

Art History after Deleuze and Guattari

PORTRAIT
D'UNE JEUNE FILLE AMÉRICAINE
DANS L'ÉTAT DE NUDITÉ



Sjoerd van Tuinen,
Stephen Zepke (eds)

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**EDITED BY SJOERD VAN TUINEN
AND STEPHEN ZEPKE**

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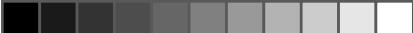
Deleuze and Didi-Huberman on Art History

GUSTAVO CHIROLA AND JUAN FERNANDO MEJÍA MOSQUERA

The work of Georges Didi-Huberman has rethought art history in a number of fundamental ways, and has drawn significantly on the work of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari to do so. In particular, the notions of the survival (*Nachleben*) of the image, of the *dynamogram* of art history, of a non-humanist art history, and of a rhizomatic temporality, or 'Renaissance' as Didi-Huberman puts it, owe a significant debt to Deleuze and Guattari. There are two important mediators of this relationship: Aby Warburg and Friedrich Nietzsche. While Didi-Huberman has written a book on Warburg, and has been deeply influenced by him, Deleuze and Guattari – perhaps surprisingly – never mention Warburg's work.¹ Nevertheless, they share a great predecessor in the figure of Nietzsche, who through Deleuze's book *Nietzsche and Philosophy* enables Didi-Huberman to bring the work of Warburg and Deleuze and Guattari together in his own revaluation of many fundamental art historical values.²

Aesthetics of Force

The classical notion of an image explains it as being the result of the relationship of matter and form that expresses a meaning, and in a larger sense as manifesting the 'spirit' of the time or epoch in which it was produced. This humanist understanding of the image regarded time and history as teleological processes within which the history of art manifested the spiritual development or destiny of humanity in a linearly ordered succession of images. For Deleuze and Guattari and Didi-Huberman however, the image is a sign of a certain interaction of forces, a chaotic and often arbitrary interaction that nevertheless expresses an underlying 'diagram' or aesthetics of force.³ The image-sign is not the result of relations between matter and form, but between materials and the forces that animate them. This new diagram for the production of art emerges with Mannerism, before being fully developed in the Baroque.⁴ As Deleuze writes in *The Fold*: 'In the Baroque the coupling of material-force is what replaces matter and form (the primal forces being those of the soul)' (1993, 35)



The notion of the survival of images developed by Didi-Huberman is possible thanks to the set of Deleuzian concepts that we call an ‘aesthetics of force,’ and describes the relationship of memory to images. Warburg says that memory is *dynamorphoric*, meaning that it bears and transforms forces, but it is not a transmitter of meaning. In this sense, Warburg argues, memory is a *Dynamogramm*, an idea which is, as Didi-Huberman observes, a response to Nietzsche’s desire for a psychology of forces rather than meanings (2002, 180-182). The *Dynamogramm* gives us knowledge of its constituent forces, and as such may also offer a morphology of force (2002, 136). This debt to Nietzsche is clearly shared by Deleuze, whose own aesthetics of force also draws on Nietzsche’s ontology to give an account of art and images. The important point here is not simply that Didi-Huberman relies on Deleuze’s *Nietzsche and Philosophy* in his explanation of the play of forces in an image, but that this idea is also modulated by its passage from Nietzsche to Warburg, a passage that requires us to rethink our understanding of art history.

Deleuze’s *Difference and Repetition* was another important influence on Didi-Huberman’s reading of Warburg. In particular, the crucial notion of survival in Warburg is reworked by Didi-Huberman through Deleuze’s understanding of the eternal return as repetition. This notion of the ‘eternal return of the same,’ as Nietzsche put it, is not understood by Deleuze to mean the return of the identical, but as saying that what is the same in what returns is difference. For Didi-Huberman, Nietzsche wrote about the immanence of plastic force, and Deleuze interpreted this as the repetition of difference, but it was Warburg who applied superior empiricism to art history.⁵ The notion of *Nachleben* shows that historical time is a plastic force that does not cease to come back, does not cease to survive, and in each survival does not cease to be metamorphosed. There is no *Nachleben* without metamorphosis.

Art history as a practice is organised, Didi-Huberman argues, around conceptual couplings – matter-form from Aristotle to Vasari, and from Kant to Panofsky, and material-forces from Nietzsche to Warburg and Deleuze (2002, 389). Each of these genealogies are organised around quite different philosophical problems, and indeed Didi-Huberman believes that to conceive art history according to an aesthetics of force offers a significant philosophical alternative to the humanist art historians (primarily Gombrich and Panofsky) who have attempted to cut out the Nietzschean thread running through Warburg’s work, because it puts the humanist character of the discipline in jeopardy (2002, 142-143). Didi-Huberman (with Warburg), on the other hand, wants to reinvent art history as a practice, so that it ceases being a humanist history of art and undergoes what he calls a *renaissance*. In developing this concept Didi-Huberman considers its various existing meanings, beginning with Winckelmann’s work on the Italian Renaissance (2002, 11-



27). Didi-Huberman shows how Winckelmann's model of art history arises from an *organic* notion of history, which imagines that it develops in the same way as an embryo (for example) grows into a fully mature animal. When Winckelmann writes about the Renaissance he pictures it as culture's point of full maturity and perfection, a moment of flourishing after which only decline and decadence was possible. Jacob Burkhardt (a crucial source for both Warburg and Nietzsche) on the contrary, thinks of the Renaissance in vital but not organic terms, regarding it as *impure* rather than complete (Didi-Huberman 2002, 110-111). For Burkhardt, there is no Art History without a morphology of forms in time, and he understood these forms as being constituted by a play of forces (*Potenzen*) from which they derive their various modes of existence. Nietzsche regarded Burkhardt as his master, as we can read in his letters (Didi-Huberman 2002, 118), and various Nietzschean concepts can be traced to Burkhardt such as 'living fossils' and 'mobile elements in history'. As Didi-Huberman puts it, 'in Burkhardt, time is a time of frequentation, hybridisation, anachronism; and so it is a foretelling of Warburg's survival' (2002, 113). Burkhardt's work on the Renaissance and Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy* are two of Warburg's most important sources. The Apollonian and the Dionysian are the figures of Nietzsche's early aesthetics of force, and although it is connected to the *Dynamogramm*, Warburg's concept also goes beyond Nietzsche. For Nietzsche music was the Dionysian art par excellence, while for Warburg both Apollonian and Dionysian forces are at work in painting. Warburg was able to find in marble what Nietzsche could only find in sound: the genius of existence itself, a will that makes itself be understood (Didi-Huberman 2002, 181). In the same way that Nietzsche describes music and tragedy and Warburg painting and sculpture, Deleuze describes the procedure of art as based on non-visible or non-perceptible forces, twilight forces, as in Bacon, forces that the body has to face and make visible through its effects, its shakes, spasms and retching. In Deleuze's diagram of artistic production material-forces are equivalent to Nietzsche's Dionysian element, whilst the emergent forms are equivalent to the Apollonian element. As Didi-Huberman puts it, 'here there are no constructed forms without the abandonment to forces. There is no Apollonian beauty without a Dionysian background.' (2002, 270)

Renaissance

In his 1893 work on Botticelli, Warburg follows Burkhardt in claiming that the Renaissance must not be understood as a moment of splendour and maturity, as an accomplished form that incarnated its content in the matter and technique of the time. Warburg imagines a different mode of occurrence, a different mode of return, a different kind of life that can resurface and be reborn in a way that can-



not be explained as the successful union of matter and form, but as a violent and surprising anomaly, living in spite of its models as a force with multiple relations and tensions including those of time. In this sense, *renaissance* means the survival of stubborn elements of the past that emerge in unconscious ways, as a violent, unpredictable kind of life. In the notion of *Nachleben*, the term *Leben* (life) stands for a kind of germinal life that grows from an origin that doesn't stop coming back, an impure origin acting as a vital residue that survives in its repetitions, and constantly gives culture its beginning. In this sense, *Nachleben* anachronizes history as Didi-Huberman shows (2002, 86), by expressing the coexistence of heterogeneous times. This is why we speak of a 'time-image,' because the image is made of different and heterogeneous times, or configured by time as plastic force. The coexistence in an image of heterogeneous times that are in tension, in contradiction, in diverse stratifications and contrapositions, and that are emerging in unexpected movements against the chronological flow of time – all this produces an anachronistic time, and an anachronistic image. Critical movements, unexpected eruptions, tectonic and overlapping layers of history are the geological morphology of survival and explain how the past can be reborn and never ceases surviving in the present.⁶ This utterly inorganic model of life clearly echoes Deleuze's concept of the Body without Organs.

Although Didi-Huberman references different art historians than do Deleuze and Guattari, we can nevertheless trace a number of similarities and echoes between them. Both seek to construct a non-humanist art history out of an aesthetics of force. For example, the notion of a non-organic vitality in Deleuze comes from Willhelm Worringer, while Didi-Huberman pursued a very similar idea following in the footsteps of Burkhardt and Warburg and using their concepts of *Nachleben* and vital residues. Both proposed a new notion of life to the organic-teleological notion of life at the basis of humanist art history. For Deleuze inorganic life emerges in the Gothic and in Mannerism as a set of forces of deformation. Nevertheless, the main elements of the concept; its multiple heterogeneous connections, the fact it doesn't take place in an euchronistic time but in an anachronistic one, its connections in a transversal time, and the emergence of the event, makes the connection between Warburg and Deleuze and Guattari, and their concepts of dynamogramm and rhizome, obvious.

Psychoanalysis and Seismography

Before going further it is necessary to point out that there is a basic difference (a difference of philosophical sensibility) between Deleuze and Didi-Huberman concerning their relation to Freud and psychoanalysis. One of the main aspects of this difference is the central position in Didi-Huberman's work of the notion of the





phantom. While *Difference and Repetition* (1994, 104, 124) and *The Logic of Sense* (and in particular the 'Series of the Phantasm' (1990, 210-216)) contain many references to Freud, and *Nietzsche and Philosophy* also establishes several connections to him, Deleuze discards the theatrical notion of the phantasmatic unconscious after he begins to work with Guattari (he moves, he says, from the theatre to the factory). When Didi-Huberman claims he only differs with Deleuze in his philosophical sensibility, he is referring to this difference over psychoanalysis. But while Deleuze and Guattari do not specifically use the notion of the *phantom*, it nevertheless echoes with Deleuze's concept of hysteria, or his and Guattari's understanding of schizophrenia.

In the chapter on hysteria in his book on Bacon Deleuze talks about the 'portrait' of hysteria that was built by 19th century psychiatry. There he makes reference to every movement this phenomenon produces in bodies: contractions, paralysis, haste, sluggishness, seizures and poses etc.. Deleuze draws a connection between these movements and the figures in Bacons paintings, it allows him to talk about hysteria in the work of the Irish painter, and indeed in painting in general: 'with painting hysteria becomes art' (2003, 52). For Deleuze, the task of painting should be to liberate sensation from representation in such a way that it becomes pure presence. Painting should achieve through lines and colours the visual sensation of an excess of presence. It's been said the hysterical person is the one that imposes its own presence and that for whom things are too present. On the other hand, Didi-Huberman has dedicated a whole book to hysteria: *Invention of Hysteria. Charcot and the Photographic Iconography of the Salpêtrière* (2003). This subject keeps reappearing in all his works. In this book Didi-Huberman points at how important it was for Freud to meet Charcot and work at la Salpêtrière, to attend that theater of hysteria: 'it filled my eyes completely' (Freud's own words) before devoting himself to listening, and to the invention of Psychoanalysis (Didi-Huberman 2003, 80-1). Freud will read hysterical symptoms already recognized by Charcot in terms of a *hiding screen* and will notice the important role of memory (displacements, amnesia) as the key for understanding the formation of the symptom. A decade later, hysterical symptoms were interpreted as unconscious phantoms that, though a fusion of desire, representation and activity, were able to find a figured form (Didi-Huberman 2003, 158-160, 212-214). These references to hysteria give a sense of the differences between Deleuze and Didi-Huberman regarding psychoanalysis. Deleuze in the book on Bacon (published in 1981) renounces any talk about phantoms and the theatre of the unconscious, as what he is interested in when talking about hysteria are the *autoscopic phenomena*: I see and I see myself in a head that I no longer feel is mine, I don't feel I am in my own body but I see myself in that body that I see naked when I'm dressed, etc. This eye's function is seeing but it is dislocated, it is a transient poly-



valent organ of the Body without Organs. The BwO is not populated by phantoms but is traversed by intensities that pass through it, painting as hysteria has equipped our body with eyes in the back or in the belly. Didi-Huberman, on the other hand, acknowledges that Charcot's and Warburg's symptomatologies are totally opposed. Warburg has no regular frame that allows the symptom to be defined as a clinical category as Charcot may have expected; closer to Freud, Warburg's symptom does not relate to a traumatic or neurological determination, instead it is opened to an over-determination. 'With Freud, the hysterical symptom doesn't depend on an iconography anymore: it is not a picture (representative, protocol) nor a reflex (even if it is a traumatism). Instead [Warburg] develops multi-polar dynamogramms.' (Didi-Huberman 2003, 296-7) However, Didi-Huberman also seems to concur with Deleuze when he understands the theatre of hysteria as the *scene that is not meant to be represented* (Mallarme's words). This scene that is not meant to be represented is an excess of presence, this exorbitant gesture 'was nothing but the ostentation of an absence, the shady and clamant vacuity of an empty space' (Didi-Huberman 2003, 252-3). Note that Didi-Huberman's reference here is to Deleuze's *Difference and Repetition* and the section on difference in itself (1994, 67-69).⁷

Furthermore, beyond biographical anecdotes regarding Warburg's experience of mental illness it is possible to *read* his understanding of the art historical process from the point of view of the schizo rather than the phantom. In this sense art history is an experience of forces and affects that disrupt and break down clichés and normative understandings, a catastrophic or even chaotic process that then generates forms and diagrams that returns Warburg, and art history back to a certain equilibrium, or sanity. In this sense the phantasmatic symptoms appearing in art history that Didi-Huberman draws from Warburg could also be seen as schizo-signs. These can be linked to a suggestion made by Didi-Huberman himself: In 1918 Warburg suffers a psychotic breakdown, and this can be understood in his own terms as a seismographic historian as a symptom of WWI. Warburg built an archive with news from every corner of the world, thousands of news reports, he drew the front lines in his notebooks, he traced the trenches and drew the geography of those schizo-movements that were about to swallow millions of human beings. According to Didi-Huberman, Warburg had gone from being a seismograph-historian in the manner of Burckhardt, keeping track of symptoms and keeping a distance from the shakes (quakes), to becoming a seismograph-historian in the manner of Nietzsche, he ended up drowning in the events themselves. In the end, the collapse of European humanity was to take place in his very own mind, and this limit experience drove him to the very verge of madness; 'The frontline and the schizo were in him. And then, just as with the Nietzschean seismograph, he collapsed most abruptly'



(Didi-Huberman 2003, 370). From 1921 to 1924 Warburg was hospitalized at the Bellevue Clinic at Kreuzlingen where Ludwig Binswanger was his doctor, as well as the 'first psychiatrist to introduce Freudian psychoanalysis in an institution for the mentally alienated' (2002, 379). Didi-Huberman thinks that it was due to the special characteristics of Bellevue Clinic that Warburg was able to extract the foundations of a new individual re-composition and the foundations of a new knowledge from madness, in the words of Warburg, 'out of the monster's dialectic'. First, Warburg never stopped writing, an experience that was usually painful and frustrating, but one through which he was trying to battle the chaos of his own psychic forces by charting his delirium using schizo-graphics. Second, thanks to constant conversations and anamnesis therapy with his psychiatrist Dr. Binswanger, who understood psychoanalysis as interpretation essentially based in experience, and developed a perspective that linked psychoanalysis to phenomenology beyond Freudian orthodoxy, which allowed Warburg to find again a 'nucleus of truth to which all of his thought could or should be reborn' (2002, 378). Didi-Huberman offers the suggestion that we can only reference here (and maybe develop elsewhere), that Warburg got from his limit experience

a knowledge (*Erkenntnis*) that is able to transform the "confession" (*Bekennnis*) of a schizoid into the cultural theory of symbolic schizos, is able to transform a pathos or a symptom in cultural theory of the pathos (or of the symptom). I can't stop picturing the fascination that Gilles Deleuze would have felt with such a movement. (2002, 368)

Another connection that could be drawn between Didi-Huberman's psychoanalytic language and Deleuze's aesthetics of force is between Deleuze and Guattari's geological model of the unconscious and Warburg's idea of survival. Didi-Huberman connects Deleuze and Guattari's geological morphology to Warburg's notion of *pathosformel*, and uses their geological model of time and of images to discuss Warburg's conception of art history.⁸ The concept of survival involves utilises a rhizomatic model of time, a geological *Dynamogramm* of its constituent forces.⁹ This idea connects to a very interesting conceptual personae in Warburg's work, the art historian as a seismograph. Warburg, like both Nietzsche and Burkhardt according to Didi-Huberman, are sensible seismographs, receptors of (shock) waves of memory and knowledge. Burkhardt speaks about non-continuous, non-linear, non-teleological forces of time. The seismograph-historian belongs to time and registers the seismic movements of the history of culture as different densities, crises, breakups and catastrophes. (2002, 131, 132)





Warburg was interested in the forms of visualisation of movements in fluid or non-homogeneous mediums, as well as in the work of Etienne-Jules Marey on chronophotography, and in other instruments developed in his day such as the 'myogram' (Didi-Huberman 2002, 124) of the convulsions of a hysteric. For Warburg these devices offered new forms of visibility of the body, ways of making the body's unconscious forces visible. For Didi-Huberman these forms of visualisation work as metaphors by means of which Warburg connects the *Dynamogramm* with the *Pathosformel* (2002, 122-124). The art historical dynamographer reveals the forms and the complex nature of their movements that constitute the history of images, which must be analyzed and cannot be reduced to only one aspect or meaning. She must develop biological and psychological models according to its findings. In his seminar of 1927 Warburg spoke about the threatening nature of historical life, and of how the historian stands on the edge of the abyss, not only describing visible movements, but also inscribing and transmitting the invisible movements that may come to occur, that clash with each other, waiting for the moment to emerge. Didi-Huberman speaks of a tactile record of the symptoms of time (2002, 124) that comes close to Deleuze's notion of the haptic. Events and images resonate in the seismograph, they transmit vibrations and shock waves to an optical device, to an inscription roll that allows them to appear before the sight of others.

There are many references and elements at play in this point. The historian offers his body as the painter offers hers (as Merleau-Ponty suggests, 1964 9-25); the art historian is also sensible to these invisible tectonic movements and her work is also to make them visible to a spectator, to show how art does this job, and to show how it works in an image. The art historian has to show how the image transmits movements, but also how she transmits that movement as it occurs inside herself as a symptom, and in which she may lose herself. Warburg points at a very peculiar dialectic of the image as a way to do justice to the risks of the art historian's work, which Didi-Hubermann (following Walter Benjamin) calls a 'strange dialectics' (2002, 106). The art historian is neither neutral nor objective; she is inscribed in time. There is a strong empathy between Warburg and Nietzsche on this point. Nietzsche and Burkhardt are for him two kinds of seers, singular subjects who are able to experiment with the symptom and see images as occurrences of survival. In this sense they represent two basic methodological aspects of Warburg's own work. (Didi-Huberman 2002, 128-132) For Warburg however, Burkhardt keeps a distance between time and its phenomena, and so does not take the same risks as he and Nietzsche do. The experience of seeing and suffering the symptom he calls 'geological incarnation' in Nietzsche and 'demonic incorporation' (*survivances démoniques*) in himself. (Didi-Huberman 2002, 130) Indeed, in his life Warburg faces phantasmagorical delirium, and the dynamograph becomes, as he explains in the 1927 seminar





on Nietzsche, a form of self-portrait. Warburg sees his own drawings and writings as reactions to the geological movements animating him, and the results of his own body acting as a seismograph.

A-signifying Signs

For Didi-Huberman there is a difference between Deleuze pre- and post-Guattari. This difference emerges in one of Deleuze's lectures from December 1971, the period in which he and Guattari were writing *Anti-Oedipus*, a lecture that is also important for understanding their aesthetics of force. Although Deleuze's subject here is not aesthetic but the overcoding and decoding of the flows of desire, and in particular the shift in social organisation that accompanies this. Deleuze claims that capitalism decodes flows of desire, dismantling the previous hierarchies that had overcoded it, and erecting new machines in their place. Deleuze goes on to show how the released decoded flows are then axiomatised, and offers an example of aesthetic decoding to explain this. Deleuze points to the hierarchical, pyramidal structures of Byzantine painting practiced in Venice, which were a result of 'despotic overcoding':

there is an old despot, there is the father, there's Jesus and there are the tribes of the Apostles. In one of Delphiore's paintings, there are rows of pyramids which are spread in fine rows facing straight ahead. It is not just the people who are coded and overcoded in Byzantine art, it is also their organs which are coded, coded and overcoded, under the great unifying influence of the despot, whether this despot is God or the father or whether he is the great Byzantine Emperor.

But then, after capitalism had already been established for a while in the city, and in the midst of Christian painting, a kind of madness emerges in the Venetian School, and it's as if everything suddenly escapes its former strict limits:

a kind of radical break: all of a sudden we see the hierarchy of overcoding breaking down, the ruin of the territorial codes, the flows of painting go insane too, destroying all of the codes, a flow passes. We get the impression that painters – occupying their usual position amongst artists in relation to the social system – create Christs that are totally queer, they are totally mannerist Christs, it's all sexualized, they create Virgins who stand in for all women, and baby boys who have just nursed, little boys pooping, they really play at this process of decoding flows of colour. (1971, 6)





This break is a kind of Mannerist hysteria emerging from the decoding of capitalism, a hysteria caused by the figures in the paintings individualizing and becoming the owners of their own organs, and so being able to suddenly do what they want and pursue their own interests. What we see here, Deleuze argues, is the end of the over-coding defining the social body before capitalism and under the rule of the despot, and the emergence of a new form of control, one operating through axiomatics. There is now

a strange sort of pictorial machine that conjoins and that will give rise to the unity of the picture, no longer a signifying unity of a code or overcode, but a system of echoes, of repetitions, of oppositions, of symmetries, a veritable conjugating machine, where flows of colours and decoded features are conjugated. There emerges a real pictorial axiomatic that replaces the failing codes. (1971, 7)

The emergence of the Venetian School is an amazing example of the decoding and recoding of the flows by which a whole new set of possibilities for painting, a new coding of the organs, an unbelievable creation of the world, the body of Christ as a joyful experience of the BwO, emerges. The creation or emergence of Mannerism is therefore not a story of decadence after a point of supreme health and maturity during the Renaissance. It is something else and it is related to time and history in a way that is not teleologically accounted for. Mannerism was labeled in traditional models of art history as both a decadence and as the stage previous to the Baroque. So, Deleuze makes it possible to speak about Mannerism not as an epoch or movement but as a decoding process. What is important for him and Guattari is that the despotism of the signifier is abandoned and flows in every direction become possible. The consequences of the body of Christ as a BwO in the history of painting are countless. Although the language here is that of flows and not of forces, the notion of the BwO is already there, and makes it possible for us to see the subordination of the form/content relation to that between forms and forces. As a result, it is possible to connect this with some of the subjects we have already discussed. The body of Christ as a BwO can be connected to the hysterical/vibrating body, as can the way painting invents a BwO, which is evident in the decoding of painting that takes place in the Venetian School and the Byzantine codes.

We can understand this better through an example of Deleuze and Guattari, who call Tintoretto a *painter of forces* in *What is Philosophy?* In all his work the play of forces, flows, movements is highly evident. In *St Mark Saving a Saracen from Shipwreck* (1562-1566) (fig. 1) for example, the ship of the Saracen is in the middle of a wild swirl, and with no respect for any previous code St. Mark performs a





Figure 1: Tintoretto, *St. Mark Saving a Saracen from Shipwreck* (1562-1566), Accademia Venice, 398 x 337 cm.



Figure 2: Tintoretto, *St. Mark's Body Brought to Venice* (1562-66), Accademia Venice, 398 x 315 cm.

kind of pirouette to pull the body out of the ship and free it from the storm, a force stretches the body and it suffers a deformation when this force struggles with the forces of the storm. In *St Mark's Body Brought to Venice* (1562-66) (fig. 2), a night scene in the Piazza, everything is caught up in the movement of loose brushstrokes, a blizzard agitates every element as a group of thieves tries to steal St Mark's body in the midst of a contrasting mass of shadows and light. The heavy body being carried by the thieves, the shadows of the bodies flying through the scene, the dark clouds in the sky starting to cover the piazza, the animals that will carry the body, a thief falls and takes a drape with him, in all of this there is no trace of the codes ruling Christian painting in Byzantine art, not because these have fallen into decline but because they have been recoded.¹⁰

As Didi-Huberman writes; 'What remains in the survivals is not the meaning, the problem is displaced, changing every moment, its the *signifying trace* itself? Maybe Deleuze would put it differently, and call it the *asignificant trace*. Why? When we were speaking about the despotism of the signifier and the coding of flows we touched on the subject of meaning, and now its time to underline the importance of this notion for Warburg and to show how it is connected to Deleuze. In developing our idea of an aesthetics of force we pointed at a movement, a displacement of the relationship between form and content onto the relationship of material and



forces. So the problem of meaning and content falls back onto this other dimension of material-force, and this movement is one Warburg also makes, and in doing so he comes, Didi-Huberman claims, very close to Deleuze (2002, 163). Warburg puts his efforts into showing the displacement of the meaning, or content (signified) into the signifier, but we see that this change is just an illusion because in the order of the signifier the signified/meaning is always at work. Didi-Huberman insists in using these terms (signifier/signified) because they work well with his Freudian-Lacanian affiliation, but the important thing is the conceptual coincidence that goes beyond the terminological divergence. This can be seen if we consider the *asignificant trace*, a concept that comes from *A Thousand Plateaus*.

Deleuze and Guattari have abandoned Saussure's signified-signifier. They produce a theory of the sign following Hjelmslev, using the notion of a *regime of signs* within which the relationship signified-signifier is only one of the possible relationships. The sign works in many ways. Painting for example, may work as a signifier, may be read or interpreted as a signifier, but that is only a fraction of what painting is. Painting cannot be explained or comprehended in terms of the relationship of signified-signifier although some of its elements may work that way from some points of view. Deleuze and Guattari would place painting, understood as a relationship of materials and force, in what they call an *asignificant regime of signs* because painting works as an index.

Deleuze and Guattari developed their regime of signs by following Pierce. For Pierce there are three kinds of signs; Icon, Index and Symbol. Icons are a highly coded regime of signs, as in our previous example of the religious coding of Byzantine painting which resulted in what Deleuze and Guattari call the despotism of the signifier. But what happens when Mannerism decodes the Byzantine order? Deleuze shows that colours begin to perform new functions that are not limited to the manifestation of meaning (ie., a signified) and this marks the shift to a new regime of signs, namely indexes. The aesthetics of force employs signs with an indexical nature, and so we see that what Warburg might have called *the significant trace* works as an index in Deleuze and Guattari's aesthetics of force.

When Didi-Huberman recovers Warburg's work as a model for art history he opposes an iconographic understanding of painting that was championed by Winckelman, Panofsky and Gombrich, for whom the main task of painting is to manifest meaning and performs a symbolic function. For Didi-Huberman humanist art historians inscribe painting in overcoded symbolic regimes in which they work as symbols or icons. Didi-Huberman is concerned with what happens when the code is broken in a way that is compatible with Deleuze's view of Mannerism from the perspective of an aesthetics of force. This means that the trace in Didi-Huberman is not understood as the contour of a figured figure but as a dynamic,



surviving, repeated act of the figuring figure.¹¹ Didi-Huberman uses this language as a means to explain Warburg's work, and for him the word *Gestaltung* or shaping is very important (1927, 44). In Didi Huberman's *The Surviving Image* he says that his terms of 'a significant trace' and the pair 'figured figure' and 'figuring figure,' 'sum up ... the figural' (2002, 163). For Didi-Huberman, if painting fulfils a symbolic function it does so only as a memory that transmits the imprint of a movement, and here the notion of index fits more closely. For us this is what Warburg calls an *energetic engram* in his last handwritten notes. In these terms the artist of the Renaissance would be the recipient of an *ancient dynamoforic memory*, a *Nachleben* of what is remembered not as the meaning, but as the imprint, or the remains of what is left as a print or mark. In this sense, Didi-Huberman's understanding of Warburg's art history not only draws on Deleuze's work, but exhibits many of the same strategies, to the point where they can both be called a – and these are Didi-Huberman's words – a Superior Empiricism (2002, 143).

Notes

1. The English translation of Didi-Huberman's *L'Image survivante: histoire de l'art et temps des fantômes selon Warburg* is yet to appear, and so all translations from this book are the author's own, with the references being to the French edition.
2. Didi Huberman refers to *Nietzsche and Philosophy* in 2002, 157, 159, 165, 171.
3. There are two senses of Deleuze's aesthetics of force. The first derives from the Nietzschean pairing of material and force, and the second is inspired by Paul Klee. This second aspect develops the idea that the task of art is to make non-visible forces become visible (see Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 342, 344, 346). Deleuze is closest to Didi-Huberman and Warburg in the first aspect.
4. For Deleuze, in the Baroque form depends on a relationship of forces. Such forces emerge precisely where matter won't stop folding, unfolding, re-folding and building an infinite number of textures, from mountains to the ripples on the water, to organic tissues to ornamental fabrics. It is from the manners in which matter folds that different kinds of texture arise, out of the forces tangled in this folding operation forms come into being. 'Matter that reveals its texture becomes raw material, just as form that reveals its folds becomes force. In the Baroque the coupling of material-force is what replaces matter and form.' (1993, 35) Deleuze insists on this diagram of the production of art (material-forces: form). From the infinite movement of the inorganic line in the Gothic according to Worringer to the baroque operation of elevating the fold to the infinite.
5. As Didi-Huberman acknowledges, 'Deleuze has shed light on another aspect of this plastic force, it is about knowing what form of knowing reconciles empiricism with its principles, if it constitutes a superior empiricism it is because this is an essentially plastic principle [...] that] is not wider than that its conditions.' (2002, 152)
6. On vital residues see Didi-Huberman 2002, 82.
7. See Didi-Huberman 2003, n. 238, 253.
8. Didi-Huberman connects Warburg's nonlinear conception of art history to the rhizome (2002, 24, 388, 404, 446), and to strata and stratification (2002, 24, 37, 40, 95, 158, 404, 446, 460).
9. Didi-Huberman makes several mentions of rhizomatic modes of thinking about time (2002, 25 and 106), talking about the difference between Aby Warburg and Cassirer in relation to the notion of rhizome (447), and also about *montages rhizomatiques* (428).



10. Arnold Hauser saw this in his book *Mannerism, The Crisis of the Renaissance and the Origin of Modern Art*. Deleuze doesn't mention Hauser, but he also doesn't consider Mannerism a case of decadence.
11. For Deleuze the distinction is not between the 'figured figure' and the 'figuring figure', but between the figure and the figural. According to Deleuze painting isn't figurative because the figure has no essential narrative or representational function. Figure as force is called the figural (see 2003, 14). Didi-Huberman uses the term figural in 2000, 13.

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