordering potentials of matter itself. Rather than sensation being projected upon the readily striated material surface, the material itself rises up into a metamorphic plane of forces and discloses what they call "smooth space." The smooth space of the virtual is defined as a relatively undifferentiated and continuous topological space which undergoes discontinuous differentiation and progressively acquires determination until it condenses into a measurable and divisible metric space.¹⁸ In contrast with a hylomorphic model, matter is never simply a homogenous substance that passively receives forms but is itself composed of intensive and energetic virtual traits.

Percepts and affects become the compositional elements with which an artist creates, elements that the artist shapes on a purely aesthetic plane of composition and renders as perceptible through materials that have themselves been configured or rendered expressive. In the "veritable theatre of metamorphosis and permutations" of modern art, it becomes more a matter of concentrating upon the way in which the specific material being used can become inherently expressive of sensation rather than merely a vehicle for a pre-existing idea of a specific sensation. It is here that the genuinely self-ordering potential of matter is able to be thought aesthetically.

In modernist painting, where abstraction comes to prominence, the materiality of the paint comes to articulate these forces; matter itself becomes the crucial expressive component in the artwork. Matter-movement carries with it virtual singularities as implicit or virtual forms, and it is the potential for material self-ordering that the artist must negotiate. Form is suggested by the material itself. It is created out of the suggested virtual potentials of the matter rather than something preconceived by the artist and imposed on a passive matter. Hence the significance for Deleuze of Bacon's type of diagrammatic figuration—the creation of resemblance through profoundly non-resembling means. The artist on the aesthetic plane of composition, such as Bacon, in some sense surrenders to the matter of paint and follows its virtual singularities. By attending to these traits the artist allows it to speak to their "instinct" and then devises a range of practical strategies to bring out these virtualities, to actualize them as sensible possibilities, as heterocosmic facts.

Intrinsic, then, to the varied materials of art are autopoietic forces and rhythms. The matter of the artwork is never a homogeneous substance that passively receives preconceived forms but is an emergent autopoietic line of divergent becoming. It is these implicit or virtual intensive traits that make the self-formation of all matter possible and which, for Deleuze and Guattari, provide the means by which forms of matter can be self-modulating and self-differentiating. In painting it is thus the materiality of the paint that comes to articulate and express such forces.

An analogous effort to elucidate the specific logic of paint is undertaken by James Elkins in his extraordinary study, *What Painting Is*.¹⁹ In this study, Elkins pursues this logic through the mobilization of a type of fluid resonance between alchemy and painting. For Elkins, painting has a deep affinity with alchemy insofar as both concern an ongoing logical development emerging from a negotiation with different fluid materials "which are worked on without knowledge of their properties, by blind experiment." The ongoing dialogue with the material of paint by the painter, and the development of a thinking in paint or a specifically painterly logic of sensation, "is an unspoken and uncognised dialogue where paint speaks silently." In a wonderfully Deleuzian passage, Elkins writes:

A painting is made of paint—of fluids and stone—and paint has its own logic, and its own meanings.... To an artist, a picture is both a sum of ideas and a blurry memory of 'pushing paint,' breathing fumes, dripping oils and wiping brushes, smearing and diluting and mixing. Bleary preverbal thoughts are intermixed with the nameable concepts, figures and forms that are being represented.

The material memories of a picture—every painting captures a certain resistance of paint, a prodding gesture of the brush, a speed and insistence in the face of mindless matter: and it does so at the same moment, and in the same thought, as it captures the expression of a face (JE, 2–3).

For Deleuze as well, the raw material of paint is often felt by the painter as something deeply alive, full of thought and expressive meaning before it is formed into the resemblance of an object. In this sense both Elkins and Deleuze echo the injunction of the painter Malevitch, who asserted that a painter is said to be a painter and nothing but a painter, and argues that the task of the painter is to struggle ceaselessly with the “powers” of painting in order to make paintings rather than merely paint objects and reproduce existing forms of nature. It is a matter of returning to a primal act of painting.

Deleuze’s work on Bacon is marked by an extraordinary effort to listen to how Bacon continues a certain return to this primal act of painting, how he “thinks in paint,” often drawing at length from the interviews Bacon conducted with David Sylvester. In the *Logic of Sensation*, Deleuze spends considerable time considering the specific utilization of the “catastrophe” (a catastrophe implicit within painting and what Deleuze, following Bacon, calls the “graph” or “diagram”) in Bacon’s work. He spends considerable time analyzing Bacon’s handling of the conflict between chaos and order and the realm of the unthought within painting. Deleuze argues that Bacon utilizes the diagram as a way to constitute an analogical language in paint, a painterly logic of sensation emerging from a negotiation with the autopoetic, material traits of paint. This utilization of the diagram by Bacon consists of these three distinct stages. First, in contrast with the two extremes of contemporary abstraction, Bacon begins with a figurative form. Second, he produces a catastrophic intervention of the diagram to scramble it through the introduction of purely accidental material components of paint—that is, thrown, scrubbed, rubbed, scraped injections of paint. For Bacon, a fundamental act of painting is defined as making random material marks: cleaning, sweeping, or wiping the canvas to clear out locales or zones, throwing paint from various angles and at various speeds. It is through the introduction of these material traits that the pre-pictorial givens are able to be removed. The diagram is thus a pre-figural preparation of a canvas—the series of shades, colors, and layers of painterly material set down prior to the actual delineation of the figure. For Bacon, this process consists of a series of haphazard lines, colored spots, and pitched paint. Such a physical, rather than visual, act of painting lays down a ground that is in contradiction with the pre-planned figure, a kind of material

catastrophe that underlies the production of figuration in paintings. Third, Bacon utilizes this catastrophe of the diagram to allow the materiality of the paint to facilitate the emergence of a form of a completely new type of figural resemblance, which Deleuze terms the figure. For Deleuze, the diagram allows the emergence of another world into the visual world of figuration, another form of creative individuation. However, being itself a catastrophe, the diagram must not be permitted merely to create a catastrophe. Being a zone of scrambling, the diagram must not be permitted to scramble the painting utterly. The diagram must be grasped as an inherently fecund zone, with what emerges from it coming both gradually and all at once. The diagram is indeed a chaos, a catastrophe, but it is also a germ of rhythmic order.²⁰ It is a violent chaos in relation to the figurative givens, but it is a germ of rhythm in relation to the new order of the painting. As Bacon himself says, it unlocks new areas of sensation. This lack of control and restraint is, for Deleuze, the failure of abstract expressionism.

For Deleuze, then, the process of painting involves an injection of the manual diagram into the visual whole. The diagram thus initiates the genuinely creative act of painting. Deleuze claims that of all the arts painting is the only one that necessarily integrates its own material catastrophe, and consequently is constituted as a flight forward through material. In creating, painters must pass through the material catastrophe themselves, embrace the virtual multiplicity and chaos of the material of paint, and try to negotiate and invent with its autopoietic force:

Painting needs more than the skill of the draftsman who notes resemblances between human and animal forms and gets us to witness their transformation: on the contrary, it needs the power of a ground that can dissolve forms and impose the existence of a zone in which we no longer know which is animal and which human, because something like the triumph or monument of their nondistinction rises up.... The artist must create the syntactical or plastic methods and materials necessary for such a great undertaking, which re-creates everywhere the primitive swamps of life (WP, 173–4).

Where painters differ is in their respective manners of embracing this non-figurative chaos, in their evaluation of the pictorial order to come, and the relation of order with this chaos. Thus, different painters utilize the diagram in order to constitute what Deleuze calls an "analogical language of paint," a radically pre-subjective material expression with its own specific sense and logic.²¹ For example, cries, grunts, growls, and

moans can function as elements of an uncoded analogical language and have profound significance, yet their sounds lack the discrete organization of a natural language. In much the same way, Deleuze argues, painting is able to utilize the expressive traits of the material of paint to elaborate color and line schemas to the state of a language, an analogical language—for example, Bacon's violence of line and color. In painting the diagram creates the possibility of this analogical language, uncoded and affective, yet structured according to its own autonomous order. In *The Logic of Sensation*, Deleuze tentatively identifies three essential dimensions of painting's analogical language: planes, colors, and bodies. The primacy of variable, autonomous connections or junctures of planes replaces the externally fixed relations of classical perspective. Variable, autonomous color relations of tonality replace externally fixed relations of value based on light and shades (*chiaroscuro*), and the mass and disequilibrium of the body replace stable figurative representations and traditional figure-ground relations. A painter's negotiation with the catastrophe of the diagram thus has the capacity to destroy the figurative coordinates of conventional representations and to release the possibilities of invention according to an uncoded and autonomous analogical language.

The Diagram acts as a modulator for the painter. The Diagram and its involuntary manual order will have been used to break all the figurative coordinates; but it is through this very action that it defines possibilities of fact, by liberating lines for the armature and colours for modulation. Lines and colours are then able to constitute the Figure or the Fact, that is, to produce the new resemblance inside the visual whole, where the Diagram must operate and be realised (LS, 120–1).

The diagram functions as a modulator of forces, a temporally varying mold that directs and orients the construction of each new painting. There is, then, a triple liberation or counter-effectuation here: of the body, of the planes, and of color. Such liberation can occur only by passing through the material catastrophe of painting, or through the diagram and its involuntary irruption. As a result of this irruption a new figuration is able to emerge, one where bodies are thrown off balance and are in a state of perpetual fall, where planes collide and colors become confused and no longer delimit a fixed represented object. However, in order for this rupture with figurative resemblance to avoid merely perpetuating the catastrophe, the planes, starting with the diagram, must maintain their junction; the body's mass must integrate the imbalance in a deformation, and above all, modulation must find its

true meaning and technical formula as the law of analogy. In painting, the diagram must act as a variable, continuous, and productive mold which allows for a disciplined negotiation with the materiality of paint and for the invention of a new type of figuration.

In conclusion, what Deleuze's analyses of the materiality of paint emphasize within the context of his broader ontology of art is the degree to which philosophers must be attentive to the problems associated with the specificity of the materiality of painting, to the painter's understanding of its pre-verbal meaning, its associations, powers, virtualities, and unthought possibilities. Philosophers must listen to how artists articulate their different ways of negotiating the radically self-positing element of the material they utilize, how they hold themselves in a dynamically creative relationship with the unthought of paint, controlling and utilizing it at the same time as being continually astonished, affected, and modified by it. Philosophers must listen to how different painters understand what happens when they create in and through paint. When they attempt to think in and through paint, they must be attentive to its infinite movement in order that lessons for philosophy, and its own efforts towards a ceaseless creative activity of "thinking the virtual," can be genuinely learned.²²

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Notes

1. D. Sylvester, ed. *The Brutality of Fact: Interviews with Francis Bacon* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1987). Hereafter cited as BF.
2. Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, trans. D. W. Smith (London: Continuum, 2003), 99. Hereafter cited as LS.
3. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. P. Patton (London: Continuum, 2004), 83. Hereafter cited as DR. In LS, Deleuze claims that the work of Cézanne is marked by one of the most significant attempts to put us in communication with a pre-objective phenomenal reality in which the world emerges with *us*, a radically pre-human world. Cézanne initially encounters this world as chaos from which his canvas will, after significant struggle, arise.
4. Indeed, Bacon says: "There are standards set up as to what appearance is or should be, but there's no doubt that the ways appearance can be made are very mysterious ways, because one knows that by some accidental brushmarks suddenly appearance comes in with a vividness that no

accepted way of doing it would have brought about. I'm always trying through chance or accident to find a way by which appearance can be there but remade out of other shapes.... If the thing seems to come off at all, it comes off because of a kind of darkness which the otherness of the shape which isn't known, as it were, conveys to it" (BF, 105–7).

5. See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. B. Massumi (London: Athlone Press, 1988). Hereafter cited as TP.

6. Deleuze, following Bergson, writes of the virtual realm as the realm of an original and primary problematic: "The virtual possesses the reality of a task to be performed or a problem to be solved: it is the problem which orientates, conditions and engenders solutions, but these do not resemble the conditions of the problem" (DR, 264).

7. Deleuze famously speaks of philosophy as a strange hybrid between the genre of detective fiction and science fiction. Why detective fiction? Manuel de Landa posits the following: "The virtual leaves behind traces of itself in the intensive processes it animates, and the philosopher's task may be seen as that of a detective who follows these tracks or connects these clues and in the process, creates a reservoir of conceptual resources to be used" (M. Delanda, *Intensive Science and Virtual Philosophy* (London: Continuum, 2002), 44.

8. Deleuze rejects such extreme nihilism since it can only lead to death, madness, nothingness, or catastrophe. In particular see Deleuze and Guattari's comments in TP, 160–1.

9. Paul Klee, *On Modern Art* (London: Faber and Faber, 1924). Cited as OMA.

10. In TP (255), Deleuze and Guattari write at length of this single and abstract animal rhizome as the plane of immanence: "There is a pure plane of immanence, univocality, composition, upon which everything is given, upon which unformed elements and materials dance that are distinguished from one another only by their speed and that enter into this or that individuated assemblage depending on their connections, their relations of movement. A fixed plane of life upon which everything stirs, slows down or accelerates. A single Abstract animal for all the assemblages that effectuate it."

11. J. Rajchman, *The Deleuze Connections* (Cambridge: MIT, 2000), 139. Hereafter cited as DC.

12. Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, trans. G. Burchell and H. Tomlinson (London: Verso, 1994), 5: "The philosopher is the concept's friend; he is potentiality of the concept." Hereafter cited as WP.

13. J.-C. Martin, "Deleuze's Philosophy of the Concrete" in I. Buchanan ed., *A Deleuzian Century* (London: Duke University Press, 1999), 241.

14. In the short preface to the 1994 English translation of DR, a text contemporaneous with WP, Deleuze writes: "Philosophy ... creates and expounds its own concepts only in relation to what it can grasp of scientific functions and artistic constructions.... The scientific or artistic content of a philosophy may be very elementary, since it is not obliged to advance art or science, but it can advance itself only by forming properly philosophical concepts from a given function or construction, however elementary. Philosophy cannot be undertaken independently of science or art" (DR, xiv).

15. Hence the precise relevance of Deleuze's discussion of what he calls the essential "catastrophe" and "hysteria" implicit within the art of painting in LS. Here Francis Bacon is embraced by Deleuze as a painter who celebrates and productively negotiates with and maintains the irrational, the unthinkable, and the imperceptible, via the implicit "catastrophe" and "hysteria" within painting. Indeed Bacon says: "one of the things I've always tried to analyse is why it is that, if the formation of the image that you want is done irrationally, it seems to come onto the nervous system much more strongly than if you knew how you could do it. Why is it possible to make the reality of an appearance more violently in this way than by doing it rationally?" (BF, 104).

16. As we will outline, with regard to Deleuze's discussion of painting in LS, this is discussed as painting's ongoing and ceaseless struggle with the "catastrophe" and "hysteria" implicit within it, the threat of ruination, of chaos and confusion that haunts it. It is this necessary traversal from the chaos (or what Deleuze will term the "Diagram") to the painting which becomes so significant for Deleuze. As Bacon says in an interview with Melvyn Bragg: "I want a very ordered image but I want it to come about by chance" (South Bank Show, June 1985).

17. "There is a mode of individuation very different from that of a person, subject, thing, or substance. We reserve the name *haecceity* for it ... in the sense that they consist entirely of relations of movement and rest between molecules or particles, capacities to affect and be affected" (TP, 261).

18. For a more detailed treatment of the "Smooth" and the "Striated" see TP, 474–500.

19. J. Elkins, *What Painting Is* (London: Routledge, 1999).

20. When referring to this diagrammatic function of the production of differentiation in art in DR, Deleuze writes of this initiation of a new order: "The actualisation of the virtual appears to take the form of the creation of divergent lines, each of which corresponds to a virtual section and represents a manner of solving a problem, but also the incarnation of the order of relations and distribution of singularities peculiar to the given section in differentiated species and parts" (DR, 264).

21. "Painting is the analogical art par excellence. It is even the form through which analogy becomes a language, or finds its own language: by passing through a diagram" (LS, 117).

22. This paper is a version of a paper first delivered at The Royal College of Art, London in June 2005. Thanks go to Kamini Vellodi, Emily Harding, and Constantin Boundas.