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Matter, Manner and Idea in Michelangelo, Leibniz and Deleuze

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According to the last verse of his most famous quatrain, Michelangelo Buonarroti held that “the best artist has no concept [*concetto*] which some single marble does not potentially enclose within its mass, but only the hand which obeys the intellect [*intelletto*] can accomplish it.”¹ This has often been interpreted in hylomorphic terms as saying that the content lies waiting within the marble for its form to be hewn out. Such an interpretation is idealist insofar as it would be the task of the mind to recognize the form of this content and of the obeying hand merely to free it from the surrounding mass. For Michelangelo, however, it was not so simple. When his pupil Benedetto Varchi complimented him, “Signor Buonarroti, you have the brain of a Jove,” he responded, “But Vulcan’s hammer is required to make something come out of it.” The passage from the intellectual *concetto* to the hand that realizes it entails more than just a passage from the possible to the real, because the idea of the whole composition must constantly be repeated or rehearsed in a painstaking process of experimental construction. In the words of de Tolnay: “In a very real way the primitive form of the block had a decisive influence on Michelangelo’s imagination. As he became absorbed in it, the inner image awoke in him; one can actually see how in his sculptures and reliefs he always allowed himself to be guided by the primitive form of the block, and in his frescoes by the dimension and shape of the surfaces at his disposal.”²

If the material work of art is neither simply conceived in the image of its concept or idea nor coincides with it, couldn’t we say that for Michelangelo, borrowing a quote from Marcel Proust made famous by Gilles Deleuze, the idea is “real without being actual, ideal without being abstract” (PS 57, 60)? Michelangelo and the mannerist aesthetics he inspired have indeed found a very strong resonance in Deleuze’s understanding of art and of art’s interrelations with philosophy. Even if Deleuze never systematically developed a concept of mannerism in the way he did for expressionism and the baroque, his aesthetics is profoundly

¹ Michelangelo, quatrain LXXXIII, 1547, translated by Clements 1961, 16.

² De Tolnay 1964, 97.

mannerist.³ Conversely, and this will be the aim of this essay, a rereading of Michelangelo from a deleuzian perspective could also offer a new perspective for our understanding of sixteenth century art practices and art theory. After a brief discussion of Deleuze's explicit references to Michelangelo, this rereading will be carried out in terms of three central concepts first distinguished as such by another pupil of Michelangelo, Vincenzo Danti: matter, idea, and manner. Each of these terms is developed in discussion with Leibniz, whom in his last course at Vincennes Deleuze repeatedly aligns with Michelangelo insofar as his "entire philosophy is without doubt mannerist par excellence." (CGD 07/04/1987) Finally, we conclude with a brief reflection on how the contributions of mannerism to art and of Deleuzianism to philosophy can be distinguished.

Deleuze and Michelangelo: United in Anti-Classicism

In a lecture at the FEMIS film school in 1987, Deleuze equates the question 'What is a creative act?' with that of 'What does it mean to have an idea?'. "Ideas," he argues, "have to be treated like potentials already *engaged* in one mode of expression or another and inseparable from the mode of expression, such that I cannot say that I have an idea in general." (TRM 312) Artists are "seers" or "visionaries" who have an intuition of the virtual dimension of things, yet their ideas differ from Plato's eternal ideas insofar as they have no existence outside of the actual work of art and do not preside over life but become coextensive with it. Already in *Proust and Signs* (1964), which appeared just before the hey-days of the so-called 'dematerialization of art', Deleuze therefore wrote that the idea is "hewn out of our life" and "delivered in a work". (PS 129)

One question I would like to raise is to what extent this notion of idea, which is central to all of Deleuze's work, is indebted not only to modernist expressionism, but also to the 16th-century doctrine of *disegno interno*, the drawing after an internal model or internal design guiding the hand, which replaces the *disegno esterno* of natural models that dominated Renaissance formalism. It seems hard to oversee the importance in Deleuze's work of this Florentine tradition of revived Neoplatonism that deeply inspired Michelangelo, yet even

³ Although it has gone almost unnoticed, mannerism is a recurrent concept in Deleuze's work. In two of his cooperations with Félix Guattari, *Kafka* and *A Thousand Plateaus*, there can be discovered a mannerist ethics in terms of rhythmic postures and manners (ethology); in *The Fold*, Deleuze develops a mannerist logic of predicates as events; and in his writings on painting (Bacon), cinema (Daney) and the history of art (the baroque), he approaches mannerism in discussion with art criticism. In my still unpublished PhD dissertation (2009) I have provided a systematic and encompassing development of a Deleuzian concept of mannerism. For a differentiation of this concept from the baroque, see Van Tuinen 2009.

those who discover in Deleuze an “involuntary Platonist” have neglected this mannerist heritage.

The only published occasion at which Deleuze explicitly refers to Michelangelo is in *Francis Bacon. The Logic of Sensation* (1981), in which his suggestion is that with mannerism there appears for the first time “a properly pictorial atheism”. (FB 9; cf. WP 194) In 15th century classicism the prevailing image of art prescribed that art’s task lies in the imitation of beauty found in nature as a divine product. In the 16th-century the principle of *fantastica idea appoggiata alla pratica e non all’imitazione* (Bellori) came to serve a confrontation between nature and artistic creativity and a valuation of style or *maniera* over nature. Thus whereas Leone Battista Alberti warned the artist against placing too much trust in his genius, advising him to confine himself to the great model that is created nature, Michelangelo relied on his *ingegno*, the power of his artistic mind to improve nature instead of merely imitating it, for example to extract from a Carrara mountain top the colossus that is hermetically confined in it.⁴

What Deleuze appreciates in Michelangelo’s anti-naturalism is the rupture it provokes with classical figuration. Although in painting any “will to art” initially expresses itself in the abstract line (Paul Klee) and “[f]iguration and narration are only effects” (FB 136), it is with classicism that painting becomes figurative. Following Wilhelm Worringer, Deleuze defines classical representation by the rigid way in which it forces sensation into the transcendental “molds” of aesthetic laws that serve the perfection of optical contours in deep, linear perspectival space, which in turn “first of all expresses the organic life of man as subject.” (FB 125-6) By contrast, mannerism lays out a “haptic” space in which there is a “shallow depth” or “thickness” that simultaneously separates and intertwines foreground and background such that contour ceases to be the primacy of the foreground and becomes their common limit on a single compository plane of indeterminate dimensions. Whereas in classical representation the potential idea slumbering in a given material is therefore first ‘seen’ by the eye of the human intellect and then realized in manual work, mannerism – the Italian *maniera* deriving from *mano* (hand) – proceeds through an ongoing and potentially inhuman communication from eye to hand and from hand to eye, between possibility of fact and the fact itself. Once this “frenetic zone in which the hand is no longer guided by the eye and is forced upon sight like another will” (FB 137) is affirmed, the classical cliché of the

⁴ Clements 1961, 23-4. On the influence of mannerist theories of art on early Leibniz, who felt that the Harz mountains should be seen as a kind of outdoor extension of the *Kunstkammer* – “The Harz mountains are simply a wonderful stage on which nature struggles with art to gain the upper hand” – see Bredekamp 2004, 118-20.

creator-genius is replaced by the properly pictorial experience and craft of the artisan who becomes one with his material. From this understanding of mannerism as “manual intrusion” (FB 138) it follows, firstly, that the artistic vision of the idea is itself transformed into a “haptic vision” (FB 152) or “third eye, replacing the eyes of nature” (C2 265). As Michelangelo says, the aim of art is to “make of my entire body one single eye”, such that, as in Marsilio Ficino’s Neoplatonic understanding of love, there is no “part of me not taking pleasure in thee!”⁵ Secondly, it explains why the complete execution of a work of art, materially speaking, is not indispensable. Unfinished or “infinite” works of art such as the *San Matteo* or the *Prigioni* reflect the artist’s virtuosity insofar as they are inseparable from the creative act that executes them.⁶ It is for these two reasons that Deleuze claims that “[i]t was with Michelangelo, with mannerism, that the Figure or the pictorial fact was born in its pure state”. (FB 161, TRM 182)

Matter

According to Deleuze, both Michelangelo and Bacon can be qualified as mannerist insofar as they escape from classical figuration not through Platonic abstraction towards pure form without matter, as in Mondriaan or Kandinsky, or the rejection of all form, as in Fautrier or Pollock, but through the “extraction or isolation” of what Lyotard has called the “figural”: a process of disrupting the link that relates sensation to an object (illustration) or that relates it to other images in a composite whole which assigns an objective place to each of them (narration). Whereas illustration and narration are established by resemblance or by convention and thus bear witness to the dominance of some other faculty over sensation, “the violence of sensation” in itself consists not of signifying relations but of “matters of fact” devoid of analogy or code. (FB 4) In Bacon’s paintings, especially the triptychs from the early 1970s that are at the centre of Deleuze’s analysis, the “brutality of fact” means that a figural “event” is “made” or “recorded” in a deformed body of sensation – “the body insofar as it is flesh or meat” (FB 22) – which cannot be reduced to either an object of reference or the lived experience of a seeing subject. (FB 34-5) Similarly, in the jarring juxtapositions or

⁵ Clements 1961, 35.

⁶ As Charles de Tolnay has argued, whereas the *imagine del cor* is superior to the finished work, the unfinished work communicates a fragmentary whole of which the unfinishedness derives not from external limits or too large ambitions, but from an inner necessity, from a certain inexhaustible potentiality ‘power’ of the material itself: “This argument suggests that Michelangelo must certainly have regarded his incomplete statues as unfinished works, because his artistic ideal was founded on the power of the *relievo*. He did not complete his statues, in spite of this, because in so doing he would have lessened their lyric intensity.” (Tolnay 1964, 95)

contraposto of bodies in Michelangelo's *Doni Tondo* (*The Holy Family*, 1503) "[i]t is as if the organisms were caught up in a whirling or serpentine movement that gives them a single 'body' or unites them in a single 'fact,' apart from any figurative or narrative connection." (FB 130-1, 160) What is this body of sensation, this matter of fact, constitutive of a figure?⁷

In *What is Philosophy?* (1991) Deleuze and Guattari write that, whereas philosophy puts forward concepts that express the consistency of an event, art makes blocs of sensations stand up on their own. Their distinction coincides with the duality of form and matter: "Conceptual becoming is heterogeneity grasped in an absolute form; sensory becoming is otherness caught up in a matter of expression. The monument does not actualize the virtual event but incorporates or embodies it: it gives it a body, a life, a universe. ... These universes are neither virtual or actual; they are possibles" (WP 177). Whereas in *A Thousand Plateaus* artistic and philosophical creation are still approached alike, Deleuze says that it was only with *The Fold. Leibniz and the Baroque* (1988), hence with Leibniz, that he was able to "see better" what this distinction amounts to. (N 137) As he argues in this book, a form of expression is produced in a process of actualization whereas a material is made expressive in a process of realization. The two processes are irreducible to each other, insofar as actualization relates to the reality of the virtual, whereas realization relates to the existence of a possible world or universe, "the possible as aesthetic category" (WP 177). This distinction can help us to get a better grasp on the relation between sensation and physical bodies.

In terms of Leibniz, the difference between the actualization of the world in the appetitions and perceptions of individual souls and the realization of the world in bodily interaction is not a difference between two kinds of substances, but between two kinds of distributing the world, between the soul taken as a monad in itself and the body taken as a composite of several monads. A soul is an eternal individual unity whereas matter is a continuously varying multiplicity, an aggregation of aggregations *ad infinitum*. Since what is real must necessarily be one, it follows that matter or extension does not exist. In this way Leibniz subscribes to the idealist conviction that the extended world exists only in monadic perception. However, Leibniz simultaneously says that no soul, except God's, can exist without a body, since the body that belongs to it is precisely what connects it with the rest of the world. The external world is made up of what the scholastics called "secondary matter (*materia secunda*)". From the perspective of monadology, it is an infinitely divisible *masse brute*, made up of an unformed flux of monads chaotically traversing all kinds of interactions

⁷ For a more extensive discussion of Deleuze's Leibnizian account of the serpentine figure, see Van Tuinen 2011.

and compositions, its indistinct collectivities corresponding to the variability of the unconscious flux of perception included in every monad. If the soul is nonetheless capable of extracting distinct perceptions from this insensible flux, in the case of humans even self-conscious apperceptions, this is because it possesses a mediating body or “primary matter (*prima materia*)” capable of selecting and organizing disparate individuals into the unity corresponding to its “point of view”. For Leibniz the soul is the “foundation (*fundamentum*)” or “form” of this organic composition, whilst the other monads that participate in it are merely its “requisites” or “material”. In fact, matter is present only through the organic body by which extensive phenomena are “realized” and otherwise remains fully abstract and ideal.⁸ In order for a phenomenon to be “well-founded”, therefore, there must correspond to each of the soul’s clear and distinct perceptions a fully evolved organ, such that a perfect “resemblance” between form and content is guaranteed.⁹

In Deleuze’s reading, there is an “almost schizophrenic tension” (TF 33) between the idealist Leibniz and the realist Leibniz. There is a tension, for example, between the claim that God chose a certain world expressed by the individual souls that populate it and the claim that each “windowless” monad freely draws its perceptions from the folds of its own infinite, obscure or “virtual”¹⁰ background. For it implies that, if an actual soul is free to hallucinate about other possible worlds, it must have access to other perceptions than those chosen by God which also strive to existence. On the level of actualization, however, Leibniz is necessitated to exclude the reality of the possible, since it is precisely God’s choice for bringing into existence this one actual world such as it is expressed by all individual essences that guarantees the well-foundedness of the phenomenon. It is only on the level of realization, where de jure or pre-established harmony depends on de facto organic perspective or union of body and soul, that Leibniz allows, either within the organic body or at least open to it, more reality than the soul can express by itself. Here the infinitely divisible continuum of secondary, or anorganic, matter is not restricted by God’s choice for the actual world and

⁸ In itself, matter therefore does not ‘exist’, although in it is realized something that Deleuze in *The Logic of Sensation* calls “presence”: “the pure presence of the body becomes visible at the same time that the eye becomes the destined organ of this presence.” (FB 52)

⁹ “On the Method of Distinguishing Real from Imaginary Phenomena”, date unknown, L 363-6. Following Leibniz’s expressionist account of the correspondence of body and soul in terms of resemblance, Deleuze thence argues that “[r]esemblance is equated with what resembles, not with what is resembled” (TF 95). Just as for Plotinus “never did the eye see the sun unless it had first become sunlike” (Plotinus, 1991, *Enneads*, I, vi, 9), sensation realizes itself in the material when the latter becomes what it resembles, replacing “the imitation of a primal model with a mimesis that is itself primary and without a model.” (ATP 237) Just as becoming is never an imitation, resemblance thus has no exterior reference or essence. Rather, it is always “a resemblance produced with accidental and non-resembling means” (FB 98, 115, 158), such as “the smile of oil, the gesture of fired clay, the thrust of metal, the crouch of Romanesque stone, and the ascent of Gothic stone” (WP 166, 173).

¹⁰ “Discourse on Metaphysics”, §8, §13, §26, L 303-30.

encompasses all subsisting possible worlds. Even if the law of pre-established harmony guarantees that the moral order of souls and the natural order of bodies fuse on a shared continuum, the actual does not constitute the real, which must itself be composed in ‘accidental’, intermonadic relations. Hence we see why, for Leibniz, the bodies in which hallucinations can be realized are not necessarily individual and not necessarily real.¹¹ Since the process of realization does not bear on the virtual but on the possible, a body of sensation or matter of fact is always potentially a non-individual “monument” for the presence of a possible world within the actual world.¹² As Deleuze says: “Including possible worlds in the plane of immanence, even in this very sketchy way, makes expressionism the counterpart of constructionism.” (N 147, WP 183-4)

Back to Deleuze and Guattari’s definition of art. Following Leibniz’s distinction between appetite and perception, they say that a possible world is embodied in a compound of affects and percepts. Affects and percepts, however, are not the same as affections or perceptions, because they are not reducible to an individual soul whose lived organic experience they are. Instead, they are “*beings* that have validity in themselves and exceed any lived experience [*tout vécu*]”, the work of art constituting “a being of sensation” existing “in itself”. (WP 164) Already for Leibniz, a body can possess a plastic consistency without being individual, since although organs are the perceptual-affective requirement of the development of the life of the individual monad to which a body belongs, the reverse is not the case. Other material compositions passing into other, non-subjective or monstrous sensations are always possible. Only reasonable monads have a so-called “substantializing bond (*vinculum substantiale*)” attached to them by which, like a “judgment of God”, the organic compositions are morally bound to their unchanging foundations, whereas bodies belonging to animal souls are subject to the continuous metamorphoses of “the matter-flow as pure productivity” (ATP 454), that is, they can always be developed into different possible worlds or folded into different and potentially mutant animals and thus into new composites of sensation.¹³ Each sensation thus “exists in its possible universe without the concept necessarily existing in its absolute form.” (WP 178) Spinoza’s observation is valid for Leibniz as well – we do not yet know what sensations a body is capable of: “Even when they are nonliving, or rather

¹¹ Deleuze makes a similar point in relation to the baroque, the “paradigm” of which he claims to be mannerist (TF 34, 36-7, 38): “the essence of the Baroque entails neither falling into nor emerging from illusion but rather *realizing* something in illusion itself, or of tying it to a spiritual *presence* that endows its spaces and fragments with a collective unity. ... The Baroque artists know well that hallucination does not feign presence, but that presence is hallucinatory.” (TF 125)

¹² For a more elaborate account of this plasticity of the body according to Leibniz, see Hammond 2010.

¹³ “Monadology”, §71-2, L 650; “A New System of the Nature and Communication of Substances, as well as the Union between the Soul and the Body”, §7, L 455.

inorganic, things have a lived experience because they are percepts and affects.”¹⁴ (WP 154, translation modified) Hence Michelangelo’s preference to speak of “alpine and living stone” or of “the living figure in alpine and hard rock”¹⁵ that outlives its maker, or Deleuze’s claims that, firstly, blocs of sensation possess the autonomous and inorganic life of “nonhuman landscapes” and “nonhuman becomings” by which “we become universes” (WP 169) and, secondly, that the model of all art is a sensory becoming-animal, in other words, an animation – or “animalization” (FB 46) – of matter in non-human and non-individual ways.

If perception is no longer necessarily subjective, then neither can it be reduced to an objective state of affairs. Rather, there is the unity of eye and matter in the becoming of the pictorial fact. Sensation refers only to the “immense agitation of matter” (FB 137) of which it is composed and in which it is expressed. The body, detached from the individual soul and dispersed in flux, becomes a “zone of objective indiscernibility or indeterminability” (FB 157), and with it the well-founded phenomenon gives way to deformation. Whereas classical representation “takes the accident into an optical organization that makes it something well founded (a phenomenon) or a ‘manifestation’ of essence” (FB 126), the mannered postures of Michelangelo’s deformed bodies are not fixed individual forms of content, but deform the very object form of human perception (object=x) governing over sensation, such that forms become “accidental forms” (TF 137) or forms of expression and thus sources of endless modifications. This is reflected by the expressions of swooning, drunkenness and vertigo employed by Leibniz to describe what occurs when secondary and primary or accidental and essential aspects get confused. It is this objective indeterminability which Deleuze refers to both with the Michelangelesque ideal of the *figura serpentinata* and Artaud’s concept of a body without organs – that is, not bodies stripped of organs, but bodies upon which organic figures are distributed in the form of multiplicities.¹⁶ (ATP 30, cf. WP 196) Leibniz says that although nature is not an organism and hence not everything is organic, organs are everywhere clothed with or “folded”¹⁷ into the texture of secondary matter, such that “each

¹⁴ There must be inattributable, “inhuman eyes” (C1 81) or “animal souls” everywhere in matter as so many dispersed points of view. Hence when Leibniz in the *New System* also calls animal souls “material souls”, this is not because they are not ideal, but because they appertain to matter, in the same sense that “bodies can be not only animal but also animated: not because they act upon souls, but to the extent they belong to them” (TF 120).

¹⁵ Clements 1961, 12, 24-8.

¹⁶ Michelangelo, according to Deleuze, has created a matter expressive of a nonorganic life: “Certainly there is still an organic representation, but even more profoundly, we witness the revelation of the body beneath the organism, which makes organisms and their elements crack or swell, imposes a spasm on them, and puts them into relation with forces” (FB 160). In his course on *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze had already put mannerist painting in relation to the body without organs. (CGD 14/12/1971)

¹⁷ “New System”, §7 and 10, L 455-6.

part of matter can be thought of as a garden full of plants or as a pond full of fish”¹⁸. It follows that each organic composition is only a fold away from infinity, caught up in an abstract flux of entwined bodies, each of which already contains the germ of another possible world. Similarly, the serpentine figure renders the pictorial fact in such a way that it constantly escapes from itself and dissipates in multiple becomings: “In the history of art, it was perhaps Michelangelo who made us grasp the existence of such a fact most forcefully. What we call ‘fact’ is first of all the fact that several forms may actually be included in one and the same Figure, indissolubly, caught up in a kind of serpentine, like so many necessary accidents continually mounting on top of one another.” (FB 160) Although in *A Thousand Plateaus* or *What is Philosophy?*, Deleuze prefers the musical terms of refrain and counterpoint to describe how the various blocs of sensation resonate with each other in collective becoming, their equivalent in the visual arts is the rhythmic *contrapposto* of figures as in *The Rape of the Sabine Virgins* by Giovanni di Bologna, a student of Michelangelo (or of perspectives, as in cubism (WP 171)). “Universes are linked together or separated on their lines of flight, so that the plane may be single at the same time as universes are irreducibly multiple.” (WP 196) In other words, what the serpentine figure renders visible is the consistency of sensory becoming as rhythmic counter-positioning of possible worlds on top of one another on a single plane of composition sectioning the abstract matter-flow.

Idea

Now that we have gained a deleuzian understanding of the Michelangelesque figure, we can return to the question of how the idea is different from, yet already intuitively present in the texture of sensation-matter – in the words of Michelangelo, *della carne ancor vestita*. It is again Leibniz who offers the means for an answer, when he invokes the image of veins in marble both to describe how pleats of matter surround living beings held in mass and how innate ideas are present in the soul. Leibniz sought to substitute the latter analogy for that of the perfectly homogeneous and even surface of the blank tablet (*tabula rasa*) of Locke, who held that all truths originate in the senses. But this analogy can also be read as a direct commentary on artistic practice:

¹⁸ “Monadology”, §67, L 650.

“For if the soul were like an empty page, then truths would be in us in the way that the shape of Hercules is in an uncarved piece of marble that is entirely neutral as to whether it takes Hercules’ shape or some other. Contrast that piece of marble with one that is veined in a way that marks out the shape of Hercules rather than other shapes. This latter block would be more inclined to take that shape than the former would, and Hercules would be in a way innate in it, even though it would take a lot of work to expose the veins and to polish them into clarity, removing everything that prevents their being seen. This is how ideas and truths are innate in us – as inclinations, dispositions, tendencies, or natural virtualities [*virtualités*], and not as actions; although these virtualities are always accompanied by certain actions, often insensible ones, which correspond to them.”¹⁹

Again, we must be wary of idealist interpretations. The ‘likeness’ between veins in marble and ideas in the soul expresses more than just a metaphor. To each little glimmering in the background of the soul there ‘corresponds’ some bodily action, such that soul and body are only different functions – functions of “form” and functions of “matter” – immanent to a single and same psychophysical continuum. In itself, this continuum is an intermediary zone diversified by ideas but purified from both the subjects that actualize them and the objects in which they are realized. For Leibniz, this zone of immanence is the ideal continuum of the world in its impersonal and pre-individual state, a virtual structure of disharmonious possibility; Deleuze discovers in it the “diagram” or “abstract machine” that is the world’s immanent cause. The question of art, then, is: how do we go from virtual dispositions, inclinations or tendencies of unformed matter to their actualization and realization in a figure, from the veins in marble to the shape of Hercules, without submitting to the transcending illusions of subjectivity and objectivity?

A key text for answering this question is *Proust and Signs* (1964/1970), which also happens to be Deleuze’s first appropriation of Leibniz.²⁰ Although it does not explicitly refer to it, the chapter on “Essences and the Signs of Art” (PS 39-50) could well pass as a treatise of mannerist art theory. The main thesis of the book is the account of Marcel’s apprenticeship

¹⁹ Leibniz, 1982, *New Essays on the Human Understanding* 52, 86, translation modified. Deleuze discusses this fragment on TF 4, 23, and in the crucial footnote on TF 146n19.

²⁰ In a footnote, Deleuze underlines that “Proust certainly read Leibniz, if only in school: Saint-Loup, in his theory of war and strategy, invokes a specific point of Leibnizian doctrine (‘You remember that book of philosophy we were reading together at Balbec...’ [*In Search of Lost Time II* –svt]). More generally, we have found that Proust’s singular essences were closer to the Leibnizian monads than to Platonic essences.” (PS 156n102)

in the understanding of the differential nature of signs as opposed to signifiers. Just as in the sixteenth century there appeared a particular fascination for the “explication” of hermetic problems, Deleuze defines signs, drawing on Plotinus and Ficino, as diagrammatic “hieroglyphs” which, like veins in marble, complicate “possible worlds” and which, in the Neoplatonic semantic of folding found in Proust, must be “developed” into “real worlds” according to some “manner” or “style”.²¹

Not all signs and not all styles are, however, artistic. Outside of art, Deleuze distinguishes “signs of worldliness”, “signs of love” and “sensuous signs”. Here signification is sooner or later appealed to as either subjective or objective compensation for the impossibility of completely explicating or identifying all the possible implicated worlds. (PS 34-6) Objectivism or naturalism can be defined by the tendency to equate what a sign designates (its object) with what it signifies, as if the object itself possesses the secret that the sign emits. (PS 26-33) Subjectivism then appears once we learn that the object does not give us the secret we were expecting and the signification becomes constituted by the associations of the subject instead. Although the sign is now understood to be more profound than the object emitting it, it is still attached to that object, “it is still half sheathed in it.” (PS 33-6) In either case, the rule of the signifier confines the interpretation of the sign to a dialectics development caught between “the trap of the object” and “the snare of the subject” (PS 36), a logic of interpretation set in movement by the gap that separates the inexhaustible sign from its development in a finite world that is always already to some extent naturally determined. It is through art that Proust and Deleuze seek to take a flight from this world: “[t]he whole Search implies a certain argument between art and life” (PS 137, 41), insofar as “art appears for what it is, the ultimate goal of life, which life cannot realize by itself” and “[n]ature or life, still too heavy, have found in art their spiritual equivalent” (PS 137-8).

According to Proust, the signs of art are “ideas” or “essences” that make us ““emerge from ourselves”” with the result that we gain access to other regions of Being enveloping other worlds: ““Thanks to art, instead of seeing a single world, our own, we see it multiply, and as many original artists as there are, so many worlds will we have at our disposal, more different from each other than those which spin through infinity ...”” (cit PS 42, 38, 41) Art is able to include an infinity of possible worlds within the real world because its signs are incorporeal or spiritual. Matter subsists as long as we discover, by way of analogy, a sign’s

²¹ Plotinus already liked to use the example of hieroglyphs for illustrating how intuitive intelligence can grasp in a single act a complicated intellectual content without explicating it according to argumentative and discursive reason. See Plotinus, 1991, *Enneads* V, 8, 6, 8-10.

meaning in something else. Even though two subjectively associated sense impressions or sensuous signs such as the Madeleine and Combray, or the cobblestones and Venice, may have the same quality, they are nonetheless materially two and differ from each other in extension. It follows then that the sign still possesses a minimum of general signification. (PS 40) Only in art, Deleuze argues, do sign and meaning coincide, because ideas, prior to any “natural differentiation”, “differential” essences or primordial qualities form both the “birth of the world” (PS 47, 44, 98) and “the finality of the world” (PS 49, 137), without ever being reducible to the subjects or materials in which they are expressed.²² Art’s sole aim, then, is to propagate a singular viewpoint through the world without invoking the recognition of anything that is already subjectively or objectively given. In this sense, as Charles de Tolnay writes, Michelangelo “did not intend to represent things as the human eye sees them but as they are in essence; not as they appear but as they are according to their Idea.”²³ Or as Proust says, an artistic sign is the mark of “a qualitative difference that there is in the way the world looks to us, a difference which, if there were no such thing as art, would remain the eternal secret of each man.”²⁴ (cit PS 41, 148; cf. WP 177)

In his classic *Idea* (1924), Erwin Panofsky argues that Michelangelo is a precursor of modern expressionism, insofar as he derives his creativity not from a subjective but from an involuntary, cosmic principle that functions as the divine or eternal condition of possibility of all creativity.²⁵ Similarly, Deleuze insists that an artistic sign is an involuntary *idée-force* animating all creativity: “the generative force from which issue the multiple compossible worlds that make up the real” (PS 99). In art neither the spectator nor the artist is the foundation of the way the world looks to us, but neither is it the material of the work of art in which it is expressed. Rather it is “an absolute and ultimate Difference” or “difference in itself” that constitutes an impersonal perspective simultaneously upon a realized world, whilst remaining of all possible worlds. (PS 41-4) However, in order for this ideal difference to be varied in the spatio-temporal becoming of a world, it must be repeated in a “continuous and

²² Vincenzo Danti in his *Trattato delle perfette proporzioni* (1567) writes that “an artist should not simply copy (*ritrarre*) visible nature but should imitate it (*imitare*) in its purposes; that is to say, he should imitate the perfected intentional form of nature.” As De Tolnay comments: “It follows that the artistic *concetto* (the Idea) is the inner image that the artist creates for himself of nature’s intentions. The subjective intention of the artist is therefore identified with the objective intention of nature.” (Tolnay 1964, 88) Needless to add that the identification of subjective with objective intentionality is a defining trait of the Leibnizian monad.

²³ Tolnay 1964, 85-6.

²⁴ Hence the idea “is not the individual, but on the contrary a principle of individuation” (PS 98) which “individualizes the subject in which it is incorporated, and absolutely determines the objects which express it” (PS 88).

²⁵ Panofsky 2008, 149. The *idea* of *disegno* was therefore interpreted by Zuccari as an anagram for *segno di Dio*, “divine spark”. Panofsky 2008, 128.

refracted birth”, such that some material becomes expressive of it – what Deleuze calls “clothed” or “complex” repetition.²⁶ Such is the functioning of an artistic manner or style.

Through the materials they’re working with, artists bring together different objects in order to confer upon them a common quality or consistency without ever confusing these objects with the quality itself, which stays forever indeterminate.²⁷ Art is thus intrinsically related to an art of combinations, an art of composition, which has “an essentially expressive universe” (PS 45) or “limitless corporeality” become expressive of an “incorporeal power” (ATP 109). The yellow in Vermeer’s *View of Delft*, for example, can be said to be one of these “necessary lenses of a beautiful style” (TRM 369) that determines in their mutual relations the objects by soaking them in a singular point of view, as if some contrast liquid were “reinject[ed] into the visual whole” (FB 138, PS 46). Art renders a material “ductile” or “spiritualizes” it by turning it into a “refracting medium” in which the idea can be communicated. (PS 46-8) Similarly, the signature of Michelangelo refers neither to the objective material used nor to a self-expressing artist-genius, but to an original quality or viewpoint – a stylistic “effect” – that comes to life in the singularizing modulation of some material texture – when “[t]he signature becomes style” (ATP 317, 329) in the haptic subjectivity that belongs to the labor of a “hand” (TRM 315). Whatever the technical means involved, some percepts can be constructed only in art, since they belong to an inhuman eye that traverses multiple possible worlds. The consistency of this accidental eye derives entirely from the manner in which it is developed, such that instead of possessing any transcending signification, it is only style, “the formal structure of the work of art, insofar as it does not refer to anything else, which can serve as unity – afterwards”.²⁸ (PS 149, 99, 101, 116) Or as Deleuze confirms, almost thirty years after *Proust and Signs*, it is style or manner as unity of composition that raises “lived perceptions to the percept and lived affections to the affect.” (WP 170-1)

²⁶ In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze explains this through Leibniz, who “already appealed to the internal process of a *continua repetitio*, grounded upon an intensive differential element which ensures the synthesis of continuity at a point in order to engender space from within.” (DR 26)

²⁷ Deleuze quotes Proust: “One can string out in indefinite succession, in a description, the objects which figured in the described place; the truth will begin only when the writer takes two different objects, posits their relation, analogous in the world of art to that of the causal law in the world of science, and envelops them in the necessary rings of a great style.” (cit PS 47) Or in *Difference and Repetition*: “When it is claimed that works of art are immersed in a virtuality, what is being invoked is not some confused determination but the completely determined structure formed by its genetic elements, its ‘virtual’ or ‘embryonic’ elements.” (DR 209)

²⁸ Style establishes “transversals” which cause us to leap from one possible world to another, “without ever reducing the many to the One, without ever gathering up the multiple into a whole, but affirming the original unity of precisely that multiplicity, affirming without uniting *all* these irreducible fragments.” (PS 112, 144-5)

Manner

Deleuze's Proustian concept of style or manner as the material development of the idea brings us back to the question of the relation between the eye or intellect as faculty of ideas and the hand as the faculty of construction. If artistic ideas are incorporeal, this does not mean that they transcend the corporeal process of their realization. They rather constitute the virtual potential of a material, its virtual becoming. Artistic signs are neither Platonic ideas nor Aristotelian essences, but immanent causes coextensive and undergoing qualitative transformations with everything that is. It is precisely non-artistic signs that transcend their development insofar as they possess a subjective or objective signification. In art, the signs stay fully immanent to the style of their technical development. Everything therefore revolves around the great identity of idea and style – or difference and repetition – that makes art superior to nature, as is reflected also by Bellori's famous mannerist formula of *la maniera, o vogliamo dire fantastica idea*, and by Deleuze's statement against Buffon that "[s]tyle is not the man, style is essence itself." (PS 48, 148, TRM 369)

The identity of essence and style over and against their classical opposition – in which the singularity of the latter has almost always been subordinated to the first – takes us to a third Leibnizian theme in Deleuze's understanding of Michelangelo: monadic individuation. In *Proust and Signs* Deleuze argues that artistic "essences are veritable monads", since each essence refers to an ultimate difference inseparable from its "manner" of expressing the world.²⁹ Then, in *The Fold*, he contrasts Leibniz to Descartes insofar as the first replaces the latter's classical essentialism with a "mannerism of substances" (TF 57): "Classicism needs a solid and constant attribute for substance, but mannerism is fluid, and the spontaneity of manners replaces the essentiality of the attribute." (TF 56)

Descartes keeps to "the 'classical' conception of the concept" (TF 42) which holds that between the subject and the attribute there is reciprocal inclusion. In the proposition 'I think', I is inseparable from the clear and distinct attribute of thinking and inversely thinking is what determines the substance of I. However, since reciprocal inclusion only functions in nominal definitions, it subordinates individual being ('therefore I am') to the generality of its logical identity. What Descartes fails to prove is that the notion 'cogito' forms an immanent expression of the real world, in other words, that the essence of a 'thinking I' also involves individual existence. By contrast, Leibniz defines an individual substance by all its "essential

²⁹ Or: "Essence does not exist outside the subject expressing it, but it is expressed as the essence not of the subject but of Being, or of the region of Being which is revealed to the subject." (PS 43)

requisites”: “the omnipresence of the dark depths which is opposed to the clarity of form, and without which manners would have no place to surge forth from” (TF 56, 32, 53). The Dionysian fluidity of mannerism consists of the fact that, due to the principle of sufficient reason (*Grund, fond*), an essence cannot be separated from its perspective, constituted by the infinity of pre-individual or accidental relations to the existing world that it integrates according to its individuating *habitudines* or singularizing ‘mannerisms’.³⁰ As Leibniz says: “Various things are thought by me (*Varia a me cogitantur*)”³¹, each thought or perception being a singular and pre-individual “modality, or manner of being”³². And these manners are spontaneous in the sense that, through the diagram of innate ideas, each constitutes a finality or intermediary self-inclusion by which it unilaterally composes its fold of the world. Each monad thus envelops the same ideal continuum ““under a certain potential”” (cit TF 52), but it is individuated by the singular manner in which it gives expression to this potential into which it will eventually also dissolve.³³ As Deleuze concludes: “The coupling *basis-manners* disenfranchises form or essence: Leibniz makes it the mark of his philosophy.” (TF 53)

Together the fluidity of depth and the spontaneity of manners are the two components of Leibniz’s mannerism and of his definition of the monadic envelope as infinite source of modifications.³⁴ Although surprisingly neither Bacon or Proust nor Michelangelo feature in *The Fold*, in his courses Deleuze therefore repeatedly suggests a strong analogy between Michelangelo’s figures and Leibnizian monads:

“In some way, when one thinks of painting that is called mannerist, Leibniz’s entire philosophy is without doubt mannerist par excellence. Already with Michelangelo one finds traces of a first and profound mannerism. A mannered posture of Michelangelo is not an essence. It is rather the source of a modification, the source of a manner of

³⁰ See “Discourse on Metaphysics”, §8: “That every individual substance expresses the whole universe in its own manner and that in its full concept is included all its experiences together with all the attendant circumstances and the whole series of exterior events.” (L 307) In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze refers to this procedure of extracting essences from the inessential in terms of “orgiastic representation”: “The concept thus follows and espouses determination in all its metamorphoses, from one end to the other, and represents it as pure difference” (DR 42) and hence “it is the infinite which renders determination conceivable and selectable: difference thus appears as the orgiastic representation of determination and no longer as its organic representation.” (DR 43)

³¹ “Critical Thoughts on the General Part of the Principles of Descartes”, 1692, L 385.

³² “Discourse on Metaphysics”, §11, L 309.

³³ “I call substance what is nothing but a modality or manner of being.” Letter to Arnould, March 1687, GP II 86. And: “since the ultimate reason of things is unique, and contains by itself the aggregate of all the requisites of all things, it is evident that the requisites of all things are the same. So also is their essence. ... Therefore the essence of all things is the same, and things differ only modally, just as a town seen from a high point differs from the town seen from a plain.” AK VI.iii 573.

³⁴ “Substance is not defined by its essence, it is defined by and defined as active source of its proper modifications, source of its proper manners. ... A thing is defined by all the manners of which it is capable” (CGD 07/04/1987).

being. In this sense, it is perhaps philosophy which gives us the key to a problem in painting, under the form: what is mannerism?" (07/04/1987).

With this strange 'resemblance' between art and philosophy we return, finally, to Deleuze's Leibnizian distinction between form of expression and matter of expression, or between concepts and blocs of sensation. Now we know not only what Michelangelo's figures are, but also what in each case determines how it is 'conceived'. In the explication of the idea we go from an abstract matter-flow to a concrete "manual aggregate" (FB 130) without the latter transcending the former through subjectivity or objectivity, such that the consistency or formal structure of this composition is entirely constituted by the manner in which the disparate elements are combined. Art therefore not only makes up philosophy's non-philosophical extension, but we can also discover in Michelangelesque figures the formal structure of monadic essences or Leibnizian concepts: "One shall call mannerist a philosophical conception or pictorial vision which characterizes a being by its manners." (CGD 20/01/1987) This is indeed the great theme of *The Fold*, namely that the monad's perceptions resemble matter as a form of producing it "in extension" (TF 96): "Material matter makes up the bottom, but folded forms are styles or manners. We go from matter to manner", or with Dubuffet, "from the *Texturologie* to the *Logologie*" (TF 35).

Beyond Concettism: Concluding Note on the Distinction between Art and Philosophy

Concluding we can claim that for Michelangelo as well as for Leibniz and Deleuze the idea is the animus of all creativity. It is not a voluntary force, but rather something that is – to speak with Artaud – "genitally innate" (DR 148), such that to invent is to find, *erfinden*, even if perfecting nature means to find in it what has never been found.³⁵ The idea is repeated according to a singularizing manner in a material aggregate, which means that it undergoes a continuous and infinite variation. As virtual work to be done it is, to risk an oxymoron, the 'content of expression': a virtual multiplicity of possible worlds, hence something that can be developed in infinitely many ways, but always divided over two orders of expression – material of expression and manner or form of expression – each of which presupposes the other. A matter of expression is a matter-flow, a constant tendency towards abstraction capable of realizing various possible worlds within the world. But the unity of a possible

³⁵ Cf. Clements 1961, 20.

world or point of view derives from the singularizing manner in which an abstract idea is expressed and concretized in some material. The pursuit of the idea is thus completely involved in the manner in which it is developed, in other words, in the intensive reality of its processual unfolding in extension, without the material otherwise being in any way opposed to, or even separable from, the ideal.

In proposing the Leibnizian concept of mannerism, Deleuze brings about a radical overhaul of the Kantian distinction of sensibility and intelligibility. Art and philosophy share a single and same ground teeming with “vital ideas” (WP 209) or combinatory schemata that allows for the affective continuity and transition between percepts and concepts, “such that”, as Deleuze says in *The Fold*, “we can no longer tell where one ends and the other begins, or where the sensible ends and the intelligible begins.” (TF 119, 66, 97) However, if Deleuze adopts a Leibnizian account of the presence of possible worlds in matter, his concept of manner nevertheless diverges from that of Leibniz insofar as the latter is bound to uphold perfectly individuated essences as distributive unities comprising all the possible manners of being within a single and same actual world. After all, what remains of the crucial difference between actualization and realization, between concept and bloc of sensations, when the concept of manner as ‘form of content’³⁶, as the formal foundation of a composite substance, is still based on monadic substance?

Ultimately it is not in his account of art but in his account of philosophy that Deleuze breaks with both Michelangelo and Leibniz, and that the difference between mannerism and modernism appears. Deleuze’s early critique of Leibniz still pertains, namely that the latter’s “hesitation between the possible and the virtual”, binding the latter to the first, is “disastrous” for the project of freeing the event from being caught up in a material. (DR 212-3) Hence in *Proust and Signs*, Deleuze argues that mannerism is still too much indebted to “the Platonism of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance” insofar as the notion of idea remains “caught up in an order of the world, in a network of significant contents and ideal significations which still testify to a Logos at the very moment that they break it.” (PS 100-1, 44-6) In *What is Philosophy?*, this criticism is rendered even more precise. Although Leibniz’s mannerist conception of the concept is inspired by Michelangelo’s *concetto* (TF 126) as a challenge of formal composition in relation to given materials, “from the fifteenth to the seventeenth century ... the *concetto* has not yet acquired consistency and depends upon the way in which

³⁶ “[T]he subjective form is the way by which the datum is expressed in the subject, or by which the subject actively prehends the datum (emotion, evaluation, project, conscience...). It is the form in which the datum is folded in the subject, a ‘feeling’ or manner” (TF 78).

it is figured or even dissimulated” (WP 92), which means that concettism must be regarded a “Catholic compromise of concept and figure which had great aesthetic value but which masked philosophy” (WP 103) insofar as it falsely identified the plane of immanence of philosophy with the plane of composition of art. (WP 103)

Just like matter is no longer merely a content but a material capable of realizing possible worlds beyond natural preformation, Deleuze holds that form is a form of expression virtually including all possible worlds. In art, the act of invention is inseparably caught up within the medium in which it propagates or diffuses its point of view. If philosophy can be distinguished from the bodily aggregate of affects and perceptions in “a ‘modern’ fashion” (PS 98), it must therefore break with the figural and find a way of giving consistency to “finite forms” (WP 75) whilst upholding the movement of the infinite without any misplaced concreteness. Deleuze describes this consistency as a “heterogeneity grasped in an absolute form”: an entirely incorporeal entity which surveys its components at infinite speed and in a perfectly pre-individual state, an abstract manner or event abstracted from the slow concreteness of an always already to some extent individuated or organized matter.³⁷ The concept is certainly grounded in existence and hence in affects and percepts – for as Leibniz knew well, “the most abstract thoughts are in need of some sense perception” (GP IV 563) –, but if a sensory becoming-other has to be realized in a material state of affairs, the concept gives consistency to an otherness of an incorporeal nature. If philosophy is truly different from art yet capable of sharing with it the same mannerist diagram or idea, this is therefore because art incarnates the event in a generic and dynamic bodily extension that selects and imitates possible worlds, whereas the event itself is a virtual “intension” extracted from the immanent structure of the idea not through selection and imitation, but immediately, as a direct and unmediated intuition of immanent becoming.³⁸

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³⁷ “The object is manneristic, not essentializing: it becomes an event.” (TF 19) Or: “The predicates are events and relations. All is event, that is what is mannerism. The production of a manner of being is [an] event. ... All is event, that is the mannerist vision of the world: there is nothing but events.” (CGD 07/04/87)

³⁸ This does not make a concept transcendent, as if Deleuze were a classical Platonist after all: “The event might seem to be transcendent because it surveys the state of affairs, but it is pure immanence that gives it the capacity to survey itself by itself and on the plane. What is transcendent, transdescendent, is the state of affairs in which the event is actualized.” (WP 156)

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