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The Captive

Garin Dowd

Text of a response to a paper by Linda Lai - 'Presencing the past, a montage experience: walking through a series of temporal nodes' - at Urban Encounters 2017: Cartographies, Clore Auditorium, Tate Britain, November 11 2017.

I would like to begin by saying that we have learned from Linda Lai 4 things about montage:

1. That montage can be a way to return and open out the frames of some found images.
2. Montage also has been revealed as a way to open up and gain access to the layers and strata of a city.
3. Montage is a way to identify the role of images in the formation of those strata.
4. Montage is a practice, a strategy to expose strata and to expose, moreover, strategies of coloniality and perhaps to locate within them *stratagems* which loosen the hold of the strata.

Stratagems which may only be latent, or even projected backward, or visible only as ruins.

Stratagems, then, may be what Doreen Massey calls “loose ends and ongoing stories”, those two things which pose such a challenge and an affront to cartography.

Massey in fact attests, in the same way that Linda Lai does, that space needs to be thought as a “sphere not of a discrete multiplicity of discrete things, but [...] a heterogeneity of practices and *processes*” (Massey 107).

And it is why Benjamin’s combination of archaeologist, collector and detective is important to her project. When – through his physiognomical approach to the city, Benjamin finds, in the “thousands of eyes, in thousands of objects, [that] the city [is] reflected” (GV IV 358), he invokes the idea of the monad, from Leibniz. Because monads are dynamic and always in process: they fill and empty their zones of clarity in proportion to the extent to which they are able to contain the potential of the whole.¹

One image in particular strikes me in Linda Lai’s pairings and clusters – an image which I hope I may be permitted to I set aside from its *pairing* in her diptych – if that action does not amount to illegitimately *repairing* the disjunction in their conjunction.

Mapping haecceities she says, in a formulation which is surely taken from Deleuze and Guattari for whom schizoanalytic cartography should entail a mapping not based on points and lines, but on haecceities: a wind, sound, a colour, a shadow – these may open up the

¹ For Benjamin monadology however becomes dialectal. Thus, for him, the truth of the content of a thing is only released when on the brink of extinction. The monadological conception need not be dialectical of course, and it is precisely and emphatically not in the conception of Michel Serres in *Atlas* for example.

potentiality within a space. Mapping should entail a proliferation of directions. In this a certain cartographic method would contrast with strata.

An image representing through a photograph a colonial technics of the body entailing parks, open space, breathing and perambulation: the exteriorised performance of *a health*. Its comestible equivalent: a lozenge to combat bronchial conditions. Governmentality, care of the self. Linda tells me the residence of the Governor overlooked the park

But the girls are taking a photograph. The carefully protected and accompanied girls capture a moment of felicity; the click of camera's shutter: the opening of a glimpse of self-fashioning even within this tightly controlled *dispositif*.

This pairing then is opened out backwards and forwards to the fountain of 1905, to its absence in the autobiographical traces of the 1960s and beyond to other open spaces built since then, including some which in gaps and overlayings occlude by way of voids and palimpsests monuments whose spell has not only been broken in Benjaminian critique but which have been replaced or dislocated from their former symbolic role after 1997.

In a short text entitled 'Trafic/Déclit', Jean-Luc Nancy places the photograph and the city into conjunction. The urban photo is a little piece cut out from a universe in flow or flight ["*pan coupé d'un univers en fuite*" (10)] whereas the town captures loose ends which it knots and unknots ["*capte des frayages qu'elle noue et dénoue*"]

He goes on to say that the town and the photo are two systems enabling the capture of passage and passing. The town is a frame and a framing. Hong Kong for example is a place of arrival: it once had after all its Possession Point, which gave way to Hollywood Road Park. The area of prostitutes and spies stimulated the orientalist imaginary of Hollywood and popular fiction. The image clusters proposed by Linda Lai display the capture always subject to vectors or trajectory reconfiguration.

Guattari's schizoanalytic prescription: don't trace the symptom back to a map of the past but use it as an experiment with becoming and the future. As Anne Sauvagnargues has written of Guattari's therapeutic cartographic practice: not observation but *evacuation*. It seems to me that Linda Lai's historiographic and cartographic work on Hong Kong might be part of a productive evacuation from the confines of the strata of the past into the space of contemporary and future stratagems.²

² The spider's stratagem might be a stratagem of the city as labyrinth. Benjamin wondered how he might set out the sphere of life – *bios* – graphically on a map (OWS); how he might fashion a diagram of his life.