

(In)Animate Semiotics: Virtuality and Deleuzian Illusion(s) of Life

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Abstract

It is well known that despite his close engagement with cinema, Gilles Deleuze was less concerned with animated film, being somewhat dismissive of its capabilities. In recent years, however, a number of attempts have been made - most notably by William Schaffer, Thomas Lamarre, and Dan Torre to construct Deleuzian positions in animation theory. This paper outlines some of these approaches, whilst engaging critically with Torre's writings. In particular, it foregrounds Torre's neglect of the post-structural, political dimension of Deleuzian thought, through an examination of the concepts of faciality, the close up, and relation as they occur in Deleuzian and Deleuzo-Guattarian philosophy. This is in part facilitated through a comparison of Stuart Blackton's *Humorous Phases of Funny Faces* (1906) – a work directly addressed by Torre, and Emile Cohl's *Fantasmagorie* (1908) – a work which he largely passes by. It is claimed here, that despite a number of apparent similarities, the animations of Cohl and Blackton express a radically divergent series of ontological commitments. Cohl offers the audience an experience of chaotic, mutable, relational complexity that revels in its incoherence, whilst Blackton presents a series of more straightforward set pieces, dwelling for the most part upon object-centric representational form. The tension between representation and becoming that occurs between these works is employed to facilitate a critical engagement with Torre's process-cognitivism. It is suggested that Torre's work, though exceptional in its pedagogic value, is likewise expressive of this tension, and that in its effort firstly to combine a series of process philosophical and cognitivist ideas, and secondly to unpack the radical ideas of Deleuze through the more conservative philosophy of Nicholas Rescher, it runs the risk of falling back into a quasi-Kantian philosophy of generality and representation.

Keywords

Animation, Becoming, Cognition, Faciality, Politics, Process, Representation, Stuart Blackton, Emile Cohl, Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, Immanuel Kant, Nicholas Rescher

The philosopher Gilles Deleuze devoted little space to the discussion of animation. Indeed, as William Schaffer has noted, on the one and only occasion when he did address the subject, he was somewhat dismissive of its capabilities, positioning the animated film as a subset of early cinema - as something which was closely related to the early, and for the most part live-action films that were analysed in order to develop his notion of the cinematic *movement* and *action* images (Schaffer, 2006: 456; Deleuze, 2005). For Deleuze, cinema before the Second World War was broadly concerned with the ordering and narrativisation of events – with the construction or description of a situation through the controlled distribution of movement (or sections of movement) in space (Bogue, 2003: 108). According to Deleuze, it was out of this highly structured approach to movement that pre-war cinema first developed its repertoire of cinematic techniques, such as the cut, the close-up and the long shot (Deleuze, 2005: 31-33).

In his second volume of writings on film, Deleuze went on to contrast this mode of linear spatio-temporal organisation with a cinema of the *time* image, which he claimed emerged out of the postwar climate of Italian neo realism and French new wave (Deleuze, 2000: 1-13). For Deleuze, time images served to contest the primarily object and action-oriented agenda of pre-war cinema. More closely associated with experimental approaches to film making, they offered a somewhat unmoored, syncretic vision of a crystalline reality that was ultimately resistant to capture and closure. Deleuze's notion of the time image suggests a picture of perception that is partial, associative, fleeting, intensive and less directly linked to the regularities of sensory-motor action (Deleuze, 2005: 205-219).

Despite Deleuze's somewhat lackluster engagement with the animated film, a number of latter-day animation theorists have seen significant resonance between animated phenomena and a series of core Deleuzian concerns. In recent years, various attempts have been made - most notably by Schaffer (2007), Lamarre (2009, 2010), Torre (2013, 2015, 2017) and Jenkins (2016) - to construct a series of Deleuzian positions in animation theory. This reappraisal of the significance of Deleuzian thought with respect to the formulation of a theory of animation in many ways mirrors Deleuze's own re-evaluation of the philosopher Henri Bergson's relationship to cinema (Deleuze, 2005: 1-3). Writing in the early twentieth century, Bergson - one of Deleuze's most significant philosophical progenitors – had been highly critical of the then only recently invented cinematic apparatus, arguing that the cinematograph dissected the flow of time into a series of petrified instants, which were then illegitimately reconstituted as a form of false, illusory and overly analytical movement (Bergson, 1944: 295-377). When developing his own account of cinema, Deleuze suggested that Bergson's critique had been misplaced, and that it had arisen partly out of the philosopher only having experienced the cinematic apparatus in its relatively crude, nascent state, with low,

sometimes hand-cranked frame rates and fluctuating levels of exposure. According to Deleuze, the outputs of a more technologically and artistically developed cinema, were highly resonant with the image-centric ontology that was the cornerstone of Bergson's own philosophical thinking as developed in his *Matter and Memory* (Bergson, 2005: 9-10). That is to say, Bergson, attempting to walk a line between materialism and idealism, had proposed a metaphysics in which the world was ultimately constituted not by rigid and unyielding material objects, nor by overly ethereal or ephemeral ideas, but by a plethora of flowing and interacting 'material-images'. For Deleuze - who both inherited and developed many of Bergson's ideas - this would seem to be the very thing which the cinema of his own time, was able to provide.

The growing interest in Deleuze in the context of animation studies, serves as a testament to a similar re-appraisal of Deleuzian thought that could be said to be taking place with respect to the theorisation of animation. That is to say, for a number of contemporary animation theorists, Deleuze's dismissal of animation as a subset of pre-war cinema would seem to have been similarly overhasty - serving to occlude the highly mutable, plastic character of animated form, which is very much in tune with Deleuze's own process-philosophical depiction of reality not only as a 'matter flow of universally interacting matter images' (Bogue, 2003: 38) but also as a highly metamorphic process of transformation, or 'becoming'. For a growing number of animation theorists, the metamorphic and kinetic aspects of reality that Deleuzian philosophy would seem to at once foreground, idealise, and venerate, are the very things that animation - if thought on its own terms and taken out of the shadow of cinema in general - is capable of delivering.

Torre's Approach to Process and Cognition

It is not unusual for Deleuze's commentators to position Deleuze, like Bergson before him, as a philosopher of process (Mullarkey, 2006; Williams, 2003). Most recently, in the context of animation studies, Dan Torre's writings have made explicit some of the connections between Deleuzian ideas, process-philosophical thinking and the production and consumption of animation. Torre's work draws attention to the kinetic aspects of process thought - the way in which it presents reality as flux, the way in which it attempts to dispense with nouns whilst prioritising verbs, and the way in which it depicts the world as a multiplicity of processes that are in some sense nested or layered together (Torre, 2014: 49, 56; Torre, 2017: 8, 126, 168, 188, 208). Thus, Torre emphasises the dynamism and the openness of process philosophy - its distinctive presentation of the kinetic, creative, developmental character of reality - aligning this with the notion of 'becoming' that he sees as being foregrounded in the work of Deleuze, and noting the resonance between these ideas and the practice of animation (Torre, 2014: 49-50; Torre, 2017: 8-9, 163).

In this sense, Torre could be said to have further radicalised Lev Manovich's claim - influential in the field of expanded animation - that given its dependence upon the phi-phenomenon, and given the amount of digital manipulation a 'live action' film typically undergoes, cinema per se has a far weaker connection than was once thought with the indexical, photographic image, and that as a consequence contemporary cinema should perhaps more properly be thought as a subset of animation (Manovich, 2001: 34, 294-298). Manovich's claim can be seen to have problematised two of the most traditional responses to the animated film that occur in the context of film theory - namely the tendency to present cinema as an all-encompassing category which serves ultimately to envelop animation (which is echoed in Deleuze's all too brief engagement with the subject), and the tendency to exclude or to dismiss animation as a medium of artifice - or to present it as cinema's illegitimate heir. In his most recent work in animation theory, Torre could be said to push Manovich's position further - going beyond an analysis of any specific medium or technology of representation, choosing instead to *internalise* processes of animation and to emphasise their constitutive role in cognition, perception and imagination. It is in this sense that, for Torre, the process of animation per se transcends any specific medium, becoming the very condition of experience itself.

From the perspective of Deleuzian philosophy, Torre's work is useful in its ability to shed light upon some of Deleuze's philosophical concepts (from relatively accessible ideas such as assemblage through to more esoteric notions such as non-linear temporality). Whilst Deleuze's prose is often exuberant and exhilarating in character, it can at first glance, seem willfully obscure and highly esoteric. Accordingly, Torre's more sober account of assimilated, fragmented and layered representation is pedagogically useful, and can be instructive in helping to understand Deleuze's position - drawing attention, for instance, to the way in which moments of perception and processes of imagination might 'assimilate various diverse memories' (Torre, 2014: 55; Torre, 2017: 113) - combining 'the walk cycle of our brother and the lip-synched mouth movements of our neighbour' in order to apply them in a moment of imaginative reverie to a 'person whom we only briefly noticed sitting across from us on the train' (Torre, 2014: 55; Torre, 2017: 113).

Deleuze's Critique of Cognitive Representation

When seen from a more orthodox Deleuzian perspective, however, the exceptional clarity of Torres' writing does not come without a price. Arguably, in attempting to formulate a process-cognitivist position, he endeavors to assimilate two lines of enquiry that appear difficult to straightforwardly reconcile in the context of Deleuzian thought. On the one hand, he addresses the processual dimension of Deleuzian philosophy - foregrounding the kinetic, the transformative and the absolute ontological priority of the new. On the other hand, however, he endeavors to assimilate this processual dimension of Deleuze's thinking

with a number of theories arising out of cognitive science – a discipline which traditionally couples the schematic modelling of information systems with the findings of contemporary neuroscience in order to address our faculties of representation.

Torre's Tacit Kantianism

Whilst there is clearly a processual dimension to much contemporary cognitive theory, it is important to recognise that Deleuze considered Immanuel Kant – the philosopher most often positioned as the founding figure of cognitivism – as his philosophical ‘enemy’ (Deleuze, 1984: xv). For Deleuze, the error of Kantian thought lay firstly in its entrenchment of structure into our perception of the world through the internalisation of a mode of representation, and secondly in its presumption that any encountered thing is only another identifiable instance of an already existing concept. For Deleuze this recognition-oriented, representational aspect of Kantian thought was dangerous in so far as it served to neutralise the power of difference, and to subtract any potential for genuinely creative encounter (Deleuze, 2001: 176-177; Lefebvre, 2008: 2-3, 59-62). For Deleuze, in the context of Kantian philosophy, experiential novelty was usurped through apriori acts of recognition which served to divest thought of any potential for creativity – presenting it instead as an organ of identification (Deleuze, 2001: 303).

Whilst Torre's process-cognitivism clearly stresses both the distributed and fragmented character of perception, foregrounding the multiple layers of processing (image, movement and colour, for instance) that are synthesised in any phenomenal outcome, it likewise expresses a number of Kantian traits. This is perhaps most noticeable in Torre's leaning towards identity and generality - indeed, it seems significant that Torre's exposition dwells for the most part upon seemingly vital, but nevertheless *figurative* animated form – the ‘boiling lines’ of William Kentridge and Bill Plympton, along with the ‘living sketches’ of Stuart Blackton and Lev Yilmaz (Torre, 2015; Torre, 2017). Arguably, this emphasis upon animated objects and animated characters is accompanied by a similarly quasi-Kantian conception of the self (or subject) as the *owner* or producer of phenomenal experience. Like many contemporary cognitivists, Torre attempts to walk something of a middle line, developing an account of perception and mental imaging which attempts to synthesise ‘top-down’, representational aspects of cognition, with a ‘bottom up’ more materialist analysis that signposts the at once processual, distributed, and somewhat chaotic operation of our neuro-physiological processes. The materialism of the latter is perhaps more in tune with Deleuze's own philosophical position, and it is this that is foregrounded in Torre's account. This ‘bottom up’ aspect of Torre's position stresses the way in which our perception is constantly in process, how it depends upon embodied movement (the rapid movement of the eyes, alongside movements of the head and torso) and how perception itself might be considered an at once dynamic and synthetic process of sketching (Torre,

2014: 53; Torre, 2017: 107). However, there are moments when this bottom up analysis shades into, and ultimately gives way to a top-down approach in so far as Torre suggests that that the resulting ‘fragmented saccades of [a] scene are amalgamated in our working memory’ (Torre, 2014: 53) where they are subjected to multiple layers of processing. Torre goes on to argue in a decidedly more Kantian fashion, that the ‘saccadic-fragments of visual information’ create a ‘visual trace image’, and then ‘generate cognitive images by a multifaceted compositing of stored imagery elements’ (Torre, 2017: 125-126). Ultimately, in focusing upon the processual machinations of our perception of coherent form, a more strongly delineated conception of self emerges, whilst the more radical, post-structural, political orientation of Deleuzian philosophy becomes somewhat obscured, along with its emphasis upon affective, potentialistic, and relational modes of transformation.

Comparison of Cohl and Blackton

Torre’s occlusion of the poststructuralist orientation of Deleuzian thought becomes particularly apparent when we consider his selection of Stuart Blackton’s *Humorous Phases of Funny Faces* (1906) as a vehicle for clarifying the affinity between animation and process-philosophical thinking. As we shall see, in focusing almost exclusively upon the way in which Blackton’s film reveals processes of drawing and erasure that are ordinarily hidden, Torre sidesteps the rich territory for political discussion that might be facilitated by an examination of the content, and the ontological assumptions of Blackton’s film. This seems like something of a missed opportunity given that there is much discussion of the affective and political dimensions of the face in both the sole authored writings of Deleuze and the collaborative works of Deleuze and Guattari. Discussion of the face is prominent not only in Deleuze’s writings on the affective dimension of the close-up in his first volume on cinema, where he considers the ‘intensive’ nature of the close-up and the face as an emitter of affective signs, but also in Deleuze and Guattari’s writings on faciality in *A Thousand Plateaus*, where the face emerges as a form of over-coded political capture - as a standard by which difference is at once identified, problematised and subjected to discipline. With this in mind, it is important to recognise that alternative processual lineages of animation might be traced that are more in tune with both the political and potentialistic aspects of Deleuzian aesthetics. This might be performed, firstly by considering pioneers of non-figurative, abstract animation such as Oskar Fischinger (who Torre only briefly addresses, whilst emphasising the more cohesive moments of figuration that at once bookend and anchor animated sequences of metamorphosis) and secondly through the anti-essentialist, relational

animation of Emile Cohl, a contemporary of Blackton, who is noticeably absent from Torre's writings, and whose work - whilst in some sense figurative - is nevertheless more fluid and chaotic in character.¹

Emile Cohl's *Fantasmagorie* (1908), stands as an example from the history of animation that is no less seminal than Blackton's work, but which is perhaps more in tune with many of Deleuze's post-structural, process philosophical concerns. Contra Torre, it is claimed here that despite their engagement with the process of drawing, and their relatively brief encounter with the smudging and smearing of chalk, Blackton's films, are predominately object-, as opposed to process-oriented. In this sense Cohl and Blackton's animations could be said to express a divergent set of ontological commitments, and to follow, or perhaps even initiate, divergent trajectories with respect to the history of animation. That is to say, in his emphasis upon the kinetic, transformational plasticity of the animated line, Cohl begins a lineage that will encompass many forms of animation - from the frenetic Claymation of Bruce Bikford's *Prometheus' Garden* (1988), through to the more lyrical, rotoscoped 'single line' animation of Kazuhiko Okushita's *The Red Thread* (2010). Indeed, we might go so far to suggest that it is the legacy of Cohl that stands as the seed for Disney's commercially successful principles of squash, stretch, and overlapping action. Indeed, the relationship between Disney's principles and the paintings of Francis Bacon has been explored by Simon Pummell (1998), a relationship that becomes particularly telling, when we consider the large part that an analysis of Bacon's work played in the development of Deleuze's aesthetics in *The Logic of Sensation* (Deleuze, 2003).

Duration, Possibility and Potentiality

Perhaps the most obvious and notable divergence between Cohl and Blackton's films relates to what Sergie Eisenstein famously described as the 'plasmaticness' of animation – that is, its openness, instability, and transformative potential (Eisenstein, 1988: 21). This concept has proved attractive to the increasing number of animation theorists beginning to explore animation from a Deleuzian perspective. For instance, in his discussion of Keiji Nakazawa's graphic novel, *Barefoot Gen*, Thomas Lamarre (2010) constructs a concept of the 'plastic line' out of consideration of its calligraphic qualities. Lamarre explains that his notion of the plastic line develops out of Eisenstein's plasmaticness – and explains how this was contrasted by Eisenstein himself with the 'heartless geometrising' of Euclid (Lamarre, 2010: 281). Lamarre, draws attention to its 'poly-formic' amoeba like 'contour' of the plastic line (Lamarre, 2010: 282) and emphasises the way in which it is able to 'enter into relations' with other points. In this sense, Lamarre's plastic line is positioned

¹ For an interesting discussion and overview of the pioneers of abstract animation, see Furniss (2008) - it is upon the relational complexity of Cohl, however, that we will focus for the remainder of this essay.

as potentialistic, transformative and fundamentally transitional in its kinetic capabilities. In a similar fashion, Schaffer notes how the on-screen imagistic transformations that are brought about by the self-affecting ‘invisible hand’ of the animator allow ‘the unexpected, even the impossible, to emerge at any-point-whatever’ - folding the duration of animator and character whilst also constituting the duration of the animated world (Schaffer, 2006: 462-466).

Whilst Schaffer and Lamarre each note an affinity between the hand-drawn and a set of Deleuzo-Bergsonian concerns with duration and transformation, it is perhaps Schaffer who develops this idea furthest - noting the temporal disparities between the mode of animated production and the mode of animated projection and citing Norman McLaren’s comment that ‘what happens *between* each frame is more important than what happens *on* each frame’ (Schaffer, 2006: 457). Arguably, such observations are broadly concerned with the potentialistic qualities of animation, and as such they serve to problematise, or at least to trouble Torre’s slightly restrictive, quasi-Kantian notion, that all forms of movement must fall straightforwardly under purely spatial categories (Torre, 2014: 52 ; Torre, 2017: 21).

As we have seen, despite his concern with process, Kantian themes of order and stability frequently manifest themselves in Torre’s writings. Kant famously internalised representation, suggesting that anything which constitutes an experience must fall under the orderly categories of time, space and relation. In a similar fashion, Torre suggests that all movement must fall under a spatial framework of ‘up, down, forward, back, left, right, accumulation and dispersion’ (Torre, 2014: 52). Similar tendencies are evident in Torre’s leaning towards notions of computational process – he notes, for instance, the way in which an imagined object can be ‘mentally rotated’ in a manner that is reminiscent of the machinations of 3D modelling software, and his discussion of the multifaceted composition of memory and perceptual experience is likewise suggestive of software-based production tools – with Torre frequently invoking interface metaphors, such as the layer and the timeline. In this sense, Torre’s approach to process reactivates a discussion prominent in early commentary on Deleuze concerning the differences between computational and philosophical senses of virtuality.

Computation, Cognitivism and Possibilistic Thought

The Deleuzian theorist and commentator Brian Massumi has noted an affinity between the concept of virtuality as it is used in the context of computational thinking and the philosophical concept of possibility – stressing its connection with simulation (the computational modelling of the states of affairs). Massumi positions possibilistic thought as being broadly concerned with function, clarity, and the recombination of

elements that can readily be envisaged, and which, as such, are already in some sense known. In contrast to this, Massumi notes how a focus upon *potentiality*, which he attributes to Deleuze's philosophical thinking of the virtual, is premised instead upon receptivity to the unknown, the emergence of the unprecedented, and the creative capacities of the natural world (Massumi, 2002: 137). For Massumi, the philosopher or practitioner oriented by potentialistic thought emphasises the power of contingency, resists deterministic and essentialist thinking, whilst welcoming the perpetually new territories that emerge out of a network of serendipitous connections largely situated in a virtual, potentialistic, realm.

Torre's comment, when trying to establish an affinity between processes of animation and processes of visual-spatial working memory, that 'anything is *possible* in animation and anything is *possible* in mental imagery' is telling in so far as it serves to foreground the possibilistic orientation of his process-cognitivism (Torre, 2014: 57). Central to Deleuze's critique of Kant is his dismissal of the notion of possibility as a creatively limiting recombination of existing generalities. Indeed, it is Torre's reliance upon a notion of processual generality that is perhaps most problematic from the perspective of Deleuzian thought. Torre makes much of the concept of the 'Concrete Universal' (Torre, 2017: 22) – a notion that he derives from the process philosophy of Nicholas Rescher, but which has its root in the philosophy of Hegel (another of Deleuze's enemies). Following Rescher (2006: 49), Torre suggests that any process is a process of a processual type (Torre, 2014: 50) – a process that is an instantiation of a general pattern, and which is capable of repetition (at an appropriate level of abstraction). This claim forms the basis of Torre's idea that one of the specificities of the medium of animation is its ability to abstract patterns of movement from one entity and then apply them to another - from the Director Ang Lee 'puppeting' the CGI instantiation of the Hulk using his own body, to the uncanny, anthropomorphic objects of Disney (magical lamps and wardrobes that possess human qualities). Whilst there is clearly a resonance here with Deleuzian notions of univocity and relational assemblage, it is important not to lose sight of the fact that Torre's account is also symptomatic of the tendency towards generality and possibility that Deleuze so strongly opposed in his critique of both Kantian and Hegelian philosophy (Deleuze, 2001). For Deleuze it was the repetition of difference, and not identity that was constitutive of reality, as well as its transformation. Significantly, the notion of *relation* – a cornerstone of much process-philosophical thinking on transformative potential - though in many ways implicit in much of Torre's work, is rarely directly addressed. That is to say, in accordance with his emphasis on actuality, Torre prefers to unpick the hidden complexity of objects and entities as opposed to addressing the nature - and transformative power - of relations per se.

The Striation of the Animated Plane

Out of Schaffer and Lamarre's discussion of the process of drawing by hand, there begins to emerge a second, less obvious dichotomy between traditions of art and industrialised animation - the symptoms of which can also be clearly located in the works of Cohl and Blackton. This relates to the gradual ordering, or – in Deleuzo-Guattarian terms - 'striation', of the animated plane – a process that might be connected with the development of industrial animation technologies and techniques. The industrialisation of animation is typically driven by issues of cost-effectivity and convenience, but also serves to inculcate processes of generic and standardised representation. Deleuze and Guattari (2005) famously contrast open, potentialistic, 'smooth' spaces that can be traversed in an undisciplined nomadic fashion, with more disciplined, ordered, 'striated' territories where the potential for movement becomes highly regulated. Arguably, the potentialistic character of hand-drawn animation, as well as the specificity of hand-drawn characterisation, which are collectively addressed by Schaffer and Lamarre, are in part compromised by the gradual industrial striation of the essentially open animated plane through the employment of a series of technical apparatuses.

Interestingly, the anti-representational, transformative tendencies that are most prominent in Cohl's *Fantasmagorie* were entirely produced by hand. Cohl was a member of the 'Incoherents' - an avante garde group of artists who were notorious for their celebration of laughter and the ludicrous (Crafton, 1993: 64). His *Fantasmagorie* offers the audience an experience of chaotic, mutable, relational complexity that revels in its incoherence. Indeed, from the perspective of Deleuzian philosophy, one of the most striking things about Cohl's film is the way in which it constructs a plane of almost entirely mutable relations. When screening *Fantasmagorie* to students, I often begin by noting the way in which Cohl's project seems to trouble our faculties of representation and the way in which it would seem to defeat any sense of narrative recall. I usually show the film and then simply ask if anyone can tell me what actually happened? Early in her book *Hollywood Flatlands*, Esther Leslie attempts to depict in narrative terms the action that takes place in Cohl's film, describing it as "an illogical narrative of cruelty and torture executed by people and things at war with each other". Here is a short fragment from Leslie's attempt to narrativise the film:

The gentleman sets the lady alight with his cigar, and her head swells into a sphere. For the next forty-seven seconds the clown is abused – first by the Michelin man, then by a soldier, then by a flower. The clown's head is ripped off his shoulders and a bottle shaped man bounces it up and down in a diablo shaped cup. The bottle-man turns into a bottle and fires its cork. Then it swallows up the clown, only to turn into a lotus flower and then into an elephant and finally a house ...the torture stops the clown once repaired.... swells up and floats away. (Leslie, 2002: 1-2)

Cohl, Blackton and Faciality

There is something eerily Deleuzian about both the form and content of Cohl's animation that, as we shall see shortly, facilitates reflection upon the multiple senses of the term 'relation' that can be located in Deleuze's work. Much like the philosophy of Deleuze, Cohl's animation seems to privilege mobility over stasis, chaos over order and nonsense over sense, collectively reflecting a process-philosophical commitment to the emergence of novelty and to the absolute ontological priority of change. In the case of Cohl this results in a radical form of both graphical and contextual mutability. It is in this sense that Cohl might be seen as an anti-essentialist animator – that is, as an animator less interested in the definitions and identities of things and more interested in dynamic vectors of becoming.

Blackton's more entrenched approach to form and identity is evidenced in his presentation of caricatural portraits of male and female faces, along with equally engrained depictions of cultural and racial stereotypes that are offered to the audience as entertainment. In an essay on the Creole cartoon, Mark Winokur goes so far as to suggest that the Irish characterisation in Blackton's *Humorous Faces* is not only stereotypical in terms of its graphic representation of physiognomic characteristics, but is also 'traditionally racist', with characters exhibiting clear traits of 'Irish temper and alcoholism' (Winokur, 2012: 59). This is further bolstered by his observation that before working as an animator, Blackton had starred in a vaudeville act that involved a process of rapid drawing, in which he would produce 'lightning sketches' of predominantly ethnic stereotypes (Winokur, 2012: 57). Blackton's act eventually evolved into an animated film of the same name. In contrast to the work of Cohl, Blackton's figures are more strongly delineated – and it seems significant that his visual overcodings emerge out of a set of related order words that evoke racial stereotypes – specifically those of 'Cohen' and 'Coon'.

Interestingly, Blackton's more entrenched representations of the caricatured human face, and his somewhat stereotypical classifications of race and gender, also make extensive use of a number of time-saving devices such as sprocketed limbs, which had been cut out from card, and which, as a consequence, could be quickly repositioned (Furniss, 2017: 32). In this sense, Blackton's work can be seen as a form of proto-industrial animation, that would seem to have been prescient not only of animation's fascination with streamlined processes of production, but also with its emphasis upon caricatured representation and the production of comedic stereotypes.

In Deleuze's discussion of the face in *Cinema I* (Deleuze, 2005: 87-101), he emphasises the affective dimension of the close-up. For Deleuze, the close-up produces an 'affection image' extracting the face from its surroundings and abolishing any broader situational context. For Deleuze, the face elicits an affective power. Thus, we are told that the close up 'suspends individuation' giving us 'both the face and its effacement' (Deleuze, 2005: 100). That is to say, it stands as an expression of material affects that precede any notion of subjectivity or ownership. In the context of horror, for instance, the face expresses and transmits a curiously impersonal quality of fear that can drift and circulate throughout the world, and serve to affect other bodies (Deleuze, 2005: 105-106). Accordingly, it is a somewhat abstract, material quality of fear that strikes us – we need not see who, or what is feared, and we need not be closely acquainted with the face that expresses the fear. Whilst the example of horror is instructive in helping us to understand the migratory aspect of affect and its grounding in material-sensation, it is equally important to recognise that the notion of abstraction that Deleuze presents here, is productive as opposed to subtractive, it is premised upon a conception of the richness and complexity of the surface of an individual face and upon the equally complex confluence of material-affective relations. Thus, it is a confluence of affects that stands as the condition of potentiality that grounds subjectivity – providing a threshold between individual 'worlds', and proceeding through a register of aesthetic contagion. The concept of affect is noticeably absent from Torre's account of animation – although he perhaps comes close to this in his discussion of the operation of mirror neurons (Torre, 2017: 111, 168). Torre explains how recent work in neuropsychology has drawn attention to the activity of mirror neurons that are said to fire in the brain of a spectator as they watch the movements of an actor. Torre states it this:

Mirror neurons are portions of the brain that are activated when we perform a particular physical activity. Significantly, the same neurons are activated in an identical manner when we simply see the same physical activity being performed by another... part of our brain actually carries out the same series of processes and work that it would if we were actually performing the action that was witnessed, albeit that they do not culminate in the final action. (Torre, 2017: 111)

Thus, mirror neurons would seem share in, or underpin, an affective logic of contagion. However, it must be remembered that such an approach also leans towards a quasi-Kantian notion of universal subject (the idea that we are all essentially the same kind of processing unit).

Ultimately, it is the issue of complexity that makes the difference between an expression of potential, and a subtractive overcoding. Whilst Deleuze's embrace of complexity with respect to the face of the affection image resists the simplification and political overcoding that may occur at an institutional level, Blackton's

stylistic form of abstraction all too easily slips into a more radically subtractive mode of caricature. Thus, in *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari emphasise how particular kinds of face support political regimes – they argue that the plethora of paintings of the face of Christ that emerge out of Christianity, whilst positively engaging with creative, aesthetic potentials, serve also to institute a regime of signs that entrenching the face of the average everyday European white male, and as such serve to inculcate and support a Christian-political program that Deleuze and Guattari position as inherently oppressive in character (Deleuze and Guattari, 2005: 176).

Torre's writings, though certainly instructive, insightful and accessible are nevertheless - like much secondary commentary on Deleuze - necessarily subtractive and partial. Indeed, there is a sense in which the Deleuzian corpus itself could be said to have much in common with Deleuze's conception of the virtual. That is to say, Deleuze's tendency to coin neologisms, hyphenate terms, fuse concepts, shift idiom, and engage with non-philosophical territory, presents us with a body of work which seems chaotic and overflowing with potential (c.f. Mullarkey, 2006). As a consequence, when engaging with Deleuzian thought it becomes necessary to in some sense abstract, determine or 'actualise' his philosophy. This gives rise to a range of partial readings – or creative closures - of his work in the secondary literature.

Comparison of Deleuze and Rescher

The vestige of representation that is retained in Torre's account of process, perhaps results from his employment of the more conservative processual thinking of Nicholas Rescher (1996; 2000) as a means of unpacking the rather more radical and post-structural process thinking of Deleuze. Process philosophy has a long intellectual history, having been present as a minor current in Western philosophy since as early as 540 BC (Rescher, 1996). As a consequence, there are many different kinds of process philosopher, and many subtle variations of process thought. Whilst, Deleuze and Rescher have similar ontological commitments, their modes of philosophising seem at first glance to place them in stark, incommensurable contrast. The idiosyncrasies of Deleuze's style, his embrace of non-philosophical practices and his wilder, more baroque conceptual creations stand in stark contrast to the methodological traditionalism of Rescher. Similarly, as Culp (2016) has recently noted, despite the association of Deleuzian philosophy with processes of affirmation, Deleuze presents his ideas using an ever evolving, neologistic vocabulary that emphasises notions of disjunction (e.g. 'becoming minor', 'line of flight', 'deterritorialisation' and 'the untimely'), In contrast to this, Rescherian process-philosophical thinking, much like Torre's approach to animation, tempers radical notions of transformation and flux by foregrounding the role of meta-stable processual constancies. Methodologically, Deleuze approach is diverse – ranging from incisive methodological

critique, to highly performative texts in which language is used in an affective fashion to engage, animate and stir the reader – enticing them to feel the force of a problem (Williams, 2008: 14). Rescher, on the other hand, is more philosophically conservative, exhibiting a stronger commitment to rationality, order and clarity of communication. Indeed, Michael Hampe (2004: 286) has criticised Rescher’s recent historical survey of process philosophy as entirely ignoring the European process tradition – a tradition which is perhaps best represented in its contemporary form by Deleuze. It should be clear from what has been written thus far, that for the most part, Torre sidesteps the radical, virtual dimension of Deleuzian philosophy in the construction of his process-cognitivism, and leans more closely towards the sobriety and actualism of Rescherian thought.

By juxtaposing Rescher’s conservatism with Deleuze’s radicalism, we are able to draw out a subtle intra-perspectival opposition within the process-philosophical tradition itself – the way in which it could be said to be constructed upon an at once integrative and differential fault line. Thus, there is a tendency for process philosophers to stress the ontological priority of novelty, transformation and differentiation, whilst simultaneously asserting the importance of relational structure, and connectivity in the constitution of entities. This process-philosophical schism reveals the importance of relations to the perspective (a topic that is prominent in Deleuze’s writings, but which is addressed only indirectly in Torre’s work), and the central role that the concept of relation tends to play in the constitution, development and differentiation of entities. Relations, then, have a complex, somewhat liminal status - regardless of whether they are considered lines of integration, or vectors of transformation, and regardless of whether they are considered agents of ‘inter’ or ‘extra’ being, there is a sense in which they are always ontologically ‘in-between’.

The Importance of Relations to Animation and to Deleuzian Philosophy

The Deleuzian scholar Patrick Hayden once suggested that much like Leibniz, all Deleuze does is contemplate relations (Hayden, 1995: 283). This is not surprising given the amount of work they have to do in his philosophy - fulfilling an at once constitutive, connective and transformational function. In *Dialogues II*, a work co-authored with Claire Parnet, Deleuze aligns himself with a form of empiricism, famously claiming that ‘relations are external to their terms’ (Deleuze and Parnet 2002: 41). In emphasizing the externality of relations, Deleuze is contesting traditional philosophical notions of fixed, determined and timeless essence, whilst stressing the thoroughly contingent nature of the world. For Deleuze, the composition of a material situation is at once complex, multiple and thoroughly mutable in character (Baines, 2006: 28).

Differential, syncretic and political relations could be said to underpin the mutating and chaotic canvas of Cohl's *Fantasmagorie*. In one sense his figures do battle, but in another they perpetually fuse and differentiate - melting and morphing across the projection screen. Films such as *Fantasmagorie* are notable for the way in which they play with context and setting in a highly fluid fashion. A similar, though perhaps more identity-centric, trope is evidenced in Osvaldi Cavandoli's *La Linea* (1971-1986) and Steve Roberts' more recent *Dipdap* (2011) – both examples of animated series intended for children, which combine Blackton's process of animated lightning sketching (an image which seems to 'draw itself') with the contextual mutability that we find in the work of Cohl.

In animations such as *La Linea* and *Dipdap*, new lines - produced by a seen and unseen hand, respectively - constantly intervene into situations, modifying and transforming the world and perpetually shifting its aspects. The constant, active defamiliarisation that characterises the experience of the protagonists in each of these series, results in a space of perpetual encounter (an encounter that is vicariously experienced by the viewing audience). It seems significant, however, that Cohl's animation, which predates Robert's *Dipdap* by over a century is not only more radical in its application of plasmatic animation technique but is also more subversive with respect to its political content. It is claimed here that Cohl's animation more readily allows us to address the autopoietic transformation of actuality from a material-cultural perspective than does Blackton's *Humorous Phases of Funny Faces*. Indeed, there is a sense in which we might argue that *Dipdap* is to *Fantasmagorie*, as Torre is to Deleuze.

Political Subversion in Animation and Deleuzian Philosophy

In addition to its playing with context in a highly fluid fashion, Cohl's animation is distinctive in its radical cultural subversion. In an early essay on carnival and postmodern animated discourse, Terry Lindvall and Matthew Melton (1997) explored the way in which the ideas of the Russian linguist and cultural theorist, Mikhail Bakhtin, can be seen to resonate with the comedic subversion and self-reflexivity of the animated cartoon. With specific reference to Cohl, they note the way in which the cartoon shares the playful and subversive dynamism of the carnival spirit - foregrounding the way in which Medieval laughter explored and subverted entrenched categories of social and religious existence. Thus, it is characteristic of the carnival that the highest echelons of society temporarily stand with the lowest – hierarchies become inverted, and the agonistic conditions of the socio-cultural world are briefly rendered visible. In a paper published in the second volume of *Deleuze Studies*, Fred Evans (2006) reveals Bakhtin as a primary source of inspiration for Deleuze's emphasis in *The Logic of Sense* on voice and indirect discourse as figures (or vocalisations) of multiplicity – serving to inform Deleuze's conception of what Alan Badiou has termed

the ‘clamor of being’ (Badiou, 2000). Evans notes how both Deleuze and Bakhtin valorise heterogeneity and creativity. With this in mind, the politically mischievous porosity and perpetual transformations of Cohl’s animation could be said to contest the rather crude abstraction of Blackton’s overcoded categories in a playful, but nevertheless politically motivated fashion.

It would be a mistake to divide Cohl and Blackton in simple binary terms into a ‘good’ subversive, potentialistic, anti-essentialist and a ‘bad’ mainstream, over-coded, object-centrist. If there is anything that the practice of animation makes clear, it is that there is a fine line running between these positions. As we have already seen, Blackton’s work is darkly subversive in its approach to stereotypical characterisation, and it is well known that animation, even in its most commercial form, has had a long and complex involvement with issues of race and gender. If the content of Blackton’s animations and sketches was not enough, his relation to identity becomes further complicated when we consider his habit of sometimes performing his lightning sketching routine dressed in drag (Crafton, 1993: 51-52). Perhaps there is a sense in which we might position Blackton - despite being in some sense ‘on the wrong side’ in relation to this discussion of representation, caricature and overcoding - to have had developed a sense of what Judith Butler describes as the ‘performativity’ of social roles, categories and essences (Butler, 2009). Indeed, a similar logic might go some way towards clarifying Deleuze’s seemingly inexplicable penchant for the comedian, Benny Hill. In his television interview with Claire Parnet, Deleuze, in the context of a discussion of cinema and culture, describes the British comic as having been in the possession of ‘an idea’. In attempting to shed light upon this somewhat perplexing statement, John Mullarkey (2008), has drawn attention to a number of aspects of the chase sequence that closed every episode of the Benny Hill show. Mullarkey begins by noting how the ‘speeding up’ of characters resulting from the under-cranking of the filmic apparatus resulted in a time image that was comic in the Bergsonian sense of the term. Mullarkey goes on (in a somewhat tongue in cheek fashion) to depict these chases as Deleuzian ‘lines of flight’. He notes how, during these closing sequences, Hill does not, in fact, chase women (as is most often assumed). Rather, in all of these sequences, Hill races ahead, slowly drawing a crowd of chasers – these include stereotypical depictions of policemen, burglars, farmers, along with numerous stereotyped and often fetishised representation of women. Over the course of the chase, Hill typically encounters a range of obstacles, such as hedges, or clothing hanging on a washing line, which often afford the potential for disguise (typically through adopting the conventions of another form of caricature). There is something broadly cartoonish about Hill’s chase sequences, and their transgression of gender codes that would seem to align them with divergent aspects of Cohl and Blackton’s animation practice. With this in mind, it is interesting that Deleuze’s alleged dislike of animation would seem to dissipate, or to become subject to modification as the ‘cartoon’ is brought into relation or encounter with a (live) action image. Perhaps it was

this intersection that, for Deleuze, constituted Hill's 'idea' - ultimately expressing affects which Deleuze describes as both 'troubling' and 'amusing'. Interestingly, the very possibility of this act of combination would seem to be dependent upon some kind of separation of what is cartoonish from the live-action film – a fact which would seem ultimately to contest Deleuze's notion presented at the beginning of this paper, that animation should be considered a mere subset of the cinematic.

A Deleuzian Theory of Trans-form-ation

If Hill's chase sequence can be considered a line of flight, then the same might be said of Cohl's flat, projected canvas. In Cohl's animation, escape, disguise and transformation abound. In outlining his philosophy of language in *The Logic of Sense*, Deleuze begins to develop a mischievous, rather esoteric, quasi-Leibnizian picture of ontological relation, which emphasises the intensive play of inverted Platonic form-like infinitives (Deleuze, 1990: 181-186). Indeed, we might position the resulting ontology as a Deleuzian theory of 'trans-forms'. Whilst Deleuze's notion of a chaotic play of infinitives could easily be brought to bear upon the predominantly kinetic qualities of abstract animation, it likewise has a strong affinity with the animation of Cohl. That is to say, when observing Cohl's film, it is as if we experience a falling, an inflating, a cutting, a floating alongside any clearly defined sense of characterisation. Indeed, following the process philosophical treatment of objects and organisms as meta-stable rhythms, we might likewise extend this verbing to likewise encompass a clowning, a bottling or a policing.

Despite the strange kinetic Platonism that is expressed in *The Logic of Sense*, there remains an affinity here with the genetic view of becoming presented in Deleuze's roughly contemporaneous *Difference and Repetition*. The ontology of *Difference and Repetition* is governed by difference-driven processes, with differential relations functioning as elements of potentiality that work topologically upon the actual. Whilst these variant ontologies are undoubtedly similar (and I think that a good case could be made that these works were simply developed for different philosophical audiences), there is arguably a stronger sense of internalism at work in *The Logic of Sense*. That is to say, its Leibnizian ontology is primarily subtractive - with actual subject positions being selected from a hyper-connected background. Accordingly, we can locate a strongly syncretist tendency that is operative within the resulting metaphysics – which remains stylistically in tune with Cohl, despite the sharpness of his animated line. That is to say, whilst there is an absence of 'smoke', 'erasure' or 'smearing' in Cohl's animation, it is nevertheless strongly syncretic in character.

Syncretic ontologies are characterised by a generalised diffusion of the world. For an elephant to transform into a ballerina, for instance, it must first morph or recede into an indeterminate mass – a quality that the Object-Oriented Philosopher, Graham Harman has disparagingly described, in more specifically ontological context, as a ‘cosmic lump of molten slag’ (Cavalier, 2015: 50; Harman, 2011: 299). A similar situation occurs in the context of ‘single line’ animation, where the image often transitions through a ‘flat-line’ state (out of which anything could emerge). Thus, Cohl’s ontological commitments would seem to be most significantly embodied not at the level of narrative but rather at the level of style. That is to say, just as *Logic of Sense* and *Difference and Repetition* might be seen as companion volumes with different kinds of ontological emphasis, the syncretic dimension of animation is itself balanced by its own genetic counterpart. Thus, the Deleuzian animation theorist Erik S. Jenkins has drawn attention to the way in which the transformability of animation playfully exploits the viewer’s ability to perceive form and trajectory and to anticipate movement (Jenkins, 2016: 87). Indeed, if we keep this genetic-syncretic tension in mind, Cohl’s animation can be seen to play out or dramatise the fundamental tension between relational integration and relational differentiation that occurs in much process philosophical thinking. This is also apparent in films as diverse as *La-Línea*, *The Red Thread* and *Dipdap*.

Jenkins likewise emphasises the way in which it is characteristic of our experience of animation, that we *know* it to be false but *feel* it to be true (Jenkins, 2016: 90). One of the most interesting and idiosyncratic aspects of Cohl’s animation is the way in which it revels in relation as experiential transition. According to the contemporary Deleuzian philosopher James Williams, it is in the ebb and flow of our aesthetic and emotional life that we can locate our most intimate connection with the operation of the pre-individual, intensive, forces that constitute the virtual. Williams points to the way in which our emotions ‘shade into one another’, ‘envelop’ or ‘cover one another over’ (Williams, 2003: 8). Indeed, we might extend Williams comments – through Deleuze’s notion of Hitchcock’s ‘relation image’ - to consider the experiential transitions that accompanies other moments of radical relational change (Deleuze, 2005: 203-205). These might include the vertiginous moment when the plot of a film ‘twists’ – and all of its relations are reconfigured - or the moment of abductive inference that occurs when something feels anomalous or out of place, the moment of aspect dawning in a gestalt shift - or the pronounced, disorienting kinetic-experiential effects of Optical Art (Op Art).

References to Op Art in the Work of Deleuze and Guattari

Op Art is a style of abstract visual art, perhaps most iconically, associated with the work of the British Artist

Bridget Riley. It typically employs static geometric lines placed in very precise mathematical relationships in order to produce the perception of chaotic, pulsing or swelling movements as the image rendered on the canvas resonates with the viewer's perceptual system. Deleuze and Guattari make scant reference to Op Art throughout their corpus. This is perhaps because it seemingly lacks any political context. However, if we consider such imagery in relation to Deleuze's claim that philosophy needs to focus its attention upon molecular processual movement – upon 'movement in itself, or relation *per se* rather than focusing on the object moved or the things related' (Cull, 2009: 71), there is a sense in which, in its purity of movement, Op Art could be positioned as the *most* political of arts. This resonance is not lost on Deleuze-Guattari – indeed on the brief occasions when Op Art is addressed, it is evoked as an ethical ideal, in the context of describing 'actual' forms of political practice. In their discussion of the political significance of quilt making in *A Thousand Plateaus*, they suggest that "the recurrence of a [single element] frees uniquely rhythmic values ... an amorphous, nonformal space prefiguring Op Art." They go on to suggest, in a formulation that neatly captures the qualities of both the paintings of Bridgit Riley, and Cohl's anarchic relational escape:

It is as though a smooth space emanated, sprang from a striated space, but not without a correlation between the two, a recapitulation of one in the other, a furtherance of one through the other. Yet the complex difference persists. (Deleuze and Guattari, 2005: 477)

Whilst many of the potentialistic examples cited in the essay refer to hand-drawn animation, it would be a mistake to think that this is in any sense a necessary requirement. Rather, following William James and Thomas Lamarre, we should note the connection between the line and the relation. Indeed, Lamarre, has spent much time exploring layering and compositing in potentialistic terms. Given their connection to industrialised animation production, it is most tempting to think of the process of layering as a process of striation relating to the expedient production of animated imagery. In contrast to this, as Torre notes, Lamarre has become interested in the choreographing of relations between the 'invisible interstice between layers' (Torre 2017: 51). Lamarre seems particularly interested in the way in which a particular kind of relational choreography would seem to usurp the mobile camera. Lamarre contrasts a Cartesian style of layered animation that attempts to provide volumetric depth and mimic aspect of the live action film, with a 'superflat' style of compositing that gives rise to an image where 'figure and background are equally vibrant, equally present' and where 'all grounds appear on the surface' (Lamarre, 2009: 126). Lamarre notes how superflat composition pushes all forces of movement to the surface in the form of 'surface depths' that have 'potential energies or potential forces' (Lamarre, 2009: 127). As a consequence, Lamarre suggests that any element in the resulting image may serve to draw a line of sight, or to generate a field of potential depth. In this sense, the superflat image, in its density of information, would seem to institute a form of

syncretism that is nevertheless sharp and strongly contoured as opposed to the modes of selective blur or chiaroscuro that are more typically associated with syncretic forms of representation. Accordingly, in this mode of animated expression there are strong resonances and affinities with Cohl's equally flat and frenetically animated plane.

Torre, Blackton and (In)Animate Semiotics

I have hinted throughout this paper that there is something eerily fitting about the title of Blackton's film – *Humorous Phases of Funny Faces* – and I have attempted to engage with it from the perspective of Deleuze's sole authored writings on the close-up and his collaborative work with Guattari on political faciality. Whilst there is clearly some semblance of life within Blackton's animation - specifically in the features of the face, it is (for the most part) a life that takes place with strong borders and clearly defined boundaries. Though (very-nearly) taking place in close-up, Blackton's work lacks the subtly and micro-movements required to instantiate the affection image discussed in Deleuze's early writings on cinema, whilst it leans all too readily towards Deleuze and Guattari's notion of 'faciality'. Accordingly, Blackton's films might be considered too rigid in their mode of affection - ultimately producing a highly facialised mode of comedy – which recalls Bergson's notion of laughter as 'something mechanical encrusted upon the living' (Schaffer, 2006: 480; Bergson, 2005: 31), whilst nevertheless serving to fuel oppressive modes of organisation. On the subject of racism, Deleuze and Guattari note:

Racism operates by the determination of degrees of deviance to the White man's face, which endeavors to integrate nonconforming traits into increasingly eccentric and backward waves, sometimes tolerating them at given place under given conditions, in a ghetto, or sometimes erasing them from the wall, which never abides alterity (Deleuze and Guattari, 2005: 178).

Perusing the history of animation it is clear that the cinema – and specifically the cinema of animation is one such place where both the toleration and the overcoding of such non-conformist faces is combined into a monstrous repetition. Whilst the idea of the caricature serves as a useful metaphor for the Deleuzo-Guattarian concept of faciality itself, we must not forget that for Deleuze and Guattari, faciality operates as a generalised feature of perception – as an institution of illusory norms and essences to the exclusion of alterity. Indeed, there is a sense in which both Blackton and Cohl produced extra-ordinary modes of experience and we have seen how they could each be said to rally affect but in the service of antithetical ends. Thus, Cohl's animation could be said to function as a Deleuzo-Guattarian 'probe head' – inducing a stuttering and stammering of existing languages in order to deterritorialise the binary regimes that are reinforced in the work of animators such as Blackton. In contrast to Cohl, Blackton's animations, though

equally subversive in their means of operation – are in some sense duplicitous in their mode of capture. That is to say, they operate rhetorically, employing a highly affective register as a means of further entrenching extant modes of representation. Interestingly, from a Deleuzian perspective, something very similar might be said of the process-cognitivism of Torre, where the language of vital process is coupled with a generalised mode of representational form. Arguably, each constructs a seemingly vital plane whilst infusing it with a peculiarly *inanimate* form of semiotics – resulting, in both cases, in a mere semblance, or illusion, of life.

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