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Felix Guattari's 'Cracks in the text' revisited

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Cracks in the text or cracks in the street

Garin Dowd

Text of a short intervention at 'Schizo-Culture: Cracks in the Street', an event organised around the work of Sylvère Lotringer, curated by Katherine Waugh in collaboration with David Morris and Space gallery, at the French Institute, South Kensington, London May 17th 2014

<https://www.institut-francais.org.uk/events-calendar/whats-on/talks/schizo-culture-cracks-in-the-street/>

For the purposes of this short intervention I would like to return to a text by Guattari from 1986. Guattari begins his essay delivered to the MLA conference (Cracks in the Text) in 1986 by stating that the organisers wanted him to stick to the notion of *text* as this was in keeping with the name of the association of which he was the invited guest. Guattari resisted and retained the title 'Cracks in the Street'. In the text he explores non-textual discursivity in three paintings by Balthus and throughout resists the perhaps expected reinscription of his paper in terms of a textualist paradigm. In continuity with the emphasis on a semiotic model which would resist what he and Deleuze regarded as the reductive model of structuralist linguistics, he invokes Hjelmslev's immanent account of the operations of Content and Expression. Moreover he concludes that what is operative in Balthus is a force of transversal passage. *Passage* is the name of the painting then which embodies the operator of passage. The cracks which the painting embodies or renders possible Guattari asserts will themselves be capable of subjecting certain psychoanalytic readings and reductions of the painting to a kind of fractalisation. If the painting itself is oscillating in a space of passage our model of engagement with it is subjected to the force of this oscillation.

But I am not here going to speak about Cracks in the Street or other associated concepts in the writings of Guattari and of Guattari with Deleuze, not least when the latter takes up the phrase of another participant in Schizo-Culture 1975. I am thinking of Foucault's 'fendre les chose, fendre les mots'. Though clearly this would be a relevant line of enquiry.

No, the reason I begin with 'Cracks in the Street' is that its first publication in the original – for Guattari wrote it in French – was in the journal *Chimères*, founded in 1984 by Guattari and with, among others, the psychoanalyst Peter Pal Pelbart on the editorial board. Deleuze only came on board later, and as François Dosse accurately points out, despite Deleuze's presence the journal is decidedly Guattarian.¹ In his editorial

¹ I want to speak about *Chimères* because the journal amounts to an experiment in transversal intellectual proliferation of the very sort associated with the combined journal and the Foreign Agents series founded by Sylvère in the US *Semiotext(e)*. To

introduction to the first number Guattari defined schizoanalysis as a science of chimera. A science which would be open to rather than attempt to close off the impact of the aesthetic paradigm, such as exemplified for him by the paintings by Balthus; a science which would not follow psychoanalysis, albeit in a journal of which many of the contributors were indeed members of that profession – albeit loosely ‘Labordean’ in orientation. The interventions would rather return in some sense to the inventiveness of the first psychoanalysis and remove the *carcan*, or iron collar of pseudoscientificity which would come to define it just as it had research in philosophy and the social sciences. The chimera are at once the monsters comprising different genes – thus the different disciplines – but also more general products or scenes of the delirium which for Guattari is the domain of art, and which the discipline of psychoanalysis must relearn. Back then to 1975 and the theme of madness. Not, Guattari cautions, a gratuitous inter-disciplinarity but rather a return to the singular, to singularity. *A chacun sa folie*.

I would like to conclude with my own three passages, to mimic Guattari in his *Cracks in the Street* intervention.

I could have chosen any number of films to take the place of the three paintings.

I want to allow them to speak, or to utter for themselves.

Each film is concerned with contemporary infrastructure, economy and geopolitics in different ways.

The first of these amounts to a delirious reimagining (*Castro* by Alejo Mogueillansky) of Samuel Beckett’s novel *Murphy*, transposed from its axis of Dublin-London to that of Rio del Plata-Buenos Aires.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qa_NMXUnVEI

The second is another looser sense of adaptation, the Ballardian *Home* (directed by Ursula Meier).

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jkMbyAknaGI>

The third is Tsai Ming-Liang’s *I Don’t want to Sleep Alone*.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Azu197bM2Zk>

continue then with *Chimères* is a way of linking the ‘schizo’ part of the name of this evening’s event and the ‘cracks in the street’ part.

As a coda to these short extracts I should refer briefly to Guattari's interest and aspirations to become a filmmaker. These are increasingly well-known, not least since the publication of his film script for a project entitled *Un amour de UIQ*. The project has been the subject of a recent film by the artists Sylvia Maglioni and Graeme Thompson entitled *In Search of UIQ*. We will see another Guattarian film made by them later this evening.