

# rhizomes 11/12

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Interface to Hyperface: Odd Links and Cruel Design  
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*Queer theory . . . works not at the site of gender, but at the site of ontology, to shift the ground of being itself, thus challenging the Platonic parameters of Being--the borders of life and death. (3) — Sue Ellen Case*

*Utopic in its negativity, queer theory curves endlessly toward a realization that its realization remains impossible, that only as a force of derealization, of dissolution into the fluxions of subjectless desire, can it ever be itself. (346) — Lee Edelman*

*Ahab's strange relationship with Moby Dick, mixing desire with death, is, since Dialogues, the example of becoming that Deleuze most frequently provides. (213 n. 2) — Francois Zourabichvili*

### **Involution**

[1] To queer media studies, specifically interface design/studies, challenges the mechanism of identification that Deleuze and Guattari describe as faciality. It does not identify the sexuality (homo-, hetero-, bi-, poly-, phallogocentric, what have you) of an individual, a textual discourse, or an interface design strategy. It neither outs Deleuze nor demythologizes the sexist phallogocentrism of media studies. Neither “either” nor “or,” but not “and” or “but.” Imagine instead the disjunction, the odd blank link, an artificial-Warholian pose as the poetics of queering. Not the Being of queer, but always a deadpan bemusement: a becoming-Other. The style: not outing an identity’s passion, but the queering not yet arrived at – held at bay in media studies, at least, by Oedipal ideological identity politics and anti-ideological analyses alike. This approach, “no longer trapped within the reductionist paradigms of sociological, semiological and psychoanalytic analyses,” as Barbara Kennedy explains, allows for “innovative conceptions of theory of affect and sensation through the processuality of becoming, rather than pleasure and desire” (33). Alexander Doty explains that “queer” is “more than just an umbrella term in the ways that “homosexual” and “gay” have been used to mean lesbian or gay or bisexual, because queerness can also be about the intersecting or combining of more than one specific form of ... sexuality” (xvi). It apprehends the odd link that does not fit back into grand narratives. As Doty explains, “queerness should challenge and confuse our understanding and uses of sexual and gender categories” (xvii). Doty even includes the category of “straight queerness” to distinguish queering from gayness, lesbianism, or bisexuality (xviii). And, Judith Butler argues that “heterosexuality doesn’t belong exclusively to heterosexuals ... and practices are not the same as ... norms” (199). These deterritorializations include Jacques Derrida’s deconstruction of the “relations between what is called “man” and “woman”” (232). The assumption that queer theory pushes against is that “everyone “has a sexuality” ... implicated with each person’s sense of overall identity in similar ways” (8), as Eve Sedgwick argues, the “most exciting recent work around “queer” spins the term outward along dimensions that can’t be subsumed under gender and sexuality at all” (9). Much more is at stake than simply group consciousness-raising and cohesion.

[2] Queer theory can alter the relationship between theoretical speculations and objects of study: between media and media theories. That is, the norms of practical criticism change when a rhizomatic context of research "projects" and "screens" theory, not to become an object of study as in meta-theories, but rather to function as a creative disruption of contexts of research and reception. This rhizomatic theory makes contexts of reception into images. It filters ways of understanding media through various picto-ideographic effects. In D & G's terms, the theory projected here is "involutionary" rather than merely descriptive.

Becoming is involutionary, involution is creative. To regress is to move in the direction of something less differentiated. But to involve is to form a block that runs its own line 'between' the terms in play and beneath assignable relations. (*ATP* 238-239)

As an effort to involve, this projection runs a line between performance and theory, audience and performers, and education and entertainment. As Jacques Derrida notes, "Performativity, ... excludes in principle, in its own moment, any machinelike technicity" (74), but what if the performance would happen by the machine? The theory resembles a kind of performance of theory to "run a test" of contexts of research and reception: to de-face (rather than inter-face) with the arborescent ordering of information." The question we begin with is no longer about how could a spectator be positioned as a transcendental consumer by the cinematic apparatus. Instead, how could one use these theories to suggest a different mode of subjectivity or alternatives to subject formation? These types of ideological analyses presume falsely that "the writer was hiding anything to begin with" instead of acting like a child who "plays in the full light of day, plays openly, and even causes his or her creations to transform the external world of perception" (Lambert 136). This could serve as a description of queer theory's efforts to form a becoming, if not a realization, of "the fluxions of subjectless desire," a flux not identified within the identity politics of gay-straight striations. Instead, it follows, what Butler describes as "possibilities that emerge from failed dialectics and that exceed the dialectic itself" (198). It plays out without shame or self-satisfied hubris.

[3] On what plateau does this subjectless desire flow over the banks of facing-up to group identity? The odd, the anacoluthon, the queer, does not follow in lock-step nor reduce desire to identity. Involutionary logic, difficult to press into service for identity politics, may suggest a line of flight through the striations of interface. In Doty's terms, "queerness is a mass culture reception practice that is shared by all sorts of people,"(2) often "beyond ... sexual identities and identity politics" (15). In that sense, "queer reception (and production) practices can include everything from the reactionary to the radical to the indeterminate" (15). The implications of this alternative to subject formation for inter-face design begin with the supposed connection between faces and identities.

## Faciality

[4] In exploring the alternatives to subject formation, one plateau in *A Thousand Plateaus* examines our notions of the face and of facializing objects, landscapes, etc. The face mechanism situated at the intersection of signifiacance and subjectification appears not only on human heads, but also in our treatment of bodies and things (See also Bogue 140-142). In this scenario, the face and facialized objects function as windows onto subjective intention and assemblages of meaningful looks. We not only say, for example, “he had a sad face,” suggesting signifiacance, but also imply that “he is sad” precisely because he had a sad face. Kuleshov’s (perhaps apocryphal) experiment (the Kuleshov effect) illustrates the intersection of subjectivity and signifiacance in a face, and demonstrates how objects become facialized. He showed an audience clips of film with the famous actor Mujakeen--in each clip Kuleshov used the exact same shot--inter-cut with shots of a bowl of soup, a funeral procession, a springtime scene, etc. The participants raved about the amazing acting skills of the actor; that is, they imputed subjective qualities to him, and they saw signifiacance in his face. After all, what’s a face for anyway? Likewise, the objects became charged with intention as well; they spoke to the actors face; they said, hungry? sad? happy? Deleuze explains, in *Cinema I*, that “the close-up is by itself face”(Deleuze, 1986, 88).

[5] Essential attributes do not define the face. It exists as a relation in motion. Instead of defining objects as geometrically static, this plateau suggests that “differential speeds” lead to the always-changing relationships among supposedly well defined territories. So, for example, the movable hand and a use object join in a deterritorialized relationship. This "block" shifts the body’s hand from its territory, or proper place, and sets it in relation to the use object; another example, the upright head deterritorializes human away from the animal kingdom toward wanderings on a steppe. The crucial example, for this plateau, concerns the relationship between the face and the landscape. “This last example, has special intensity;” the face deterritorializes the world. Everything becomes facialized ready for someone to fill it with significance and subjective intentions. Italo Calvino’s “The First Sign” in *Cosmi-Comics*, about the first signs in the universe that soon led to an aggressive struggle to sign everything until the whole universe is filled-up with signs. Before any signing begins, something faces empty space and as soon as s/he/it notices that first sign, s/he/it soon has started filling space with signs (31-33). Because the story postulates this un-named entity facing the empty universe, it also might help illustrate how faciality pre-exists any tracing of sign systems back to any deeply rooted origin. Deleuze and Guattari explain that “The black hole/white wall system must already have gridded all of space and outlined its arborescences or dichotomies for those of signifier and subjectification even to be conceivable.” In Calvino’s story, some faceless entity makes a mark in some undefined space, and soon the mark returns with another mark on top of it. This infuriates the faceless entity, who soon faces the entire universe and fills it completely with marks. The first mark builds upon an embryonic narcissism--once the entity makes the mark, s/he/it hits the fan: the entity has to face the cluttered landscape. The overtones of a god-like entity also suggest the importance of a Christ figure, who faces and facializes the world. Christian morality demands that we face our sins. Psychoanalysis demands that we face-up to our subjectivity. Information theory demands that we inter-face with the facialized world around us. Gay and lesbian identity politics demands we face the political realities of homophobia in the ongoing attacks. Face-ness always demands a proportionate response: subjectivity always exists in a proper proportion to a transcendent signifying god-like system. If the subject moves too close to the god, or the god overwhelms the subject, then the facialization breaks down into a glossolalia of potentialities: the face becomes a mask.

## Deterritorialization of Interface

[6] To summarize the relationships involved in deterritorializations, Deleuze and Guattari list a few theorems. In turn, these theorems suggest clichés about relationships as useful mnemonic devices. Borrowing clichés about interfaces and identity, the queering unhinges them from their previous meaning and/or identity. Instead of defining objects in terms of categories and essential characteristics, differential motions make becomings always in terms of a relation: locomotor hand/use object; wasp/orchid; face/screen. These becomings are always in relation to other planes, other deterritorializations. Instead of a branching tree, the connections are rhizomatic: locomotor hand/remote control/TV/eyes/airwaves/electronic interference/static/phone/ear . . . etc. These deterritorialized becomings always reterritorialize, but on a different organizational plane: the wasp and orchid form a territory open to the deterritorializations of, for example, DDT. The abstract machine works not by order of resemblances but by order of reasons. Faciality does not imprint according to a rule such as 'only things that look like a face.' Rather it functions according to a particular conjunction; a reason of being, which indicates an object as facialized (for example, the face of a clock). Likewise despotic power always resides in the anticipation of the subjects who anxiously wait for figurative smiles or frowns. Besides the *anticipatory despotism*, a shift has already occurred away from faciality. Understanding optics of fascination as a dance of the masks, rather than as a spectacle's in-your-face approach, stresses ludic disruption instead of the lures of a spectacle coordinated for social control.

[7] In offering an alternative to the one-and-only proper viewing position analyses of cinema, Deleuze and Guattari use the close-up as a theoretical mapping activity (rather than as a description or tracing of the object of study supposedly separate from the perceiver's position). In the case of mixed scales and in terms of the line-of-flight, the close-up concerns a mapmakers position. Michel De Certeau describes the effect of knocking signifiante and subjectivity with mixed scale proportions including a close-up scale.

Things extra and other (details and excesses coming from elsewhere) insert themselves into the accepted framework, the imposed order. The surface of this order is everywhere punched and torn open by ellipses, drifts, and leaks of meaning: it is a sieve-order (De Certeau, 1988, 107)

The sieve-order's disruption of any accepted framework leads to what Deleuze and Guattari describe as a *minor literature*. This "deterritorialized language, appropriate for strange and minor uses," disrupts the usual connection between an individual and a social background (Deleuze, *Kafka* 17). The social milieu does not serve as a mere background, but rather it allows one to, in Deleuze and Guattari's terminology, "pickup ideas." The participants become nomads, immigrants, Gypsies, strangers in relation to any framing discourse. A minor literature affects the scholarly endeavor itself.

(B)outs of surprise (in the same way there are bouts of fever), the sudden jubilatory, semi-ecstatic forms of 'astonishment' or 'wonder' . . . have been, from Aristotle to Wittgenstein, the inaugurators of philosophical activity. Something that exceeds the thinkable and opens the possibility of 'thinking otherwise' bursts in through comical, incongruous, or paradoxical half-openings of discourse (DeCerteau, 1988, 109)

The “cognitive map” gives way to a projection, a mapping: neither continuous, unified, logical, nor complete. The wanderings no longer uncover denotative meanings nor certain destinations. Contingencies of use supersede the deeply rooted definitions. The text and interface becomes a situation rather than a substance: turbulent vision.

[8] The interface of hypertext fiction described with the analogy of “women telling each other stories” (Sloane), suggests it is not just that women writers are important in the production of hypertext interface and writing, but that the very interface design may demonstrate “women’s writing” as a form and process (Case, 1997). When accretion replaces plot line, the new reading process may also suggest a new type of reader and subjectivity. In at least one hypertext novel, “composition style,” rather than the literal story alone, suggests a “lesbian desire” (Case, 1997). Changes in compositional or interface design may have implications for the way the texts address the reader. There is not just one-way to couple segments of a text. The dis-conjunctions focus less attention on the impossible duality of oppositions and more on the becomings between them.

### **Nomadic Mapping**

[9] Artaud’s theater of cruelty offers a model for the pragmatic construction of a nomadic mapping of perception and an opening for something that changes interface. Deleuze explains that “Artaud believes in an appropriateness between theater and automatic writing, as long as we understand that automatic writing is not at all an absence of composition”(Deleuze, *Cinema II*, 165-166); there is a fissure, a crack, a hole in appearances-- “no longer a whole thinkable through montage, on the other hand there is no longer an internal monologue utterable through image.” Rejecting Eisensteinian formalist analysis as well as more typical readings of characters, Deleuze instead uses Artaud to propose an automatic writing, a pragmatic construction (a mapping) which shifts the perception of interface as a screen to hyper-faces as a mask, an event, a happening. He also does not want to limit interpretation to the analysis of a “dream state induced in the viewer ... or imaginary participation [compare Metz’s explanation of the “imaginary signifier”](Deleuze, *Cinema II*, 168). The nomadic perceptions “affect the visible with a disturbance, which far from making thought visible, as Eisenstein wanted, are on the contrary directed to what does not let itself be thought in thought, and equally to what does not let itself be seen in vision”(Deleuze, *Cinema II*, 168). In this situation, “the image has ceased to be sensory-motor.” The screen-mask becomes a seer: “It is this belief that makes the un-thought the specific power of thought, through the absurd, by virtue of the absurd”(Deleuze, *Cinema II*, 170). The spirited belief fueled by this absurd perception is not in a different or transformed world; the belief is “in the world as if in a pure optical and sound situation . . . reconnect to what we see and hear”(Deleuze, *Cinema II*, 172). This is not a return to a Bazinian phenomenology, as some have suggested, but rather a turn toward Artaud’s frustrations of pure unadulterated perceptions, frustrations and disturbances to any direct encounter with phenomenal realities. Sexuality as an analogy (The analogy) for interface no longer functions in terms of the symmetry of striated sexuality. Although it is useful for real world politics to take sides, queering sets out to propose a complete impossibility and negativity: an inter-faceless alternative or more correctly a hyper-faces-intensity.

[10] In a discussion of Pedro Almodovar's *All About My Mother*, Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit discuss a non-relational sexuality created by Almodovar. The film suggests a desire "no longer burdened by fantasy-illusions of power and castration" (120). It is precisely that anti-Oedipal desire that Deleuze and Guattari explore throughout their collaborative work including their work on interface. For Bersani and Dutoit, Almodovar's articulation of women's desire, not "occluded by homosexuality," creates an intensity with reference to psychological or sexual identities (121). That desire, unhinged from Oedipal frustrations and identity politics, forms the basis for what we might call interstitial (for lack of a better term): a becoming-. As long as identity's desire, the symmetrical interface of those desires, and un-masking (or outing) form the basis of a media activism (straight-laced for efficiencies sake), the calculated performance called queering impatiently awaits its asymmetrical becoming-other, mixing desire with death in an endless disturbance and mourning of the conjunctions of any interface coming together.

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