

Review of

Stephen Zepke (2005), *Art as abstract machine : ontology and aesthetics in Deleuze and Guattari*, *Studies in philosophy*, New York, London, Routledge.

Simon O'Sullivan (2006), *Art encounters Deleuze and Guattari : thought beyond representation*, *Renewing philosophy*, Houndmills, Basingstoke, New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

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Alain Badiou once observed that Gilles Deleuze's work was an attempt at a 'philosophy "of" nature' understood as a 'description in the thought of the life of the world, such that the life thus described might include, as one of its living gestures, the description.'¹

Both of these recently published books on Deleuze & Guattari's 'onto-aesthetics', Zepke's *Art as Abstract Machine: Ontology and Aesthetics in Deleuze and Guattari* and O'Sullivan's *Art Encounters Deleuze & Guattari: Thought Beyond Representation*, echo to some degree Badiou's original insight with regard to the connection being established in their thought between ontogenesis and aesthetic and philosophical expression. Both Zepke and O'Sullivan accord a profound significance to Deleuze & Guattari's *description* of a *co-creative* realm between the ontological and the aesthetic, and both argue passionately, and at times quite differently, for the creative, political and social implications of Deleuze & Guattari's *machinic* and *living* model of the arts.

1 A. Badiou, 'Review of Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*' in Boundas, C. & Olkowski, D. (ed.) (1994), *Gilles Deleuze and the Theatre of Philosophy*, London & New York, Routledge, p. 63.

Zepke clearly echoes Badiou when, at the beginning of his book, he describes the essentially impossible aim of Deleuze & Guattari's onto-aesthetic project as the attempt to 'create a thought, a sensation, a life that participates in the world's joyful birth of itself: a dancing star.'² He explores throughout the book the mutual implications of impossible co-creation between ontology and aesthetic expression in Deleuze & Guattari's collaborative work, including *Anti-Oedipus*, *A Thousand Plateaus* and *What is Philosophy?* as well as Deleuze's sole authored studies of cinema and painting. He shows how across these different works a certain descriptive understanding of art is developed. Art is understood as an 'autogenesis expressing the world' through the construction of new types of experience in 'monuments of sensation'. Art is nothing, he claims, if it is 'not this ongoing expression of life in the construction of living machines.'³ For him the impossible implications of such a co-creative understanding of the new 'living machines' of art are signalled by Deleuze's Kierkegaardian claim regarding the impossible 'which can only be restored within a faith... Only a belief in the world can reconnect man to what he sees and hears.'⁴ Zepke claims that the autogenetic conditions of artistic creativity, as expressed by Deleuze & Guattari, imply an entirely new and transformed type of relation to the world, a new form of belief solicited by the abstract 'living machines' of art. On their understanding art is a new abstract and living mechanism capable of increasing our power by liberating us from the existing limits of representation. Art is the freedom to experiment on our actual conditions of existence and produce something new – a new body, a new sensibility adequate to a life of ontological invention. As Zepke writes - 'Art is an experience of becoming, an experiential body of becoming, an experimentation producing new realities.'⁵

However, in his introduction Zepke argues that his work on Deleuze & Guattari's machinic onto-aesthetics is not merely descriptive in character but represents an imperative towards a form of machinic constructivism and the new forms of associated belief in the world that the artwork solicits. He begins by drawing upon Deleuze & Guattari's

2 S. Zepke (2005), *Art as Abstract Machine: Ontology and Aesthetics in Deleuze and Guattari*, London & New York, p. 8, hereafter *AAM*.

3 *AAM*, p. 5.

4 G. Deleuze (1989), *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, H. Tomlinson & R. Galeta (trans.), London, Continuum, p.223

5 *AAM*, p. 4.

insight (what he terms their recurrent ‘first principle’) that the crucial function of the ‘abstract machine’ is not to represent but rather to engage in constructing ‘a new type of reality’ *to come*. He claims that the abstract machine ‘is the vital mechanism of a world always emerging anew, it is the mechanism of creation operating at the level of the real... a new world opens up, a living world in which nothing is given except creation.’⁶ The abstract machine’s role is to act as a type of guide towards this radical becoming, or to be a vector of creation or probe-head. Art, according to Zepke is *the* privileged site of corporeal experimentation in Deleuze & Guattari’s work, and the experimentation involved in their account of onto-aesthetics involves a constant interplay between the finite and the infinite, the material and the immaterial, the actual and the virtual. It is at this point that Zepke introduces the major innovation of his understanding of Deleuze & Guattari with his claim that this constant interplay can best be described and understood as a form of ‘atheistic mysticism’, where art is understood as the construction of enigmatic ‘local absolutes’ or finite instantiations of infinity. Such an account of their thought as mystic atheism is somewhat controversial (a point happily conceded by Zepke), which is underscored, for example, by Peter Hallward’s recent critical reading of Deleuze’s apparent mystical and otherworldly thought and its prevalent gestures of ‘flight from the actual’ in *Out of This World*.⁷ In clear opposition to the view exemplified most recently by Hallward, Zepke argues that ‘mystical atheism’ is the real condition of Deleuze & Guattari’s pragmatic constructivist philosophy and essentially underpins their work as a form of immanent and anti-representationalist politics of becoming. This is, in fact, an understanding of Deleuze & Guattari shared by both Zepke and O’Sullivan. As Zepke writes - ‘Mysticism is the experience of immanence, of the construction/expression of the at once infinite and finite material plane on which everything happens.’⁸

Zepke emphasises the degree to which Deleuze & Guattari’s mystic atheism/onto-aesthetics signals a ‘politics of lived experience, a realm of experimentation that opens life up to alternative modes of being, affirming new realities, new communities, and new methods of self-

6 *AAM*, p. 2.

7 Hallward, P. (2006), *Out of This World: Deleuze and the Philosophy of Creation*, London, Verso.

8 *AAM*, pp. 6-7.

organisation.’⁹ For him, Deleuze & Guattari’s conception of art is as a form of applied ‘bio-politics’, a political experiment with ‘life as it is lived’. In order to develop this highly original insight into their thought Zepke proceeds to draw upon three of Deleuze & Guattari’s most significant fellow travellers – Nietzsche, Spinoza and Bergson. In the first two chapters of the book he explores what he terms certain ‘ethical-aesthetic’ issues through a detailed analysis of Nietzsche and Spinoza. The aim of these chapters is to delineate an entirely new and transformative ‘image of art’ that serves as an important philosophical prelude to his consideration of ‘specific affectual assemblages’ in subsequent chapters. The first chapter considers the ‘Artist-Philosopher’ and the question of the critical ethics of affirmation expressed in Nietzsche’s philosophy, and assesses the degree to which this is echoed in Deleuze & Guattari. The chapter contains a detailed discussion of the *critical* function of affirmation in Nietzsche’s account of the Eternal Return and its precise function with regards to the overcoming of nihilism. For Zepke, this discussion of Nietzsche serves to delineate one of the defining principles adopted by Deleuze & Guattari’s onto-aesthetics, namely the critical and violent process of destruction, counter-actualisation and counter-effectuation necessarily involved in affirmation:

Affirmation is therefore like a leap of faith, a leap into the chaos of the world in order to bring something back, in order to construct something that expresses life beyond its sad negation.¹⁰

This important opening chapter serves to remind us that for Deleuze & Guattari the construction of an onto-aesthetic machine requires an ethical choice, a selection and an affirmation. For Zepke, only in this critical and deterritorialising way can the abstract machine ‘break matter out of its overcoded forms’ and put it back into contact with its vitality, ‘its living flows, its inhuman and inorganic nature.’¹¹

The second chapter deals further with the ethical questions associated with Deleuze & Guattari’s mystic atheism/onto-aesthetics through an analysis of Spinoza. Zepke develops a rich and illuminating account of the contours of Spinozist ontology and argues for an essential

9 *AAM*, p. 9.

10 *AAM*, p. 8.

11 *AAM*, p. 8.

link between Spinoza's third kind of knowledge (beatitude) and what he terms 'the art of atheistic mysticism'.¹² For Zepke a certain mystical understanding developed within Spinoza's 'intense expressions of the infinitude of God/Nature' serves to further liberate the 'image of art' from the auspices of representation. Indeed, for Zepke:

Spinoza offers an alternative understanding of art, one in which it expresses the productive dynamics of being, and so places its ontological function on the same plane of immanence as its expressive existence.¹³

Zepke thus effectively argues in these opening chapters that a unique blending of 'Nietzsche's physiology of overcoming' and 'Spinoza's mystical trajectory of reason' constitutes Deleuze & Guattari's new image of art. His subsequent chapters focus much more on analysing specific affectual assemblages in relation to Deleuze & Guattari's onto-aesthetics – i.e. cinema and painting. Chapter three concentrates on Deleuze's cinematic philosophy and develops an account that emphasises the transformative potential associated with visionary and mystic aspects of new cinematic expression. In exploring this particular aspect Zepke draws upon Bergson's philosophy and demonstrates its significance within Deleuze's account of the two distinct forms of cinema – Movement-Image and Time-Image. Interestingly, Zepke credits Bergson (in addition to Spinoza) for being partly responsible for the mystical or spiritual dimensions that Deleuze associates with contemporary film. For example, when writing of Deleuze's development of the Time-Image Zepke writes:

Bergson's 'Spirit' is immanent to life as what gives life, a type of thought utterly material, but one that takes us beyond the rational limits of human being. This life is what Deleuze believes the spirit of cinema discovers as the vital movement that animates its images...It is the immanent and inorganic life of duration, expressed in the perceptive mechanism of the brain as it constructs the new. The problem for Deleuze will therefore be to show how the cine-brain "ascends" to the immanent and virtual plane of duration without transcending its actual images,

¹² *AAM*, p. 73.

¹³ *AAM*, p. 75.

to show, in other words, how the cine-brain constructs images in such a way as to express their spiritual dimension.¹⁴

In addition to this informative discussion of Bergson in relation to Deleuze's understanding of the spiritual development of cinema, Zepke also considers the role Peirce's semiotics play in Deleuze's cinematic thought, the historical role of montage, faciality and the visionary contours of the new Crystal-Image in cinema, before concluding with a useful discussion of modern cinema's anti-representationalist 'powers of the false' considered here as its ultimate artistic power. He highlights Deleuze's Nietzschean insight with regard to modern cinema's capacity to raise the false to power and thus liberate the image from 'appearances as well as truth':

The Crystal-Image enjoys the power of the false ontologically, for it is the vital power constructing and expressing an absolutely immanent and univocal duration, no longer a duration as the "outside" of time, but an "internal outside", a creative "will" of cine-thought emerging in a new cinematic aesthetics.¹⁵

Zepke demonstrates how the new image's power of the false (through its effective *suspension* of the actual world) is co-extensive with philosophy's non-representationalist capacity for thinking the *real*. This, as he acknowledges, is what Deleuze (adopting the notion from Spinoza) terms the 'Spiritual Automaton' presented to thought by modern cinema. This is a form of cinema, a new image of art, capable of producing an image of the invisible and the unthinkable for thought – 'a visionary power of inorganic life as the unthinkable that makes us think and see something impossible to think and see.'¹⁶

An account of the visionary power being solicited by modern cinema is further developed by Zepke in the following chapter on painting. An account of the 'creative process, the "art" of absolute deterritorialisation', which Zepke argues is prevalent in all artforms, is presented here via a meditation on the specific artform of painting. He provides a very clear and convincing account of the processes of relative

14 *AAM*, p. 82.

15 *AAM*, p. 105.

16 *AAM*, p. 114.

and absolute deterritorialisation undertaken by painting (a critical ethics of composition and assemblage in the material of paint) through an engaging case study of Venetian painting and Modernist abstraction. Crucial to Zepke's account here is his account of the precise significance of the German art historian Wilhelm Worringer to Deleuze & Guattari's processual model of de-stratification and abstraction in painting.

Chapter five sees Zepke develop one of the most sophisticated and detailed readings yet to appear in English of Deleuze & Guattari's onto-aesthetic model of the artwork as presented in their final collaborative work *What is Philosophy?*¹⁷ This chapter involves a critical discussion of their model in relation to the models of Romanticism and Modernism. He argues for an understanding of Deleuze & Guattari's model as a form of 'mystical modernism' which he carefully differentiates from Romanticism. For him their model entails a 'final mystical evaporation of a distinction between art and its creative chaomic Life' through its concentration upon a *haecceity* account of sensation:

The machinery of modernist art produces a molecularised material and captures and renders sensible its chaomic forces... This implies a move beyond Romanticism as a pure expressionism, to an art capable of constructing the universe, and a transformation of "Nature" into a "mechanosphere"... Modernism, Deleuze & Guattari argue, is an art – an abstract Machine – whose matter-function no longer obeys a romantic or classical form, but constructs a material expression adequate to the chaomic forces it has released – no longer expression through disjunction, but expression through construction.¹⁸

Arguably, one can hear the echo of Badiou's description of Deleuze's onto-aesthetic expressionism most strongly at this point in Zepke's book. Indeed, he goes on to observe that 'in creating a finite that restores the infinite art embodies an ongoing and infinite creationism.'¹⁹ He concludes this important chapter by again insisting upon their being a powerful link between this quasi-mystical modernist understanding of the artwork and a pragmatic and experimental 'politics of existence'. Thus,

¹⁷ Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F. (1994), *What is Philosophy?*, Burchell, G. and Tomlinson, H. (trans.), London, Verso.

¹⁸ *AAM*, pp. 174-5.

¹⁹ *AAM*, p. 182.

insofar as the artwork performatively expresses a powerful consonance with the becoming of Life (co-creation), Zepke argues that art performs a crucial act of resistance to the *given* – ‘all the opinions, perceptions and affections which tell us who we are and that prevent us from creating – from truly living.’²⁰ For him, Deleuze & Guattari’s model ultimately proposes a view of art as creating new forms of life as the very means for resisting the stultifying existing forms of actuality– ‘outside our stratifications, our comfortable organicism, and opinionated thoughts. Art seethes in the ‘primitive swamps of life’ currently confined to the edges of our biological maps, but appearing in sensations that overflow human perceptions and affections to take us somewhere else.’²¹

In chapter six Zepke produces perhaps the most concentrated analysis of what he terms a ‘specific affectual assemblage’ of his whole book through a series of reflections on Deleuze’s most detailed work on the art of painting – *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*.²² Zepke carefully unfolds some of the key notions that Deleuze develops for understanding the art of painting within his specific analyses of Bacon’s attempt to ‘paint the convulsions of the flesh’. This includes the Diagram, the Figure, Haptic Seeing, Colour Modulation, the Body-Without-Organs, and Deleuze’s opposition to Phenomenology. Over the space of thirty pages Zepke produces an extremely compelling and insightful commentary on Deleuze’s *Logic of Sensation*. Arguably, this is the single best piece of philosophical work to yet appear in English to properly address and deal with the full detail and complexity of Deleuze’s analyses of painting.

Zepke concludes this impressive and original book by returning us to his opening reflections on the role of the abstract machine with regard to breaking with and going beyond the human condition – ‘How to break through limitations on life in order to extend our compositions as far as the infinite, to succeed in a becoming-universe?’²³ For him the answer to this problem resides within what he terms throughout the book a mystical art, yet one that remains atheist, an art capable of constructing and

20 *AAM*, p. 182.

21 *AAM*, p. 183.

22 Deleuze, G. (2004), *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, Smith, D. (trans.) London, Continuum.

23 *AAM*, p. 219.

expressing a universe through the haecceity of sensation, the infinite through the finite, an art that is capable of restoring a sense of life as *infinite becoming*. He ends by reflecting upon the challenge represented by Deleuze & Guattari's particular onto-aesthetics – which he names the challenge of belief or faith. Since, he argues, our normative and organic relation to the world has been fractured and irreparably broken, the artwork's task is to restore to us a renewed relation to the world, a relation governed by transformed ontological coordinates. The nature of this renewed relation, as Deleuze himself acknowledges, is one of belief. Zepke concludes his book by addressing us with this challenge directly:

This is the faith of the truly intoxicated, an atheistic belief in this world as a being-in-the-world, a mystic materialism without any transcendent dimension. This is the belief that our sensation encompasses man and the world in a cosmic co-creation, and is, finally, our belief in art, the belief necessary to art.²⁴

Simon O'Sullivan's book, *Art Encounters Deleuze & Guattari*, shares Zepke's concern with a pragmatic renewal of thought *beyond representation*. O'Sullivan is also concerned with the degree to which the artwork harnesses an engaged politics of becoming that is co-creative with the ontogenesis immanent to Life. O'Sullivan's particular emphasis, which is differentiated from Zepke's emphasis on mystic atheism, resides in the exploration of creative potentials for a politics of becoming in Deleuze & Guattari's onto-aesthetics through the nature of the 'encounter'.

O'Sullivan begins his study by reflecting upon Deleuze's claim in *Difference and Repetition* regarding the link between the encounter and what 'forces us to think'. These opening reflections really underpin the entire ethos of this book which argues passionately, eloquently and polemically for the pragmatic value of genuine affective encounters with artworks in 'opening up new worlds and new territories.'²⁵ He contrasts the genuine encounter with the object of recognition that he claims, following Deleuze, merely serves to confirm the 'world we inhabit' together with our own existing subjectivity. The object of recognition is

²⁴ *AAM*, p. 228..

²⁵ O'Sullivan, S. (2006), *Art Encounters Deleuze & Guattari: Thought Beyond Representation*, London & New York, Palgrave Macmillan, p. 3, hereafter *AEDG*.

always, O'Sullivan notes, a representation of the actual, and is indicative of the habitual quality of the non-encounter. With a genuine encounter our world and our normative sense of self is challenged and disrupted. It is as if, Deleuze claims, when writing of contemporary cinema – 'you can't escape the shock which arouses the thinker in you'²⁶ This is not, O'Sullivan observes, merely disruptive, rather it is *productive* – it is 'the affirmation of a new world...a way of seeing and thinking this world differently.' This, he claims, is the genuinely *creative* aspect of the encounter – the encounter insistently obliges us to *think otherwise*. He notes that disruption and affirmation are the two elements of the genuinely creative encounter, and that it is within the artwork that these two elements can be successfully brought into conjunction. Art, for O'Sullivan, is the name 'of an object of an encounter', but also the 'name of the encounter itself'. Like Zepke, O'Sullivan recognises the ethical-aesthetic dimension of the onto-aesthetic realm, the irreducibly *critical* dimension of the artwork in the effort to go beyond representation, to counter-actualise and encounter the life of becoming associated with the virtual or spiritual dimension. This is precisely the value for O'Sullivan of Deleuze & Guattari's onto-aesthetics, that it can offer us another way of thinking about the encounters we have with modern and contemporary art, beyond representation, 'towards matter and its expressive potentialities'.²⁷ For him the whole process of encounter is about opening up creative possibility precisely by challenging and resisting the very structures whereby possibility, potentiality and creativity are closed down or kept at bay.

The novelty and significance of O'Sullivan's study is contained precisely in way he aims to subject Deleuze & Guattari's work to this same creative process, the way he, like Zepke, inscribes an ethical or political imperative into his reading and his mobilisation of Deleuze & Guattari. For O'Sullivan this is absolutely vital if their original insights concerning the fundamental possibility of a *renewal* of thought offered by encounters with art are to be maintained. It is crucial, he argues, not to render Deleuze & Guattari in an overly academic fashion and as a consequence effectively reduce their onto-aesthetic thought to just another set of methodological givens. Rather, he insists, a way has to be

26 Deleuze, G. (1989), *Cinema 2 : the time-image*, Tomlinson, H. and Galeta, R. (trans.), Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, p. 156.

27 *AEDG*, p. 6.

sought which preserves its performative dynamism and creative potential. It is thus necessary to approach their thought in a very particular way. O'Sullivan argues that 'we need to repeat the energy and style of his writings without merely representing his thought.'²⁸

He therefore proposes to undertake a series of *productive* thought-experiments with Deleuze & Guattari rather than scholarly exposition, or as he puts it, 'different attempts at bringing Deleuze into contact with different milieus.'²⁹ This essentially takes the form of a very personal archive of encounters with modern and contemporary art which involve the selective utilisation of certain conceptual resources drawn from Deleuze & Guattari's thought, sometimes in a highly unorthodox fashion. His highly original approach is an extremely effective and successful utilisation of Deleuze & Guattari as philosophers of the encounter, and signals an important means for exploring the unusual contours of his (and our) affective encounters with the living machines of art. The five chapters that make up the book can be summarised as dealing respectively with the following themes associated with encounters – connectivity, affectivity, collectivity and subjectivity, the virtual and the 'fold'.

In his first chapter O'Sullivan outlines a distinct model of *connectivity* associated with encountering an artwork which is drawn from Deleuze & Guattari. The particular notion mobilised here is that of the 'rhizome' as introduced by Deleuze & Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus*. He writes of how the notion of the rhizome might be utilised to challenge certain orthodoxies within Critical and Poststructuralist theory (indeed O'Sullivan credits it with doing precisely this in his own work) insofar as it appears to have the capacity to express novel transversal connections, new forms of alliance and heterogeneous forms of communication. He argues that the rhizome introduces a new non-arborescent image of thought that is extremely significant with regard to reflections upon the *challenging* nature of art-practice and its connections to other milieus and a broader ontology of life. This leads O'Sullivan into a discussion about the artwork as a type of rhizomatic 'machinic assemblage' with a prescribed set of functions. Here, he writes, 'we no longer ask the interminable question: what does art, what does this

28 *AEDG*, p. 6.

29 *AEDG*, p. 6.

artwork, mean? But rather, what does art, what does this artwork, do?'³⁰ By refocusing attention on the way an artwork as a machinic assemblage connects to other machines, to other milieus, together with the question of how it *functions* in its connectivity, is to move, O'Sullivan claims, to a fundamentally expanded account of art-practice, one that seems much more relevant to encounters with modern and contemporary art. The new forms of connectivity, signalled by the notion of the rhizome, allow for fundamental remappings of the affectual topology of art and specific artworks, which would allow 'for different affects and possible trajectories to arise'.³¹ O'Sullivan concludes the chapter with some thought-provoking remarks concerning the degree to which this expanded rhizomatic understanding of art-practice may allow for art history to remap an entirely alternative genealogy of the affectivity of art together with a simultaneous remapping of an entirely new genealogy of subjectivity (or *beyond* subjectivity):

To reactivate the frozen event that is art, to map out the 'past' of the object but also allow the future potentialities, to map out the rhizomatic connections through time and space, and at the same time, everywhere and always to think about ourselves as being in rhizomatic connection with our objects of study and to allow these creative connections, these mappings, to transform such objects and ourselves...Indeed this project might also be characterised as ethical inasmuch as it involves exploring our potential for becoming and our potential for self-overcoming.³²

In chapter two O'Sullivan, in arguing for a move beyond representation and a return to a fundamentally *affective* experience or encounter with the artwork, turns his attention to Deleuze & Guattari's haecceity model of the artwork in *What is Philosophy?* In constructing what he terms the 'ethicoaesthetics of affect', he augments this account with references to certain notions derived from Deleuze's *Logic of Sensation*, specifically the figural, the diagram and the probe-head. In justifying his appeal to the primary significance of affective encounters with artworks, O'Sullivan refers initially to Spinoza's account of joyful encounters, 'beatitude' and immanent affectivity. He proceeds to provide a rich and detailed account of the following notions drawn from *What is*

30 *AEDG*, p. 22.

31 *AEDG*, p. 36.

32 *AEDG*, p. 37.

Philosophy? and *The Logic of Sensation* – percept, affect, blocs of sensation, abstract lines, monuments, probe-heads and becomings. O’Sullivan argues passionately and effectively for the realisation of these concepts in any adequate account of the fundamentally *affective* encounters with artworks, encounters beyond *recognition* and *representation*. He ends his chapter again with some highly suggestive remarks concerning the implicitly future-oriented nature of the affective artwork, given its challenging and disruptive quality, the fact, as O’Sullivan states, that it is ‘ontologically different’:

It is not made for an already constituted audience but in fact calls its audience into being...In presenting us with a new composite art encourages us to feel and reason in new ways... Such art produces a line of flight from within already constituted territories so as to produce new modes of becoming and new worlds for a people yet to come.³³

These remarks serve as a prelude to O’Sullivan’s subsequent discussion of collectivity, subjectivity and the Minor in chapter three. Here O’Sullivan turns his attention towards a reflection on what he terms the ‘political effectivity of art’. He begins with a consideration of the notion of the Minor drawn from Deleuze & Guattari’s collaborative study of Kafka,³⁴ where the notion is developed as a certain type of politically resistant writing capable of disrupting the existing set of Major dominant cultural codes, stratifications, practices etc. via a sophisticated activation, through language, of Minor or Molecular transformative tendencies. Deleuze & Guattari argue that the articulation of a minor language of resistance always involves the activation or calling into being of a non-existent form of collectivity (a ‘people to come’). It is this last idea associated with minor literature that O’Sullivan seeks to mobilise and apply to contemporary art practices (or what he terms encounters with certain forms of ‘minor art’). O’Sullivan emphasises not just the critically resistant aspect of minor art (i.e. its refusal or negation of the Major), but what he terms its ‘affirmative function’, or the degree to which it involves the creation, or bringing into being, of new forms of subjectivity and

33 *AEDG*, p. 68.

34 Deleuze, G. & Guattari, F. (1986), *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature*, Polan, D. (trans.), Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press.

collectivity – ‘A minor art is involved in the invention and imagining of new subjectivities as well as turning away from those already in place.’³⁵

Here O’Sullivan emphasises, much as Zepke does in his work, the essentially constructivist and politically engaged aspect of experimental and counter-actualising art-practice, i.e. its crucial role in constructing new worlds, new thoughts and forms of bodily affects, and new forms of subjectivity and collectivity. He argues:

For both Deleuze & Guattari there is an emphasis on our pragmatic involvement in the material production of our own subjectivities. Is this perhaps a call for an expanded notion of what art-practice is? Certainly it is to realise that one of the roles of art – understood as an activity of creatively interacting with the world – is precisely the production of subjectivity...In such an understanding of the ethicoaesthetics of subjectivity, art history might become replaced by a kind of art chemistry and art cartography, the mapping out of new complexes and of the possibilities of life that these new complexes allow.³⁶

The book concludes with two chapters where O’Sullivan is much more concerned with presenting rich and absorbing case studies of encounters with certain forms of contemporary art. He draws upon Deleuze & Guattari’s onto-aesthetics and provides himself a rich array of conceptual resources to produce a dazzling and philosophically sophisticated series of reflections on the transformative affect of these encounters. Chapter 4 consists of O’Sullivan’s reflections on two notions drawn from Deleuze & Guattari’s philosophy, the virtual and the plane of immanence. In developing a reading of both of these interrelated notions there is an impressive excursus into a case study of two projects by the landscape artist Robert Smithson, the *Yucatan Mirror Displacements* and the *Spiral Jetty*. This particular case study is a really compelling example of the type of creative and productive account that can and should be developed by those wishing to mobilise Deleuze & Guattari’s onto-aesthetics *non-reductively* into reflections upon the field of actual art-practice. The final chapter completes this original and valuable work with a highly unusual but much needed consideration of Deleuze’s work on

35 *AEDG*, p. 76.

36 *AEDG*, p. 97.

The Fold and the neo-Baroque.³⁷ O'Sullivan briefly introduces some of the major elements involved in Deleuze's work on Leibniz and the Fold before immediately mobilising them in a productive way with an account of what O'Sullivan terms 'folding in painting'. This account of painting concentrates its attention on the specific example of Gerhard Richter's work. O'Sullivan concludes with an intriguing and productive account of the neo-Baroque in Deleuze, and argues for the neo-Baroque as an articulation of a radically new form of nomadic subjectivity. O'Sullivan concludes the work with an experimental and performative manifesto, (drawn from his reflections on different types of encounter with art thought *through* and *with* Deleuze & Guattari) for what he terms 'an imagined future collective'. The manifesto which closes O'Sullivan's impressive study concludes with the following lines, which share the same imperative expressed within Zepke's work:

Our practice affirms transformation: we are concerned less with mundane consciousness than with cosmic consciousness. We believe in a Baroque practice as the only appropriate response to these troubled and terror-stricken times.³⁸

37 Deleuze, G. (1992), *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, Conley, T. (trans.), London, Continuum.

38 *AEDG*, p. 157