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Chapter 8

Fictions of the Imagination: Habit, Genre and the Powers of the False

Amy Herzog

The past two decades have witnessed a surge of interest in Gilles Deleuze's writings on cinema in English-language film scholarship. Nevertheless, Deleuzian approaches to cinema have not always rested comfortably alongside more established practices within the field. The question of genre presents a particular point of tension in this regard. Recent work in genre studies has incorporated dynamic models for understanding the operations of film's generic conventions. Exploring adaptations across media and disciplinary boundaries, scholars have situated genre films within complex industrial discourses, examining a rich body of archival material beyond the texts of the films themselves (e.g. Grant 1995; Dixon 2000). However, some notable exceptions aside (for example, Conley 2000), these studies seem incompatible with the concerns of Deleuze's film-philosophy project. Despite the complexity of Deleuze's own taxonomy of signs in the *Cinema* volumes, his systems of image classification remain rooted in the immediacy of the individual articulation. Indeed, Deleuze's classifications locate the affective power of film images outside of pre-coded expectations such as genre. If for Deleuze the crystalline image of time works to tease out new configurations of sensation and thought, the overly determined conventions of the genre film seem hopelessly colonised by the forces of causality and commercialism. At best, one might imagine using Deleuze to examine moments of excess that press against the outer limits of genre, in effect reading the expressive qualities of a film against their generic or industrial coding.

While genre might thus appear to be one of the areas of film studies least conducive to a Deleuzian approach, I would argue that several aspects of Deleuze's work could expand our understanding of the functionality of generic categories. Key here are three overlapping concepts, as elucidated across Deleuze's writing: habit, the simulacrum,

and the powers of the false. Certainly this take on genre is fairly idi-osyncratic, remaining closer to Deleuze's broader work on philosophy and art than it does to industrial, historical or reception-based genre theories. Yet a deeper exploration of the affective impact of cinematic repetition might enrich our understanding of the complex ways in which individual films situate themselves within, and against, conventional expectations.

Deleuze's resistance to representational modalities would seem fun-damentally opposed to the notion of a genre as an abstract category, a set of conventions or structures to which individual texts vary or adhere. Yet Deleuze himself makes extensive use of classifications in his philosophy, and makes clear that he finds a certain utility in what might appear to be traditional groupings, so long as those categories remain rooted in the materiality of that which they describe. Deleuze links his own passion for classification to the Jorge Luis Borges passage that provided the foundation for Michel Foucault's *The Order of Things*, a quotation from a 'certain Chinese encyclopaedia' containing a list of seemingly arbitrary categories: '(a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) suckling pigs, (e) sirens', and so on (Foucault 1994: xv). 'All classifications belong to this style', states Deleuze in an interview:

They are mobile, modifiable, retroactive, boundless, and their criteria vary from instance to instance . . . A classification always involves bring-ing things together with very different appearances and separating those that are very similar. That is the beginning of the formation of concepts. We sometimes say that 'classical,' 'romantic,' or *'nouveau roman'* – even 'neorealism' – are insufficient abstractions. I believe that they are in fact valid categories, provided we trace them to singular symptoms or signs rather than general forms. A classification is always a symptomology. What we classify are signs in order to formulate a concept that presents itself as an event rather than an abstract essence. In this respect, the different disci-plines are really signaletic materials. (Deleuze 2000: 368)

Deleuze then offers up his own classification of cinematic space that ranges from the encompassing (American westerns, the films of Akira Kurosawa) to the flat (Joseph Losey) to the empty (Yasujiro Ozu, Michelangelo Antonioni) to the stratographic (Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet). While the associations he draws between works and artists leaps across more traditional generic and national groupings, Deleuze draws our attention here to specific affinities, or certain sty-listic consistencies, that might otherwise escape notice. He suggests, at the same time, that the classifications of space and light that he identi-

fies could extend into other disciplines and media, such as science and painting (Deleuze 2000: 368–9).

How, then, might we approach the subject of cinematic genres symp-tomatologically? And how might the classifications that arise from such a process interface with more traditional generic conventions? The challenge here would be to develop a means for classifying patterns and modalities in films not based on fixed, preexisting forms, but arising from the expressive materiality of the filmic event. The notion of film as an event is critical in this regard, as it shifts our attention to the inter-active space between spectator and text, as well as the spaces between texts, and between sites of articulation. In this somewhat limited way, I would identify two points of resonance between Deleuze's film-philos-ophy and the notion of genre as a discourse; both approaches work to discern certain expressive refrains circulating between films, and both are attuned to acts of perception and 'reading' as core to cinematic meaning.

In the sections that follow, I will propose three means of rethink-ing film genre in relation to Deleuze, with a focus on the category of the domestic melodrama. The first, following Elena del Río's work on affective-performance, posits genre as a limit against which a filmic text produces meaning. The second utilises the links between habits, stere-otypes, and simulacra in Deleuze's work (and those he draws from) to think about genre as a kind of productive fiction. Finally, focusing on the works of Douglas Sirk and Rainer Werner Fassbinder, I outline some of the ways in which an organic symptomatology might be imagined alongside, and counter to, existing generic categories.

Genre as Limit

In *Deleuze and the Cinemas of Performance: Powers of Affection*, Elena del Río explores the tension between the 'representational imperatives of narrative' and the 'non-representational' moment as manifested cinematically (del Río 2008: 15). Though many of the films she studies (including works by Douglas Sirk, Rainer Werner Fassbinder, David Lynch and Claire Denis) could be categorised by their melodramatic tendencies, del Río prefers to frame her project according to the more variable fluctuations of certain stabil-ising and destabilising qualities she identifies in each work. Thus del Río posits the performative as an affective force that destabilises narrative structures, linking this tension to a series of similar forces that circulate within Deleuze's philosophy (the molar and the molecular, for example,

or the movement-image and the time-image). Such a reading challenges the hegemony of fixed generic identity in favour of 'unpredictable, disorganised rhythmic alternation' and 'a logic of temporal becoming':

If one considers performance an affective and sensational force that disrupts, redirects, and indeed affects narrative form, it is difficult to consign the affective-performative to stable and well-defined generic paradigms. Because narrative conventions and generic labels are often closely interrelated, the disruption that performance brings into the narrative coherence of a film may simultaneously impact the stability or coherence of this film's generic identity. (del Río 2008: 15–16)

The genre as a formal category tends to function as a relatively static ideal in relation to which various iterations either conform or diverge. The affective-performative scene, in its corporeal immediacy, almost always serves to exceed and disrupt the conventional flow of the narrative, upending, in the process, fixed generic meaning.

What del Río performs in her study is already in fact a symptomatology of affect, reading the traces of performative gestures across a range of diverse filmic texts. As she argues, 'affect in the film is not a property of certain fixated systems of meaning we call genres, but rather the very quality that challenges the image to move away from any immediately recognisable, systematisable meaning' (del Río 2008: 200). The heterogeneity of affect, in other words, overwhelms the homogenising impact of the generic category. At the same time, vestiges of genre do persist in these works, providing the limit against which the performance arises. Indeed, as del Río notes, affect becomes most intense in the films of David Lynch when, for example, it reaches the boundaries of generic meaning (del Río 2008: 202). We might thus view genre as maintaining a certain productive function in films, creating patterns and expectations that provide the foundation for counter-rhythms and deviations. The moment of affective impact gains saliency precisely because of its relationship to our entrenched, habitual notions of cinematic meaning.

In other words, genres, clichés and formulas do not exist merely as obstacles to be struck down by the more transgressive elements in a film. In many of the examples del Río isolates, for example, the performer inhabits the cliché, creating affective excesses that destabilise its coded meaning. In the process, we experience not only the resonances of the corporeal performance, but the pleasures and discomforts of witnessing a larger system of representation coming unhinged. Noting that Douglas Sirk's family melodramas contain a preponderance of female characters who are performers and exhibitionists, del Río argues that these

stereotypical formulations of femininity as spectacle provide a 'point of departure' for more transgressive trajectories. 'Ironically,' she writes, 'the same features that tend to be used in the service of ideological coercion may also serve as the vehicle for a deterritorialisation of cultural norms and frames of reference' (del Río 2008: 31).

What we witness in these acts of performative deterritorialisation, I would argue, is an expressive sleight of hand. When, for example, Dorothy Malone dances with wild abandon in Sirk's Written on the Wind (USA, 1956), she embodies any number of pre-formulated representational categories: the objectified female performer, the 'loose' woman, the bad seed. But the particularities of her performance, and the visualisation of this event, flesh out the clichés in palpable and unnerving ways: the lurid pinks, reds and blacks in her boudoir, the blaring jazz music on her record player, the counterpoint of Malone's father's fatal fall intercut with her movements. The code or stereotype becomes a guise for another set of affects and meanings; and the resonance of such a moment, I would argue, is heightened by the dissonance and uncertainty created in the act of deterritorialising (versus merely rejecting) the code.

Deleuze describes a similar relationship between narrative formulas and the powers of the false that arise from the time-image. 'This new regime' of the time-image, he writes, 'no less than the old one – throws up its ready-made formulas, its set procedures, its laboured and empty applications, its failures, its conventional and "second-hand" examples offered to us as masterpieces' (Deleuze 1989: 132). What changes in the regime of the crystallised image of time is that narration works to falsify, destabilising the representational elements that 'truthful narration' works to establish. A key figure in this regime, for Deleuze, is the forger, who emerges as 'the character of the cinema' of the time-image. In the films of Alain Robbe-Grillet, Alain Resnais and Jean-Luc Godard, for example, forgers assume a new centrality. The forger is 'simultaneously the man of pure descriptions and the marker of the crystal-image, the indiscernibility of the real and the imaginary; he passes into the crystal, and makes the direct time-image visible; he provokes undecidable alternatives and inexplicable differences between the true and the false' (Deleuze 1989: 132). The cinematic forger embodies a more deepseated fascination with the murky, shifting boundaries between truth and fiction, reality and the imaginary. Forgers work inside the codes, occupying and mutating them.

Deleuze points to an increased fascination with forgery as a narrative theme, but the implications of his observations here are far reaching.

I would argue that forgery provides a productive model for thinking about films, and filmmakers, who mutate and exploit preexisting codes and expectations. We might locate acts of forgery on the registers of sound, décor, colour, framing and dialogue. Genre, in this sense, provides the foundation that is deterritorialised and transformed. What we witness is not a clean departure, but a sleight of hand that builds on a code, then renders it hollow, estranged.

Habitual Constructions

We must take care, however, not to dismiss genre as merely the static 'bad object' that difference transforms. The formation of the genre itself is a highly complex process, a continually evolving exercise in the fabrication of representational codes. I would like to suggest that genre, even in its most reductive manifestations, is a fictional construction. In many instances, these fictions serve to reinforce restrictive patterns of thought and behaviour. Yet their status as fictional categories renders them open to more subversive acts of co-optation. Deleuze's work on habit and repetition provides a means of exposing the seeds of difference at the core of repetitive formulations such as genre. And the concept of the simulacra, discussed in the following section, sheds light on the ways in which these seeds might be productively actualised.

The relationship between representational conventions and the variations they generate can be seen as an extension of Deleuze's broader philosophy of repetition and difference. Rather than framing repetition as a negative pole against which difference reacts, we might explore the entwined circulations between every iteration and deviation. Though genres are often defined according to certain fixed characteristics, it may be more useful to think about their functionality – to ask what it is that a melodrama or a musical or a horror film *does*. Framing genres according to the work they perform allows us to sidestep the trap of creating systems of dead categories, abstracted general forms. We can thus accommodate fluctuations in genres as they evolve, and forge new series of classifications that transect the rigid typologies imposed by industry or academic discipline. In this way, too, we might locate traces of more transgressive forces already circulating within the convention itself. This focus on functionality versus typology has an additional benefit; it centres our attention not on the characteristics of the texts, but on the impact of the act of articulation on the mind that contemplates it.

Deleuze's reflections on David Hume and habit in *Difference and Repetition* (1994) are particularly illuminating in this regard. Hume

describes the way in which habits accumulate for subjects: as a subject amasses various perceptions and experiences, the full range of those experiences are contracted, condensed into a set of patterns used to anticipate future events. While the formation of habits involves a certain distillation of difference necessary to form an interpretive pattern or code, the process of discovering a series, for Deleuze, introduces a new order of difference within the mind that perceives it:

Repetition changes nothing in the object repeated, but does change something in the mind which contemplates it. Hume's famous thesis takes us to the heart of a problem: since it implies, in principle, a perfect independence on the part of each presentation, how can repetition change something in the case of the repeated element? ... Hume takes as an example the repetition of cases of the type AB, AB, AB, A... Each case or objective sequence AB is independent of the others. The repetition (although we cannot yet properly speak of repetition) changes nothing in the object of the state of affairs AB. On the other hand, a change is produced in the mind which contemplates a difference, something new *in* the mind. Whenever A appears, I expect the appearance of B ... Does not the paradox of repetition lie in the fact that one can speak of repetition only by virtue of the change or difference that it introduces into the mind which contemplates it? By virtue of a difference that the mind *draws from repetition*? (Deleuze 1994: 70)

Repetition is a process that unfolds temporally, through individual acts of iteration and contemplation. Repetition is not something that resides in a text, but something that occurs in the engaged mind of the perceiver, in the space between subject and object: 'when we say that habit is a contraction we are speaking not of an instantaneous action which combines with another to form an element of repetition, but rather of the fusion of that repetition in the contemplating mind' (Deleuze 1994: 74).

Thus difference and variation are not strictly opposed to repetition. Rather, they are inherent to it, even within this most passive synthesis of time. The contracted vibrations of past perceptions coalesce as habits within bodies and brains. As the contractions become increasingly complex and autonomous, moving into higher realms of human activity, the synthesis of time becomes more active. Memory creates virtual layers of the past that disrupt linear notions of time, and in the process, the formation of habits involves increasing degrees of intervention on the part of the perceiver.

With each act of habitual contraction, differences inherent to experience are minimised in order to form an illusory, coherent model by which expectations of the future might be formed, which Hume calls 'fictions'. Such fictions are in fact necessary for survival; they

allow us to extract, from the overwhelming flow of empirical sensations, an image of a cohesive world that we can navigate. Yet as the syntheses become more active, the impressions and fictions move into the realm of 'artificial signs', for Deleuze, 'that is to say, the passage from spontaneous imagination to the active faculties of reflective representation, memory and intelligence' (Deleuze 1994: 77).

Representational practices thus arise from the accumulated habits of material experience, and the interventions of memory and the virtual past. And acts of falsification, creative fictions, are core to the process. These fictions can easily devolve into habitual stereotypes, or even unlink themselves from material experiences altogether, generating false experiences and beliefs that fall into representational and interpretive codes. Yet Deleuze locates a generative force within creative fictions that can lead to disruptive acts of deterritorialisation. Within the realm of the arts, fictions and fabulations, the powers of the false, have a tremendous political potential.

We might thus conceive of genre as a habitual means of categorising film. Based on our previous media experiences, and on the familiar conventions of storytelling, we have created collective sets of expectations that govern both the creation and the reading of cinematic texts. Difference is thus contracted in order to distil similarities between disparate works. And these conventions are further solidified as they are written into new films, films crafted with the express purpose of filling slots within genre-driven markets. Yet the representational codes themselves are idealised projections, virtual projected models. As fictional creations, genres are prone to hijacking – acts of simulation, forgery and parody. It is in this manner that genre, when exposed as an unstable fiction, becomes a platform for the powers of the false.

Disguises, Simulacra and Deterritorialisations

In his reflections on Friedrich Nietzsche, Pierre Klossowski points to a peculiar tension between what he calls simulacra and stereotypes, or 'the code of everyday signs'. Simulacra, for Klossowski, are representations of the unrepresentable – expressive manifestations of the phantasms, the dominant or obsessive impulses, of the soul. Much like the projected fictions of habit, which create simulated images based on past experiences, Klossowski describes simulacra navigating between the unrepresentable flux of existence and the schematic codes required by subjects for survival. Distilling the unrepresentable into a legible form, simulacra build upon, and exaggerate, the stereotypes we habitually rely upon to

understand the world. What Klossowski draws out from his reading of Nietzsche here is the simulacrum as a willed intervention, a 'project of philosophical *imposture*' (Klossowski 1997: 134).

Forgeries, parodies, simulacra: these terms circulate throughout Deleuze's writings, drawn and extended, in many ways, from his own readings of Nietzsche and Klossowski, manifesting themselves in his cinema volumes in the discussion of the powers of the false. Resonances of this concept emerge in a short essay on the *Série Noire* crime novels, focusing in particular on questions of stereotype and generic code. Deleuze notes that habits and clichés plague many commercial novels, most noticeably in their attempts to achieve 'realism': 'For bad literature, the real as such is the object of more stereotypes, puerilisations, and cut-price dreams than even an imbecilic imagination would know what to do with' (Deleuze 2001: 10). Yet he praises the works within the *Série Noire* that embrace and elevate generic clichés through pastiche. Rather than attempting to represent reality, crime novels that mimic the style of William Faulkner or John Steinbeck, for example, create parodies that obscure the line between the real and the imaginary. Like the simulacrum, the parody arises precisely from within the restrictions of habitual representations. And like the simulacrum, the parody is an artistic invention, or intervention. In each instance, reality is neither represented, nor rejected. Instead the very act of simulation or imposture opens into a new and more profound engagement with the real: 'parody in turn shows us directions within the real that we would never have found by ourselves' (Deleuze 2001: 10).

The parody, in other words, is less a send-up than an act of rendering obscure questions of intention, authenticity, truth and fiction. By engaging in pastiches of existing styles, these detective novels destabilise our expectations of what it is that a detective novel should do (for example, seek the truth with regard to a criminal act), shift the relations and qualities attached to stock characters (criminals and detectives), and reframe the contexts in which the crimes and cases unfold (such as institutions, networks of power and urban landscapes). The language used to represent these overdetermined tales of sexual intrigue and violence thickens, becoming more opaque as the true object of its narrative slips from view. In terms of genre, we might say that a parodic style deterritorialises the established generic function of a work (revealing the 'truth' about an unsolved crime), shifting the work onto new functional terrain (revelling in the surface level of signs, and, in doing so, destabilising notions of any underlying truth). The process Deleuze points to clearly extends beyond the realm of the detective novel. What we find here is an act of

double displacement. The creative fictions of genre, brought about by necessity, create a virtual code, a classification that establishes patterns of expectation and minimises difference. But the classification itself is a kind of fabulation, one that can be reproduced in a false copy, a simulacrum that reveals the hollowness of the original. If the creation of habit evolves from a passive synthesis of difference, the second move is far more active. What we find in the active intervention are the powers of the false.

Deleuze expands his discussion of the powers of the false extensively in his second volume on cinema, *Cinema 2*. The filmic time-image similarly throws truth and falsity into question in a variety of ways, each labouring to destabilise narrative verisimilitude. Like reflections in a crystal, certain film images present the virtual and actual as simultaneous and indiscernible. The figure of the forger looms large here, as investment in any faith in the 'real' becomes impossible; there is no originary image beneath the series of masks (Deleuze cites the expanding circuits of spectacle in Federico Fellini; 1989: 88–9). Time in other film images comes unhinged; rather than a linear unfolding, we encounter multiple sheets of time, each with its own set of 'incompossible presents' and 'not-necessarily-true pasts' (Deleuze 1989: 275). Truth, in such instances, is undecidable (see, for example, the overlapping images of the past in the films of Orson Welles or Resnais). The thrust of becoming as an ongoing process can result in another temporal reconfiguration. Here time is experienced not as a string of moments that move from before to after, but as an evolving 'burst of series'. Rather than a sequence of distinguishable states or instants, before and after are inextricable, two coexisting sides of 'becoming as potentialisation, as series of powers' (Deleuze 1989: 275). Change becomes manifest here in a series of images that destabilise notions of a true, fixed identity (the complex narrative strategies of postcolonial cinema, for example, filled with historical fabulations and invented selves).

Indiscernible, undecidable, inextricable, incompossible: the point of commonality amongst all these strategies is the unstoppable force of change. Truth is no longer a fixed universal, it is something created anew at each moment. Indeed, Deleuze's interest in the powers of the false in the arts is not to identify a work that falsifies some notion of truth. What is key, instead, is the notion of invention as a practice that unfolds in time, continually occurring, recurring, evolving. And the task of the artist goes beyond that of the forger in rising above the level of form to create something new: 'Only the creative artist takes the power of the false to a degree which is realised, not in form, but in transformation . . .

What the artist is, is *creator of truth*, because truth is not to be achieved, formed, or reproduced; it has to be created' (Deleuze 1989: 146–7).

To return to the question of genre, then, we might think about genres as fictions of the imagination, habitual codes created to make sense of diverse textual expressions. These codes, of course, are continually reinforced and cemented, working as they so often do in support of existing industry practices, existing ideological models, existing modes of reception. But, being at their core abstract projections, they are never fully actualised in a precise or systematic manner; it is hard to identify even a single genre film that faithfully adheres to all the criteria associated with those broad categories. Deviations multiply, and the imagined boundaries of the category evolve. Moreover, each iteration of even the most uninspired generic work elicits some kind of difference in the audience that contemplates it. While Deleuze does not address this concern directly, we might draw more attention to the variations elicited by the context of each filmic event in understanding how cycles of repetition extend beyond the film text itself. Do these codes and stereotypes operate differently on the third or thirteenth viewing? In a university lecture hall or on a handheld device? Does the sedimentation of certain generic distinctions within the realm of film studies shift the legibility of a film's expressive elements? Can generic habits be destabilised in ways that render the codes themselves indiscernible?

The key to working productively with generic stereotypes and habitual codes is to deterritorialise them, denaturalise them, opening them up to new paths of movement and thought. To do so requires a willed intervention. In a lecture on music, Deleuze elaborates on this dynamic through a discussion of pulsed versus non-pulsed time (i.e. expressions that are heavily coded and habitual versus those that break free from, and deterritorialise, the measure):

In a certain manner, pulsed time will always be given to you, or it will be imposed on you, you will be forced to comply with it and from another side, it will order you; the other must be wrested . . . My problem of non-pulsed time becomes: wresting something from the territorialities of time, you wrest something from the temporal development of forms and you wrest something from the formation of subjects. (Deleuze 1977)

This distinction between something given and something created resonates broadly throughout Deleuze's writings. The implications of the willed intervention are manifold, impacting not only the form and temporality of the work itself, but larger political questions regarding power

and subject formation, the ideological scaffolding, in other words, for the fictions of the code.

I would like to propose two ways of thinking through these notions of willed interventions and creative wresting in relation to the cinematic genre. The first involves an artistic intervention, taking a filmic text or a code and wringing new meanings, new, productive falsities from it. Joseph Cornell's found footage collages are particularly affecting examples in this regard. Films such as *Rose Hobart* (USA, 1936) and *Thimble Theater* (USA, 1938) juxtapose snippets of devalued, discarded or incongruous films (B-studio films, children's cartoons, educational or scientific shorts), often projected at a slower frame rate. These moments, wrested from their narrative context and native temporality take on a haunting quality: Hobart, the star of *East of Borneo* (George Melford, USA, 1931), is caught in a ceaseless state of reactive inaction; flowers metamorphose into carousels of living animals. What might have appeared, in its given state, to be a mundane artifact is revealed as an animated, enigmatic cabinet of curiosities.

A 2007 installation by Spencer Finch suggests another mode of artistic intervention. *West (Sunset in my motel room, Monument Valley, February 26, 2007, 5:36–6:06 pm)* uses the reflected light from a bank of video monitors, facing a wall, to recreate the precise colour patterns Finch observed in his motel room during sunset on that date. The nine monitors (which viewers can only see by peering around the side of the bank) show thirty stills from John Ford's *The Searchers* (USA, 1956), each changing only once per minute, to calibrate the colour and tonality of the light that fills the gallery. Finch's own memory of the light in Monument Valley (mediated by the motel room) is indiscernible from Ford's epic fabulation of that same landscape as Hollywood backdrop in a film that is already both icon for and deterritorialisation of the western as a whole. Not only is *The Searchers* cast anew in this context, but our very notions of light, place and memory also come undone, wrested from the comfort of the individual recollection.

Another approach to creative intervention rests in the realm of a philosophical or critical engagement. We might aspire, here, to be the reader that wrests something latent or unforeseen from an existing body of work. As with the artistic intervention, the aim is to engage with the materiality of that which one observes like a clinician. 'If they are great', writes Deleuze, authors

are more like doctors than patients. We mean that they are themselves astonishing diagnosticians or symptomatologists. There is always a great deal of art involved in the groupings of symptoms, in the organisation of a

table where a particular symptom is dissociated from another, juxtaposed to a third, and forms the figure of a disorder or illness. Clinicians who are able to renew a symptomatological table produce a work of art; conversely, artists are clinicians, not with respect to their own case, nor even with respect to a case in general; rather, they are clinicians of civilisation. (Deleuze 1990: 237)

A critical engagement with genre would mean a renewal of the tables by which films are habitually organised, seeking out new connections and points of distinction. It means a further recognition of the work that filmmaker/clinicians perform in crafting their art, teasing out the relationship between material expressions and a civilisation/world that might lie dormant in the work. The film-philosopher must not merely describe, or impose preexisting models. Instead, she or he should 'form concepts that aren't of course "given" in films but nonetheless relate specifically to cinema ... Concepts specific to cinema, but which can only be formed philosophically' (Deleuze 1995: 57–8).

A Symptomatology: People, Light, Flowers, Mirrors, Blood

In a nearly ecstatic essay written in 1971, Rainer Werner Fassbinder laid out his candid responses to a Douglas Sirk retrospective:

Sirk has said you can't make films about things, you can only make films with things, with people, with light, with flowers, with mirrors, with blood, in fact with all the fantastic things that make life worth living. Sirk has also said: a director's philosophy is lighting and camera angles. And Sirk has made the tenderest films I know, they are the films of someone who loves people and doesn't despise them as we do. (Fassbinder 1975: 88)

A filmmaker's philosophy arises out of his or her manipulations of light, of surfaces, of images, of sounds. Such a description hews closely to Deleuze's own insistence upon the affective power of pure optical and sonic situations. If philosophy 'tells stories ... with concepts', the cinema 'tells stories with blocks of movements/durations' (Deleuze 1998: 15).

The introduction of Sirk and Fassbinder allows me to circle back to del Río's work on these filmmakers in order to reconsider the relationship between the performative qualities she identifies and the peculiar habits and formulations of the domestic melodrama. How does the category of the domestic melodrama work to create certain types of stylistic tics? Indeed, the melodrama is one of the most historically enduring, mutable and enigmatic dramatic forms, vastly exceeding what one might easily

deem a genre-proper. From the perspective of a heretical symptomatology, this looseness lends itself to a creative renewal of the generic code. I am further drawn to the affinities between these two filmmakers, who seem to be articulating variations on a shared refrain, voiced in one instance within, in the other outside, the porous boundaries of a generic paradigm. Sirk and Fassbinder each seem hyperconscious of the functionality of generic conventions. And, it could be argued, each performs acts of forgery and parody in manipulating those codes. What we might find in a critical reading of these works, then, is an interplay between both artistic and philosophical modes of intervention.

In his seminal essay on Sirk and the family melodrama, Thomas Elsaesser turns to the more elemental definition of the genre: 'a dramatic narrative in which musical accompaniment marks the emotional effects ...'. This is still perhaps the most useful definition', he writes,

because it allows melodramatic elements to be seen as constituents of a system of punctuation, giving expressive colour and chromatic contrast to the story-line, by orchestrating the emotional ups and downs of the intrigue. The advantage of this approach is that it formulates the problems of melodrama as problems of style and articulation. (Elsaesser 1987: 50)

Such a broad definition, of course, proves entirely unhelpful should one wish to create a system for categorising melodramatic films according to narrative structure; almost every film deploys music as an emotional marker, and we are given little guidance as to the distinctions that could be drawn between different stylistic approaches to emotional expression. Yet this starting point seems closer to Deleuze's assertion that artists work with shapes (and not forms), reliefs and projections. A focus on style and articulation is in effect a symptomatology; rather than imposing classifying structures from above, the reader must wrest meaning from the signaletic material itself. Meaning is not given here; it is made.

A focus on signs and style draws our attention to the particularities of each cinematic event. This move, for example, allows Elsaesser to make important distinctions between the domestic melodramas typified by Sirk, Nicholas Ray and Vincente Minnelli and other melodramatic traditions. The most readily apparent of these distinctions is the visual and sonic excesses of these works, particularly in their brightly hued, widescreen incarnations. Readings of the domestic melodrama, Elsaesser insists, are justified in 'giving critical importance to the *mise-en-scène* over intellectual content or story value'. Emotional and dramatic conflict is 'sublimated' in these films into 'décor, colour, gesture, and com-

position of the frame' (Elsaesser 1987: 52). Although Elsaesser frames his final observations on the family melodrama within the context of Freudian dream analysis, I suspect that his conclusion lends itself to more open readings:

Melodramas often use middle-class American society, its iconography and the family experience ... as their manifest 'material,' but 'displace' it into quite different patterns, juxtaposing stereotyped situations in strange configurations, provoking clashes and ruptures which not only open up new associations but also redistribute the emotional energies which suspense and tensions have accumulated in disturbingly different directions. (Elsaesser 1987: 60)

We might begin our symptomatology of the Sirk-Fassbinder melodrama with an examination of this kind of productive displacement. Del Río reads the gestures of the performative body as displacing or reorganising the narrative codes that would contain it. I might extend her observations to consider the performative gestures of costume and décor in this type of domestic melodrama. Emotion is not just externalised here, it threatens to devour the frame. If a symptomatological genre could be formed on the basis of 'aggressive wallpaper and draperies', we might draw a clear line between Sirk, Fassbinder and Pedro Almodóvar (with echoes of Jacques Demy and David Lynch). The rooms in these films are resplendent with the plumage of suffering and unfulfilled desire. Patterns and textures proliferate, collapsing space, bifurcating the frame, and swallowing up the human figures that dwell within them. The nearly nauseating purples and pinks of the hotel room Kyle (Robert Stack) attempts to seduce Lucy (Lauren Bacall) with in *Written on the Wind* are illustrative of this kind of performative gesture. Costumes, too, vocalise what the characters themselves cannot articulate. In *Angst essen Seele auf/Ali: Fear Eats the Soul* (Rainer Werner Fassbinder, West Germany, 1974), the plump, middle aged Emmi (Brigitte Mira) wears a most spectacular and incongruous pair of bright yellow patent leather platform sandals. The shoes signal much about her character that we might not read in her physical gestures, but even beyond this, they create a gesture all of their own, becoming part of a larger tonal palette that exceeds individual characterisation, triggering even more amorphous affective responses.

This observation, that domestic melodramas externalise suppressed emotion, is certainly not new. However, what I am suggesting we take from this observation is a renewed understanding of what it is that the domestic melodrama does. What will result is not a new generic formulation, but rather a sense of an *expressive tendency* that might surface

in a variety of works, towards a diversity of ends. I would read this tendency as a movement that interfaces with the more formalised generic category of 'the melodrama', at times as unreflexive mimicry, and at others as an act of artistic intervention. In each case, the provocation must be taken up by the viewer: how will the gesture register? What potentialities might be wrested from this expressive material? 'Melodrama', Elsaesser writes

is often used to describe tragedy that doesn't quite come off: either because the characters think of themselves too self-consciously as tragic or because the predicament is too evidently fabricated on the level of plot and dramaturgy to carry the kind of conviction normally termed 'inner necessity'. (Elsaesser 1987: 65)

What makes the domestic melodrama such a rich playground for exploring this dynamic is its excessiveness, together with the unadulterated pleasure that it takes in acts of fabrication. This does not signal a lack of sincerity; rather, I would argue that genuine affect is in abundance in these films – what Nietzsche might call 'falseness with a good conscience' (Nietzsche 2001: 225). Nevertheless, the specificity of their empirical expressions often butts against the ostensible goals of the generic form. While melodramas have traditionally been framed as vehicles for imposing moral judgements, filmmakers like Sirk and Fassbinder render judgement meaningless. Each player is a simulacrum, neither determinately 'true' nor 'false'. Surface-level expressions here overpower, forge, and circumvent easy distinctions between interior and exterior; character is flooded. Comic elements proliferate in these films, to be sure, but they are more inscrutable than mocking. The trajectory of the displacement is more often deterritorialised than it is transparent. What one views is not just a symbolic gesture, but an open-ended reflection on the inextricable relations between individual and world.

Uncategorical Conclusions

'It is pointless to claim that a list of categories can be open in principle', writes Deleuze; 'it can be in fact, but not in principle.' Categories 'belong to the world of representation', whereas descriptive, empirical, pluralist approaches tip into the realm of the simulacrum, the 'phantastical' (Deleuze 1994: 284–5). Descriptive symptomatologies, in other words, might be open in fact, if they are based on careful empirical observation, rather than the abstractions of representational catego-

ries. Symptomatologies must sink their teeth into material conditions and experiences. While general categories rely on sedentary universals, symptomatologies are 'complexes of space and time', irreducible 'nomadic distributions'. 'Nomadic or phantastical notions', for Deleuze, are 'the objects of an essential encounter rather than of recognition' (Deleuze 1994: 285).

Film genres, as we commonly use and understand them, almost certainly fall within the realm of a representational ontology. One might justifiably view the concept of genre with cynicism: genres exist to mould films into preexisting markets, they code our expectations and colonise our interpretations. Generic classifications artificially impose unity upon diverse texts after the fact, obscuring our access to their full optical and sonic richness. Deleuze is even more blunt in his dismissal: 'the main genres, the western, crime, period films, comedy, and so on, tell us nothing about different types of images or their intrinsic characteristics' (Deleuze 1995: 46).

But it is important to recognise that the signaletic materials of the cinematic expression almost always evolve in relation to the codes of the genre, whether they un-reflexively adhere to them, explicitly refuse them, or engage them in acts of forgery and deterritorialisation. Might we not read the symptomatic expression, then, in dialogue with the generalised codes that circulate through it? And, with careful dissection, might not the codes themselves reveal a whole series of phantasms and simulacra? The interplay between cinematic viewer and text relies upon a series of repetitions, shared fabulations, and thwarted expectations. While most films will inevitably remain vehicles for the replication of codes and stereotypes, the lingering possibility of creative transgression requires a careful consideration of the complex artistic and political work such codes do, or could, perform.

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Chapter 9

Feminine Energies, or the Outside of Noir

Elena del Río

Taking a Deleuzian standpoint, this essay will investigate the possibility of assessing the noir genre as the specifically American counterpart to Italian neorealism's transitional role in marking a psycho-moral crisis in the post-war period – a crisis that in cinematic terms translated into the weakening and collapse of the sensory-motor schema (Deleuze 1989: 5–6). Given the strong ties that neorealism and noir both developed with the social, cultural and economic upheavals in their respective contexts during and in the wake of the war, and given also the high investment in narrative and formal innovation that they both share, we may tentatively assign the noir series of the 1940s and 1950s a parallel, albeit non-symmetrical, function to that accomplished by neorealism. For Deleuze, this involved a shift away from the chain-like causation of actions built upon realistic spatial and temporal moorings towards a cinema of indiscernibility, unfolding through purely optical and sonic situations. As I re-evaluate some key aspects of the noir genre, I seek neither to question the validity of previous scholarly contributions nor to manufacture confirmation of Deleuze's philosophy of cinema in the films of the noir period. Instead, I am inspired by a general Deleuzian stance, also invoked by Ronald Bogue (2010: 125 and 127), which consists of cultivating a measure of scepticism towards past knowledge, and especially towards the ideas one holds most certain.

In attempting a partial reconsideration of the noir genre, I will aim at suspending a number of conceptual givens that have framed past critical debates concerning this genre. In particular, I would like to disrupt the critical balance grounded in the Oedipal framings of noir narratives by emphasising instead the genre's ambivalence towards Oedipal structures of law and morality. The ambiguity that affects the noir film, one which precisely affirms its transitional status, arises from the tension between its indebtedness to the old moral programme – a programme that

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