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### **Transmissibility: A Mode of Artistic Re-search**

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After the death of Félix Guattari on 29 August 1992, Gilles Deleuze composed a short text entitled “For Félix.” In a mere five paragraphs Deleuze conveys precisely why we should return to and study Guattari’s work, which had compelled Deleuze to experiment with his own concepts along Guattari’s unique cartographic axis: “territories, flows, machines and universes” (Deleuze 2007, 382). It is the concluding paragraph to which I would like to draw your attention. Deleuze writes: “Félix’s work is waiting to be discovered or rediscovered. That is one of the best ways to keep Félix alive. Perhaps the most painful aspects of remembering a dead friend are the gestures and glances that still reach us, that still come to us long after he is gone. Félix’s work gives new substance to these gestures and glances, like a new object capable of transmitting their power” (ibid., 383).

In a moving passage, Deleuze puts several interesting notions into play for us. First, that both philosophical and artistic—let’s say, creative—work involves a movement of “rediscovery,” a movement of repetition and difference. Any return or rediscovery involves learning how to create new objects, images, and sounds. Second, note the phrase about past images that “still reach us,” “that still come to us,” like signals transmitted from a black hole. After reading this text I was struck by the verb “transmitting” because I had already noted it in Deleuze’s interviews and at other times in his work. He uses this verb *to transmit* when discussing affects and signals. Generally, it indicates the movement of a line of escape, a line of flight, but one that is always creative, aleatory, and heterogenetic.

As a university professor who teaches studio art, architecture, and art history students, I have been developing the aesthetic-historiographic concept of transmissibility as a way to engage students with Deleuze and Guattari’s ontological and aesthetic philosophy (See Emerling 2013a, 2013b, 2015). For me, transmissibility is a concept that has the

potential to serve as a method for artistic research that is useful to both cultural practitioners and historians. It is an approach to art and history that gets at the complications of temporality, immanent movement, and the creation of sense events that comprise the most vital artworks.

Artistic research can be defined broadly as a mode of critical and creative practice wherein one attempts to construct a passage between the past and the present when dealing with historical precedent or subject matter. But this passage has nothing to do with allusion or unconscious stylistic filiation. As Marquard Smith (2013, 376) has written, “to research, which by definition is ‘to look for with care,’ is an act of not only interpreting the world but changing it.”<sup>1</sup> Even more pressingly for artistic research, he asks that we recognise how and why “each historical moment has its own *épistème* of re-search” (ibid., 377). Smith hyphenates “re-search” to emphasise this complicated structure of repetition and difference, of searching again, of always being in the middle between past and future. I would add that to think artistic *re-search* with a fidelity to the specificity of our own episteme requires us to understand that an artwork is what it does: it renders new passages, new modes of production, between past and future. These passages are always *untimely* because they are unhistorical lines of time that flow within the chronological present.

I define transmissibility as a mode of an artwork and thus as a creative aim of artistic re-search. It posits that ontologically and aesthetically an artwork traces the lines of time that deframe and compose the present. But, transmissibility has nothing to do with representing the cultural past. Instead, it has everything to do with a temporal deframing of any cultural representation *and* with the composition of other modes of culture within the present. For me, this is what makes artistic re-search vital and creative. Artistic re-search is a futural force that creates ontological, ethical, and epistemic effects, if only because it reveals how and why varying temporalities and hence different becomings are immanently enfolded within each supposed discrete tense (past, present, future).

Conceiving of transmissibility as an essential mode of artistic re-search—as a “power of the future” as Deleuze tells us—shuttles us between aesthetic labour (creation, research, performance) and cultural reception (exhibition, historiography, criticism).

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<sup>1</sup> Smith’s remarkable essay was preceded by an edited volume, *What Is Research in the Visual Arts? Obsession, Archive, Encounter* (Holly and Smith 2009).

Following Deleuze and Guattari, the aim here is to conceive of artistic research as a twofold, simultaneous operation: it *deframes* the present, meaning it undoes the actual discourse, precedent, received opinions, and clichéd feelings and expressions, as it *composes* new lines and temporal linkages, new becomings.<sup>2</sup> This operation occurs because an artwork is not simply an object but is critical thought, a futural material force. This mode of transmissibility—deframing and composing—occurs in time, opening us to a multiplicity of temporal durations (the internal difference of time itself). As such, it opens us to unforeseen, affective sense events—*material encounters that force us to think and to become*. To sketch the broad outlines of transmissibility as a concept I want to focus on two aspects of this concept: the problematic as style and materiality as immanence.

“The mode of the event is the problematic,” Deleuze writes in *The Logic of Sense* (1990, 54). A problematic is what each artist is confronted with as he or she encounters artistic precedent and futural demands (the desire for originality, newness, difference) at the same time. Problematics are the ideational and material conditions—the very state of things—from which art thinks and creates. The entire critical language Deleuze and Guattari create to discuss artworks—singularities, sense events, intensities, affects and percepts—is understandable only within the parameters of a specific problematic that a given painter, musician, writer, dancer, filmmaker, or architect is trying to solve creatively. We should add that by definition a problematic is not answerable with a simple answer in the affirmative or negative. A problematic is not a question.<sup>3</sup> Rather, it is the act of surveying a section of an actual-virtual immanent field wherein art produces potentialities, open-ended solutions, which affirm chance and thereby remind us that “thought and art are real and [as such] disturb . . . reality, morality, and the economy of the world” (Deleuze

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<sup>2</sup> The simultaneous movement of deframing and composing is essential to how I am conceiving transmissibility. I borrow the terms from Deleuze and Guattari. See their discussion of a “deframing power” and composition in *What Is Philosophy?* (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 187–92).

<sup>3</sup> A problematic is a conjunction of question and answer beyond the logic of everyday usage and life. Deleuze (1990, 56) writes: “The question is developed in problems, and the problems are enveloped in a fundamental question. And just as solutions do not suppress problems, but on the contrary discover in them the subsisting conditions without which they would have no sense, answers do not at all suppress, nor do they saturate, the question, which persists in all of the answers. There is therefore an aspect in which problems remain without a solution, and the question without an answer.”

1990, 60). But one must “know how to play” this problematic game, Deleuze (*ibid.*, 60) insists. One must know how to discern a problematic and create with and alongside it—*in media res*. If an artwork is an event—the infinitive verb of which is *to transmit*—then it must be involved in an ontological and aesthetic becoming that renders the real anew. But this ontological and aesthetic becoming takes place within a context, within a cross-section of the plane of composition, because “we can speak of events only in the context of the problem[atic] whose conditions they determine” (*ibid.*, 56).

It is this relation between a problematic and an event that I have been focusing on as I rethink artistic re-search, in part because it is quite difficult to explain how an event takes place within art practice. I mean that it is difficult to present artists with the task of creating an event, especially since events and singularities are impersonal, non-subjective, becoming. Accepting this as the endgame of art’s ontological and aesthetic value is easier to do if we can present artists with how to confront the actual state of things and teach them how to virtualise the actual. Confronting the actual state of things as a plane of immanence requires one to create a problematic. We should begin here. Especially by recalling that in all his work on art, Deleuze (2007, 218) defines “originality, or the new,” as “precisely how problems are resolved differently, but most especially because an author figured out how to pose the problem in a new way.”

Deleuze offers some advice about what we are calling artistic re-search: (1) begin with a concrete situation and work toward a problematic, that is, the threshold wherein actual and virtual fold into one another; and (2) conceive of re-search as an encounter.

First, artists should begin by confronting the state of things, the actual. Deleuze (2007, 362–63) encourages beginning with “extremely simple, concrete situations” even before getting to problematics. He adds, “stick to the concrete, and always return to it.” It is from perceptions and affections that percepts and affects will be created. This is the logic of empiricism-pluralism that runs through Deleuze’s philosophy. Artistic re-search is nothing other than a search for the “conditions under which something new is created” (*ibid.*, 304). But the states of things must be understood neither as a given nor as unities or totalities; but rather as multiplicities, as actual-virtual compounds. Here is Deleuze (*ibid.*, 305) on this point, which should be taken as essential to any definition of artistic re-search: “Bringing out the concepts that correspond to a multiplicity means tracing the lines that form it,

determining the nature of these lines, and seeing how and whether they overlap, connect, bifurcate, or avoid the points. These lines are veritable becomings distinguished from both unities and the history in which these unities develop. Multiplicities are made of becomings without history, individuations without subjects. . . . Empiricism is fundamentally connected to a logic . . . of multiplicities.”

Simply put, empiricism means to experiment with experience. This appears to be the beginning of a method of artistic re-search. However, Deleuze will insist, rightly, that there is no simple, direct method but only “long preparation” and chance, which form the two poles of an aesthetic encounter.

Second, an artistic encounter: “When you work,” Deleuze writes, “you are necessarily in absolute solitude. . . . But it is an extremely populous solitude. Populated not with dreams, phantasms or plans, but with encounters. An encounter is perhaps the same thing as a becoming. . . . You encounter people (and sometimes without knowing them or ever having seen them) but also movements, ideas, events, entities. . . . To encounter is to find, to capture, to steal, but there is no method for finding other than a long preparation” (Deleuze and Parnet 2007, 6–7). We must address why Deleuze claims that there is no method. He is hesitant to posit a method because of the chance element involved in any encounter: he always insists that an encounter is clandestine, subterranean, fortuitous. But this should only turn us back to the notion of “long preparation.” Immediately after this Deleuze quotes from a poem by Bob Dylan that he very much admires. Taking the Dylan poem as a model of artistic production, he continues: “A very lengthy preparation, yet no method, nor rules, nor recipes. . . . [Only] having a bag into which I put everything I encounter, provided that I am also put in a bag. Finding, encountering, stealing instead of regulating, recognizing and judging” (ibid., 8). For Deleuze, “to encounter” means, in part, multiplying and complicating the content of your problematic to the point of saturation or perhaps non-sense. Recall when Deleuze cites Francis Bacon’s statement that the canvas is never empty but always replete with the lines of all that has come before.<sup>4</sup> These lines are

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<sup>4</sup> Deleuze discusses this notion in *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation* (2003, 86). Francois Dosse’s work has shown that Deleuze first encountered this notion in his meeting with the French painter Gérard Fromanger in 1971. Deleuze quotes Fromanger almost verbatim in *What Is Philosophy?* (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 204). See Dosse (2010, 440–42).

the materiality of the problematic. To encounter requires a material field of lines, the veritable presence of the virtual past in the present. This allows for *creative involution*: the simultaneous erasing and composing of lines, bending and folding lines to connect to other lines they always avoided or missed.<sup>5</sup> It is this action—*transmissibility*—that allows becoming to unfold. This becoming ensnares the work as much as the artist and the viewer/listener/reader.

Thus an act of erasing, simplifying, and involuting what one encounters motivates becoming (expression and construction), which is a paradoxical movement because as one involves—explicating and complicating the folds of a work and oneself—one becomes more “populated.” But “populated” not with people or more things, but with singularities and non-historical temporalities, that is, the material and sensational precipitate of an event.<sup>6</sup> Here is Deleuze once more: “In becoming there is no past nor future—not even present, there is no history. In becoming it is, rather, a matter of involuting; it’s neither regression nor progression. To become is to become more and more restrained, more and more simple, more and more deserted and for that very reason populated. This is what’s difficult to explain: to what extent one should involute. . . . [because] experimentation is involutive” (Deleuze and Parnet 2007, 29).

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<sup>5</sup> Deleuze and Guattari discuss the concept of “creative involution” in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1987, 238). “Becoming is involuntary, involution is creative,” they write.

<sup>6</sup> As Deleuze (1990, 52) explains: “What is an ideal event? It is a singularity—or rather a set of singularities or of singular points characterizing a mathematical curve, a physical state of affairs, a psychological and moral person. Singularities are turning points and points of inflection; bottlenecks, knots, foyers, and centers; points of fusion, condensation, and boiling; points of tears and joy, sickness and health, hope and anxiety, ‘sensitive’ points. Such singularities, however, should not be confused either with the personality of the one expressing herself in discourse, or with the individuality of a state of affairs. . . . The singularity belongs to another dimension than that of denotation, manifestation, or signification. It is essentially pre-individual, non-personal, and a-conceptual. It is quite indifferent to the individual and the collective, the personal and the impersonal, the particular and the general—and to their oppositions. Singularity is *neutral*. On the other hand, it is not ‘ordinary’: the singular point is opposed to the ordinary.” But we should also note a key lesson Deleuze ([1972] 2000, 111) takes from Marcel Proust that “to remember is to create”; that is, “*to reach that point where the associative chain breaks, leaps over the constituted individual, is transferred to the birth of an individuating world* [i.e., a world of singularities].”

This mode of “creative involution” is a connective thread running from Deleuze’s work on Bergson to his concept of the fold. Becoming is “a little time in its pure state” (the Proustian formula) (Deleuze 1994, 122) or a section of chaos captured by a formal net articulated by an artist: the fold or “and” of the Joycean *chaosmos*, the ultimate aim of our “apprenticeship to art” (Deleuze [1972] 2000, 65).<sup>7</sup>

All this leaves us with the ability to posit that an artwork is what it does: it renders new passages, new modes of becoming, between past and future. These passages are always *untimely* because they are *inherent* unhistorical lines of time that flow within the present.<sup>8</sup> Transmissibility is the power of an artwork to deframe any cultural representation *and* to compose with other modes of culture. Transmissibility is this double movement, which creates aesthetic and historical encounters with singularities rather than subjects. Therefore, what is transmitted is not a given past or even a represented state of things or subject(s); instead, what is created is only an opening—a pure means—a new temporal relation of simultaneity and duration, a past-future (*Aion*) that “inheres” within the present (*Chronos*), one comprising “incorporeal effects” that make “pre-individual and nonpersonal singularities” sensible and intelligible (Deleuze, 1990, 73). To think of transmissibility in this manner is to accept Deleuze’s philosophy of time and materiality.

Deleuze’s philosophy of time, of course, includes his elaboration of Bergson’s theory that time is not simply divisible into past, present, and future. There are no clearly differentiated temporal states, but only levels and degrees of temporal co-existence and transformation. Throughout his work, Deleuze relies on Bergson’s concept of the “pure past”: that the entirety of all that has happened coexists with each present, that each present is the “contraction” of this “pure past,” which itself is then reconfigured with every passing present (see Deleuze 1991; note also Deleuze 2004). The past, therefore, is an immanent terrain, a field, “not just a reified version of the present,” because it is “searchable, explorable, problematizable, penetrable, and livable” (Lampert 2006, 51). The force that surveys and animates the past is the future. Temporal movement is “untimely” and open

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<sup>7</sup> The significance of Deleuze’s Proustian formula traverses all his works, especially the books on cinema (Deleuze 1986, 1989) and *Proust and Signs* (Deleuze [1972] 2000, 59–61).

<sup>8</sup> The “untimely” is a concept Deleuze and Guattari developed from Nietzsche and Michel Foucault (see Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 112–13). See also Deleuze (1988, 107–11, 119–23).

because the future is the desire to search the past and make different presents liveable; it is the desire to actualise different configurations and effects in lieu of the present.

For Deleuze, an event is nothing other than a movement of becoming that traverses time immanently, repeating and thus differentiating anew the succession of past, present, and future. Within this movement, the future “defines an event *not* in the time-frame that it is in, but in another time-frame” because it is “the forced communication of the present, past, and future of the same event” (Lampert 2006, 66). Of course, this “forced communication” has ontological, ethical, and epistemic effects, if only because it reveals how and why varying temporalities are enfolded within each supposed discrete tense. However, the future is conceived as a disjunctive, aleatory force: an outside that paradoxically exists at the most intimate interior of time as such because it “forces cracks in the stable set of past events to exhibit not-yet determinate chance effects, and conversely forces the future to have shown itself, at least darkly, in its precursors” (ibid.). Moreover, this philosophy of time makes Deleuze’s assertion that art is a “power of the future”—an eventual force, that embodies singularities and temporalities that complicate the history of representation—even more crucial for artistic re-search.<sup>9</sup> Thus when he argues that “*art comprehends the textures of matter*” (Deleuze 1993, 35, my italics), it is because he redefines matter so that the relation of matter and form in art is replaced by the relation forces and forms, *chaosmos*.

For Deleuze, matter is what fills space and time. Matter is “unformed, unorganized, nonstratified” and with “all its flows” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 43). It is what he will call chaos or life as such. Matter comprises singularities and relations, that is, relational capacities (to affect and to be affected). There is always already, he asserts, a “continuous variation of matter” (Deleuze 1993, 19) or “an entire energetic materiality in movement” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 408). Conceiving of matter in this way is only the first step in abandoning a hylomorphic, matter-form relation in favour of “material-force” (Deleuze 1993, 35).<sup>10</sup> Material-force replaces matter and form. This substitution gets us to the heart

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<sup>9</sup> Art is a Deleuzian “power of the future” and not a “thing of the past” as Hegel wagered (see Hegel 1975, 10).

<sup>10</sup> “Temporal modulation” is not a spatial conception of moulding matter and form (hylomorphic) in which the object is withdrawn from the mould that forms it (see Deleuze 1993, 19). Hylomorphic signifies *hyle*



of Deleuze and Guattari's semiotic, in which *material-force* is a net (an assemblage) of forms of expression and forms of content.<sup>11</sup> Hence, "it is no longer a question of imposing a form upon a matter [hylomorphic] but of elaborating an increasingly rich and consistent material, the better to tap increasingly intense forces" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 329).

For Deleuze, then, it follows that there are no human subjects and inert objects (matter), but only morphogenesis *and* traits/predicates. In working with such a materiality we must accept that an "abstract and tactile sense of matter must figure at the crux of any social practice" (Conley 1993, xiv). Morphogenesis implies that any opposition of organic and inorganic, present and past, form and content, becomes "tonal flow and flux" (ibid., xv). In other words, dialectical relations are replaced with *resonance*, which means both the ontological and temporal structure of difference and repetition as well as the logic of sensation. The concept of material-force (Deleuze and Guattari's operative definition of a work of art) takes as its starting point "a world pierced with irregular passages" because "even the most refined matter is perfectly fluid" (Deleuze 1993, 5). In short, there is always already the "fluidity of matter" (4), or "temporal modulation" (19). There is "temporal modulation" because a "matter-fold is a matter-time" (7).

This is what Deleuze (2007, 263) terms the "fabric of immanence": "complicating the most diverse things and persons in the self-same tapestry, at the same time that each thing, each person, explicates the whole." *Each thing explicates the whole, the whole complicates each thing*. This "fabric of immanence" is texture: texturology.<sup>12</sup> Texturology is precisely the importance of the fold in Deleuze's work. Materiality is an infinite folding

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(matter), wherein a form is applied to a formless and homogenous matter (passive) from without (*pace* Aristotle).

<sup>11</sup> For Deleuze and Guattari, semiotics is material expressiveness, matter of expression—that is, a non-linguistic (opposed to the semiology of structuralism with its abstract language system that operates indifferently to matter) semiotics of direct sensation. So they oppose the linguistic reductionism in structuralism and post-structuralism (postmodernism). In their semiotics, "both expressions and contents . . . have both form and matter. Expressions do not merely represent contents epiphenomenally; rather, expressions and events interpret each other at the level of form, and interact causally with one another at the level of matter," as Lampert (2006, 77) astutely argues.

<sup>12</sup> "Then matter has not only structures and figures but also *textures*. . . . a texturology that attests to a generalized organicism, or to a ubiquitous presence of organisms," Deleuze (1993, 115) argues.

wherein virtual and actual, sensible and intelligible, expression and event, past and present coexist without any recourse to a reductive hierarchy of one over the other. This is immanence. The actual (molar forms) are presented as foldings: “a complication of surfaces that offsets any temptation to step beyond the wholly immanent plane. . . . [a conception of matter as] a universal texturology” that enfolds finite and infinite (Mullarkey 1999, 77).<sup>13</sup> This is noteworthy when we recall that Deleuze and Guattari define art as the finite that restores the infinite.

This operative function of art presents artists, cultural historians, and philosophers with a challenge. A challenge to cross “thresholds of perception,” to “peer into the crannies of matter and read into the folds of the [virtual],” as Deleuze (1993, 3) posits.<sup>14</sup> The aim is to encounter the texture of an event, that is, *a* life (pure immanence) that traverses all matter. In other words, we need “a sense of the affinity of matter with life” (ibid., 6), but life within and beyond human life and experience (see also Pearson 1999; and Bennett 2010). We must accept the challenge to contemplate how and why matter is always already a “matter of expression” and why “what is expressed [an event] does not exist outside its expressions” (Deleuze 1993, 35, 37). As Deleuze writes in *The Fold*, “Art comprehends the textures of matter” (ibid.).

Lastly, although there is no given method of artistic re-search, there is the ethic of a “long preparation,” with its infinitive verbs to deframe and to compose, that is, *to transmit*. Artistic re-search is the very ethos of Deleuzian style, which is a non-style, a “foreign language *in* the language we speak. Stretched to its internal limit, toward this outside of language” (Deleuze 2007, 370). Stretching the state of things and its representations (i.e., language, image-repertoires, musical modes) means to creatively involve, to fold, it toward an outside—an intimate exterior—that is the double movement of becoming. Transmissibility as artistic re-search is a “sober style,” a texturology that senses and creates temporal passages, involutions, and thus becomings. Transmissibility works to “cross thresholds of perception” in order to partake of the work of immanence. This is the noble

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<sup>13</sup> “Matter has an inorganic life and a [being] of its own . . . far from being the worldless category that Heidegger, for one, thought it to be,” Mullarkey (1999, 78) adds.

<sup>14</sup> Note that the Deleuzian virtual is thus “the Fold between the folds” and the smallest unit of matter is the fold.

yet aleatory aim of our “apprenticeship in art,” our artistic re-search: to render time itself *transmittable but never inheritable*.

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