

PAINTING/MAKING; THE QUESTION OF MEANINGS AND VALUES

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Abstract: This work seeks to give some contributions related to my painting, the process of making as well as to my philosophical research. I try that my fields of enquiry, are not just products of complex historically contingent circumstances, but constructs of the ontological dimension of my paintings as a medium of individuation. Therefor I consider that thinking about the meanings and the values and going beyond a historically and philosophically interrelated conceptual dichotomies is important to increase critical awareness. The late 20th century saw those dichotomies sometimes come under convergence, in fields as diverse as those closest to physical science, such as the philosophy of science, and human sciences which traditionally focused on societies that used to be characterized as lacking science and even history, such as anthropology (and pre-historic archaeology). Many factors have been involved, including the socio-cultural changes that have gradually challenged the predominant pictures of the world. Also, sophisticated critiques about human nature, history and other topics where in argued since the 20th century paradigms for intellectual culture, as for several colonialist, and nationalist political «meta-narratives»¹ and continued to evolve until present. Something of the difficulty of these challenges, as well as a potential relevance is suggested by the argument:

*Going beyond dualism opens up an entirely different landscape, one in which states and substances are replaced by processes and relations; the main question is not any more how to objectify closed systems, but how to account for the diversity of the processes of objectification*².

Keywords: making; painting; meanings; values.

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¹ For instance, BENJAMIN, 1992; FOUCAULT [1972-1977], 1980.

² DESCOLA & PALSSSEN, 1996: 12.

Resumo: Este trabalho procura oferecer algumas contribuições relacionadas com a minha prática de pintura, isto é, o processo de fazer, bem como as questões filosóficas que me ocupam. Procuro que a minha pesquisa e o meu campo de inquérito, não seja apenas produto de circunstâncias contingentes historicamente complexas, mas também, construções da dimensão ontológica das minhas pinturas como meio de individuação. Por isso, considero que é importante pensar sobre o sentido e valor e ir além de uma dicotomia conceitual histórica e filosoficamente inter-relacionada. Desde o século XX que certas dicotomias, por vezes, entraram em convergência, em campos tão diversos quanto aqueles próximos às ciências físicas, tais como a filosofia da ciência, ou em ciências humanas que tradicionalmente se focavam em sociedades que antes eram caracterizadas pela ausência de ciência e até de história, como a antropologia (e arqueologia pré-histórica). Para tal muitos fatores estão envolvidos, incluindo as mudanças socioculturais, que gradualmente desafiaram as imagens predominantes do mundo. Também contribuíram para tal mudança, sofisticadas críticas em que se discutiu desde os paradigmas do século XX, à cultura intelectual sobre a natureza humana, a história e outros tópicos, assim como várias «metanarrativas» políticas, coloniais e nacionalistas³ que continuam a evoluir até á atualidade. Algo sobre a dificuldade desses desafios, assim como a sua potencial relevância é sugerida pelo argumento:

Ir além do dualismo abre uma paisagem completamente diferente, na qual estados e substâncias são substituídos por processos e relações; a questão principal não é mais como objetivar sistemas fechados, mas como explicar a diversidade dos processos de objetivação⁴.

Palavras-chave: fazer; pintura; sentido; valor.

The lines of analysis treated here are based on a reflective experience and focus on the process of making my artistic work. My practice is rooted in traditional representation and methods, but I constantly challenge my understanding of «painting». I explore ways in which paint can represent effects such as light, time, movement, climate or even a «sense of place». I use contrast and color, dramatic lighting, and graphic compositions, which often feature the interplay between man and the environment. I used the lines and colors available to me, distilling the image/feeling into the work, so that through objective representation there is enough room for subjective interpretation. This is clearly stated in some of my Scottish Series paintings, but also in the Italian Series or even in the portraits, and a small sample are presented here. I have always been interested in landscape and the environment, and after concluding my master's degree at Fine Arts University of Lisbon I have nurtured also a bigger interest in drawing and portraits. In recent years I have been also developing attention to philosophical issues with a special focus to Deleuze theoretical approach related to painting and to the operational modes of pictorial images. These «image/sensation», function as, self-sufficient devices that capture and present invisible forces⁵. My work tries to meditate on the strength lines of a given device. In each device the lines cross thresholds according to which they are aesthetic, scientific, political, etc. We emphasize that a device implies lines of forces.

³ Por exemplo, BENJAMIN, 1992; FOUCAULT [1972-1977], 1980.

⁴ DESCOLA & PALSSEN, 1996: 12. (Tradução da autora).

⁵ DELEUZE, 1981: 57.

In this way «The task of painting is defined as the attempt to make visible forces that are not visible»⁶. The purpose of this paper goes along with Deleuze philosophy, and with the path that contribute to the formation of the concept of image within his thought.

The point of departure would then, be approach the dogmatic image of thought under his Philosophy, and the alignment between his philosophy of difference and his studies around the pictorial image, (namely in *Logique de la sensation* and the modern cinematic image — *Cinéma II: L'image-temps*). Understanding how difference manifests itself throughout Deleuze's account does, however, require a brief preliminary note on the distinction between difference and differentiation. As Deleuze explains, we call the determination of the virtual content of an Idea difference; we call the actualization of that virtuality into species and distinguished parts differentiation. As such, difference «resides» at both the virtual and actual aspects of multiplicities. So, Deleuze claims being is nothing but a differentiating process and, for this reason, is synonymous with the process of becoming differentiated. Furthermore, being's differentiating becoming is thoroughly affirmative and comes first and foremost from the explosive internal force which life carries within itself. It means, contrary to identity in the sense of the identical that posit a unified, transcendental ground, Deleuze claims being's differentiation emanates from an immanent process of becoming.

The series of paintings I produced in recent times under the theme of Landscape, some of them belong to the «Scottish Series» and gave account of the differentiation and specific features that we can find in this region. As I am staying for long periods in Aberdeen and traveling to get know better Scotland I have been developing a better acknowledgement of the «sense of place» and put it to the series. As Deleuze explains, «Each series explicates or develops itself, but in its difference from the other series which it implicates, and which implicate it, (...) the essential point is the simultaneity and contemporaneity of all the divergent series, the fact that all coexist»⁷. Also, this work is connected to the concept of rhizome on the one hand and virtual on the other. Here enters the contribution of the concept of rhizome according to Deleuze and Guattari in which «A rhizome would not cease to connect semiotic chains, organizations of power, occurrences that refer to the arts, to the sciences, to social struggles. A semiotic chain is like a tuber that agglomerates very diverse acts; linguistic, but also, perceptive, mimic, gestural, and cogitative (...)»⁸. In those works, it was particularly relevant the relation of the colors, and lights and shadow. Which also alludes to virtual elements and favors the symbiotic relationship of the different parts that set together to deliver the composition. It is the relationship of the different element in the image that constitute a kind of itinerary for the viewer.

⁶ DELEUZE, 1981: 57.

⁷ DELEUZE, 2014: 157.

⁸ DELEUZE & GUATTARI, 1995-2000: 16.



Photo 1. *Left* – Glen Spean, Scottish Series, Oil on Canvas. *Right* – Untitled, Italian Series, Oil on Canvas.

Deleuze's point out that multiplicities are not fixed or closed beings, but are constantly becoming; and formed by coherent, unitary boundaries that distinguish them from others. While they may appear to be coherent and unified, multiplicities are constantly altering wholes composed of various lines which branch out in unexpected, non-linear, non-uniform ways⁹. As the configuration of the multiplicity alters as a result of being's differentiation, so too does the subject, totality, and identity that result from that particular multiplicity. Multiplicities are not closed totalities, but are open, composed of different and distinct component parts. Furthermore, it is in the plane of immanence that are contained the virtual and within itself the actualization as the relation of the virtual with other terms. Since the relationship between the current and the virtual is not what can be established between two current ones. The present ones involve already constituted individuals, while that the relation between the present and the virtual forms an individuation in act, or an individuation by relevant points.

Through individuation, the individual or being is constituted, but he is neither the first moment of being, nor the first being, but only a phase of being that constitutes a field proper to individuation. In the pre-individual field in which intensities and flows, lines of force, mobile and communicating differences do not cease to be involved and to be involving, constituting in this way, the vital powers that can emerge from the field. Thus considered, the principle of individuation presupposes a temporal succession, in which this principle performs the operation of individuation until the emergence of the individual itself. Deleuze came from Simondon's concept of individuation, according to which the crystalline individuation does not result from the encounter between a previous form and a matter, constituted before and separately, but rather a resolution that arises within a metastable system rich in potentials: «Pre-existing form, matter and

⁹ DELEUZE, 1995: 161.

energy in a system»¹⁰. But in a differently way from Simondon, he privileges the informal values in individuation, the first moment of being, the pre-individual moment, a philosophy of forces, a metamorphic capacity of thought to attain variance of becoming and the germinate power of life. In his intuitive and anti-dialectic method, he conceives the being as a totality that presents itself in multiple variations. Becoming in the light of Deleuze, implies we must think and create concepts, as devices, tools, as something that is created, produced from the given conditions and operating under these conditions. So the concept is a device that makes us think. According to Deleuze and Guattari a concept works as a re-learning of the lived, a re-signification of the world.

The major importance of my practice, and also its meanings and values stands in a position where I do not take refuge in just reflection, but operate, create, experiment, and intervene, through my work, through my paintings. Then in this body of work the research is direct to approximate and create a transdisciplinary approach, an intersection between the areas of art and philosophy. For this reason, the study of Deleuze vision provides a way to approach these areas, it is not the intention to submit or reduce art to a philosophical conception. Without being «shaking old stereotyped concepts like skeletons...»¹¹ or in other words in making, in developing a practice, we manage to escape the cliché. And this struggle against the cliché would be a struggle against an empty agent of the power of thought, against a kind of image-law, moral-image, that acts as a standardizing and value-determining mechanism. In this sense is not just a philosophical struggle, but it is also a political struggle.



Photo 2. Portraits, Oil on Canvas.

¹⁰ SIMONDON, 1964: 8.

¹¹ DELEUZE & GUATTARI, 1992: 109.



Photo 3. Portraits, Oil on Canvas.

These images are some portraits that I made in recent years and are associated with the research of light and visibility regimes, on a given device. Visibility that does not refer to light in general that illuminates pre-existing objects. Is formed of lines of light, that form variable and inseparable figures of this or that device. Each device has its light regime, the way it falls, propagates by distributing the visible and the invisible, by making the object that does not exist without it, that arise or even may disappear. This dimension of the self, as a line of subjectivities, is a process, a production of subjectivity in a device. It is a process of individuation of a becoming, as I mention before. In a broad sense we may address these issues under the process of learning. As Deleuze philosophy, mainly through the book «Difference and Repetition» well points out, the importance and dignity of learning are often recognized. «We may well say that learning is, after all, an infinite task, it is none the less cast with the circumstances and the acquisition of knowledge (...)»¹². We learn when our bodies and our language are transformed in becoming sensitive to turning points in the systems we come into contact with, when we can «interpret signs» as Deleuze would say – signs indicating precisely transformations of systems, when two differential series are placed in communication, resulting in «resonances» and «forced movements». But we can never predict how learning will take place.

Finally, when we study Deleuze we note how there is no hierarchy between philosophy, art and science. This idea is very clear in his book *What is Philosophy?* In it, Deleuze defines philosophy as a practice of concept creation, science as creation of functions, and art as the creation of affects and percepts. Between art, science and philosophy there are many possible connections. None of them can claim a privileged position in front of the others. For Deleuze, «the sciences, the arts, the philosophies are equally creative». It is interesting to pose that practice is a way of allowing theory to move forward, of solving a theoretical problem that blocks us or that theory is a way of allowing practice to move forward, of solving a practical problem that blocks us.

¹² DELEUZE, 2014: 215.

It is actually a movement from one pole to the other that is constant. Recognizing the reach of this design, and starting from the Deleuzian idea that it is on the border of what we think we know, even when we are mostly unaware, «that we imagine we have something to say» — and because Painting to me always defines an approximation to the «Meaning» of the object or the concepts, we can still aspire to the work of the Sense, for although obscure and temporary that it may be. Nevertheless, it allows us to construct a network of thought, a way of making, a «movement» between the voice and the silence, that in spite of all continues to project ideas that mark our path. In this case, art is not only a conducive medium to force thought to think but goes beyond. Deleuze would say that «the work of art is not only born of the signs as it gives birth».

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