

TWO REGIMES OF FACT

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The fact is a feature of art historical study so ubiquitous that it is rarely called into question. But what is a fact? Why does art history rely on facts, and what form does this reliance take? What might be the problems raised by such reliance? How do works of art implicate facts, if at all? And in what ways might philosophy's interrogation of the fact offer lines of enquiry for art history's address of this insistent feature of its practice? In this paper I will address such issues, drawing on the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze. Deleuze's philosophy offers as yet little explored conceptual potentials for art history. His problematisation of the fact provides a singular axis for exploring these potentials, whilst affording an opportunity for critical reflection on this most common-sensical and seemingly benign of notions.

Art History and Facts

In the closing pages of his text on the painter Francis Bacon, Gilles Deleuze remarks that "it was with Michelangelo, with Mannerism, that the Figure or the pictorial fact was born in its pure state"¹. This strange notion of a "pictorial fact", which Deleuze also refers to as a "matter of fact", bears ramifications not only for a philosophy of painting (ramifications which Deleuze carefully lays out in this text), but also for art history, as a discipline which takes works of art as its object and, by its own admission, consistently foregrounds facts.

I was struck by the force of this disciplinary admission in a recent perusal of an article on the painter Jacopo Tintoretto. Here, the two authors reiterate a remark made by the late Detlev von Hadeln in 1923 that, "before anything else", including "aesthetic arguments", "a solid foundation" must be built through an "investigation of the facts of the case", and that without such facts, "the work on this subject (Tintoretto) will never come to an end"². A couple of things might be noted about this apparently common-sensical avocation: firstly, the call for foundation, and

¹ Gilles Deleuze: *Francis Bacon – The Logic of Sensation* [1981], transl. by Daniel W. Smith, London/New York 2003, 161. Deleuze takes the notion of the pictorial fact from Luciano Bellosi (*Michelangelo – The Painter*, transl. by Pearl Sanders, New York 1971), who claims that Michelangelo "destroys the narrative religious fact in favour of the properly pictorial or sculptural fact." Deleuze: *Francis Bacon*, 196, n. 13.

² Detlev Freiherr von Hadeln: *Review of Erich von der Bercken and August L. Mayer: Jacopo Tintoretto 2 volumes, Munich 1923*, in: *The Burlington Magazine* 43 (1923), 198–199; Robert Echols and Frederick Ilchman: *Towards a New Tintoretto Catalogue, with a Checklist of Revised Attributions and a New Chronology*, in: *Jacopo Tintoretto – Actas del Congreso Internacional Jacopo Tintoretto/Proceedings of the International Symposium Jacopo Tintoretto*, Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado, 2007, a cargo de Miguel Falomir, Madrid 2009, 91–150, 91.

secondly, the call for an end. Facts at once provide a foundation or groundwork for subsequent interpretation, speculation and analysis – including questions concerning the work’s character as “aesthetic” – and (through this provision) allow a discourse to advance towards an end, an epistemological and semantic closure that might be understood in terms of the attainment of certainty – that is, the conviction that something is so and not otherwise. The reiteration of von Hadeln’s viewpoint nearly 70 years later, in a volume of papers dedicated to “new interpretations” of Tintoretto, reveals the trenchancy of this belief in the fact as the bedrock of art historical investigation. Robert Echols and Frederick Ilchman are in no doubt that the facts of chronology, biography and attribution supply “the foundation upon which investigation of other issues must build”³. Taken as an implicit condition and ongoing investigative horizon the fact thus announces entrenched methodological concerns integral to the discipline’s practice – with foundation, with certainty, with the attainment of knowledge, and with the form of representation that this attainment presupposes.

But how is this announcement made? How are we to understand the fact as it is being here referred to? After the Latin *factum*, meaning a thing done or performed, let us call the fact something that has really occurred or is actually the case, and

³ Echols and Ilchman: *Towards a New Tintoretto Catalogue* [note 2], 92. Indeed, all the essays in this collection open with a statement of fact, which, if at all contentious, are accompanied by a qualification through reference to previous scholarship. For example, in his *Archaism and Pauline spirituality in Jacopo Tintoretto’s Crucifixion for SS. Cosma e Damiano* (in: *Jacopo Tintoretto – Proceedings* [note 2], 25–35) Benjamin Paul opens: “Jacopo Tintoretto frequently adopted past traditions and employed prominent aspects of fourteenth and fifteenth century style and iconography.” *Ibid.*, 25. He supports this statement by referring to the “evidence” garnered through his earlier research. Tom Nichols opens his essay with the “well documented” fact of Tintoretto’s connection with reformist thinkers, using it as the basis for his argument that Tintoretto debunks the genre of mythological art. *Ibid.*, 36. Philip Cottrell foregrounds factual documentation as a key concern of art history in the opening to his paper: “Although the bulk of Tintoretto’s career is exceptionally well documented, a hue question mark still hands over the issue of his initial development and training. Due to a lack of reliable source material and a tangled skein of attribution and misattribution, reconstructing the course of Tintoretto’s professional emergence seems like the art-historical equivalent of tracing the source of the Nile.” (Id.: *Painters in Practice – Tintoretto, Bassano and the Studio of Bonifacio de’ Pitati*, in: *ibid.*, 50–57, 50). David Carrier argues that facts are crucial in facilitating the truthful description of artworks – which for him constitutes “the goal of all artwriting” – and in allowing “rational debate among art historians” “[a] good interpretation must be true to the facts, plausible, and original”. David Carrier: *Principles of Art History Writing*, University Park, PA 1993, 4–7. Jürgen Habermas’ distinction between the fact before and after the linguistic turn bears intriguing potentials for art historical self-reflection, which go beyond the scope of this paper. Before the turn, the fact was located immediately in the world of perceived or imagined objects; after it, facts “are accessible only as linguistically ‘represented’”. Jürgen Habermas: *Between Facts and Norms – Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy* [1992], transl. by William Rehg, Cambridge, MA 1996, 11. I would argue that despite its responses to the linguistic turn, art history remains indebted to the former regime. The distinction between a foundation of facts and subsequent interpretation is one well acknowledged in the philosophy of history. Cf. Christopher Blake: *Can History be Objective?*, in: *Theories of History*, ed. by Patrick Gardiner, London 1964, 329–343, 341.

which can be verified as being so. The chronological, biographical and attributional facts that von Hadeln, Echols and Ilchman refer to are not only events that have supposedly occurred – they are events that have occurred and which can be verified. It is such verification that permits the projection of certainty that in turn distinguishes the fact from both immediate sense-data, and hypotheses.⁴ What is commonly called ‘evidence’ supplies this distinction. From the Latin *evidens*, meaning “obvious” or “apparent”, evidence, in contrast to the fact, is immediately present to us, either through the understanding (as an *a priori* concept – a concept that contains nothing empirical) or through the senses. When I say to myself ‘that bowl is yellow’, I either refer the object of my experience to the evidence supplied by the *a priori* concept of yellow, or I consider my present experience evidential based on my previous experiences of yellow. In the case of art history, an empirically-based practice that begins with objects of experience, the evidence provided by *a priori* concepts bears little direct relevance to its methodological reflections. The fact, for instance, that Michelangelo was born in 1475 cannot be logically deduced through an appeal to any *a priori* concepts. It is, rather, deduced from the empirical evidence of documents, archives testimonies, connoisseurial observation, technical analysis, and the conclusions of past scholarship. Whether such material can be justifiably qualified as the ground for verification is of course another contentious matter. One could argue, after Kant, that any so-called certainty derived from empirical data is contingent, offering only a temporary grounding, one constantly subject to shifts. Indeed, the open-ended nature of art historical interpretation, whose conclusions often rely on consensus, might support such a contention.⁵ New data discovered next year might strongly indicate that Michelangelo was born in 1477 rather than the 1475 currently taken as fact, overturning the ‘certainty’ we thought we had acquired. Despite this problematic of the determination of closure and certainty in art history, and what the status of the deduction of the fact is if that deduction is not logical, the fact nevertheless supplies a useful function, as a mediation that traverses the vicissitudes of the given sense-data of immediate experience, supplying a foundation for ‘closure’, even if that foundation is fluid, and the attainment of this promised closure indefinitely deferred.⁶ The fact that Tintoretto painted on open-weave canvas permits a series of interpretations within the horizon cast by this factual foundation: he painted on such material for the aesthetic possibilities it

⁴ Bertrand Russell implies such a distinction: Id.: *History of Western Philosophy* [1946], London 2004, 98.

⁵ This certainty is what Kant would call “empirical knowledge”, since it does not contain any *a priori* element. Kant himself understands facts as “objects for concepts the objective reality of which can be proved (whether through pure reason or through experience).” They include therefore both “the mathematical properties of magnitudes and things, or their properties, which can be established by means of experience (one’s own experience or the experience of others), by means of testimony.” Immanuel Kant: *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, ed. by Paul Guyer, transl. by Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews, Cambridge 2000, 5: 468.

⁶ We are using the notion of ‘given’ to refer to the flux of the sensible that is passively received, rather than actively constructed, by the subject.

afforded, because it was cheap and readily available, because his father was a dyer, because he wanted to distinguish his works from those his contemporaries were making on traditional weave or panel, and so on. The accumulation of such interpretations inch us gradually towards the closure von Hadeln, Ilchman and Echols were referring to. It is with the provision of this foundation, this (albeit temporary) fixing of the continuity of sense-data that the fact allows us to represent the work of art to ourselves – where representation, again after Kant, is that process by which experience is rendered knowable.

At first it might seem unclear that art history's reliance on fact as thus understood needs any questioning. What else ought art history as a specialised branch of history – history understood not as a speculative enterprise, but as an empirical, evidence-based practice of knowledge – base itself upon?⁷

But it is inasmuch as the work of art itself problematizes the very categories of fact, evidence, knowledge and representation that such reliance is not an unproblematic, or even an evident one. Whilst the attainment of facts might indeed fulfil certain disciplinary requirements of art history, it is arguably inadequate with respect to the ontological specificity of the work of art – an object that is, as many have repeatedly declaimed, not merely another sense-datum.⁸ The work of art is irreducible to fact insofar as there is an element within its experience – the element that constitutes what may be called its 'difference' – that is unverifiable and unknowable, and not given to the act of representation.

Art history's preoccupation with the fact reduces the work to what can be represented and known of it, undermining this difference. The fact fixes the work as a datum in time and space, and it is this fixation of the work within a past time and space that we might say determines it as historical. The overlap between fact and historical fact is thus deeply implicated within art historical investigation, such that it is not only the fixing of the flux of sense-data in general, but moreover the desire to fix the continuity of the past that conditions the appeal to it.⁹ In wanting

⁷ See Carl L. Becker: "History is a veritable branch of knowledge." "Historians feel safe when dealing with the facts... the facts of history come in the end to seem something solid, something substantial like physical matter... something possessing definite shape, and clear persistent outline". Id.: *What Are Historical Facts?* [1955], in: *The Philosophy of History in Our Time*, ed. by Hans Meyerhoff, New York 1959, 120-137, 120. In his introduction to this volume, Meyerhoff quotes Ranke, stating that "the strict presentation of the facts is [...] the supreme law of historiography", ibd., 13. On art history as a discipline of 'specific knowledge of the art object' see Georges Didi-Huberman: *Confronting Images* [1990], transl. by John Goodman, University Park, PA 2004, 1.

⁸ Cf. Hans Tietze: *Die Methode der Kunstgeschichte*, Leipzig 1913: whilst "a work of art is a sensually perceivable fact" and can be apprehended like other historical documents, every work of art is also "isolated" and subject to an inner artistic logic. For him, the conflict between *Ge-setzwissenschaft* (aesthetics) and *Tatsachenwissenschaft* (factual art history) is the source of most contemporary (that is, contemporary to his time) methodological bewilderment. Quoted after Michael Ann Holly: *Panofsky and the Foundations of Art History*, Ithaca/London 1984, 98-99.

⁹ Becker understands the historical fact as a fact with meaning: Becker: *What Are Historical Facts?* [note 7], 123.

to deduce the facts of a particular commission, I not only acquire knowledge of the circumstances of the work's production, I at once root the work more firmly within a particular historical moment. However, in its material and experiential persistence, that work is not bound to a particular time and space that can be represented (as past), even though the circumstances of its production are locatable in this way. As an experiential object, the work of art is not simply a historical one, positioned within an actual time and space that, from the perspective of the present, is no more. The reliance on the fact furthermore risks a separation from the experience of work, in as much as it raises and addresses questions that do not demand this experience for their answer. The question of Tintoretto's relations with the Venetian confraternities is one that can be attended to by sifting through archives, consulting extant scholarship, and referring to the facts already sedimented within these reservoirs. Here the fact displaces the work, obscuring the 'art' of art history in the preoccupation with foundation and closure.¹⁰

But it has long been clear that the ontology of art is not an incidental question for art history. For it is the singular nature of the work of art that continues to distinguish the discipline from other forms of historical study. This distinction may in part be attributed to the persistence of works of art, such that they may still be experienced today. Whereas a great deal of the study of history is concerned with objects or events that no longer exist – fought battles, fallen heroes, faded dynasties – and which must be reconstructed through the mediation of historical facts, art historians are often at liberty to still experience the objects with which they are concerned.¹¹ The work is present, in its insistent *material* facticity, rather than through the facts by which, as a sensible object, it is mediated in an act of representation.

This distinction between an art history as experiential practice able to attend to objects in their ongoing material insistence and art history as an epistemologically-oriented practice of reconstructing the factual status of artworks invites us to re-

¹⁰ In her article "Is Art History?" Svetlana Alpers claims that documents establishing provenance testify to the work of art's "very nature as an object". This is consistent with her general claim that the work of art is a "piece of history", and her acknowledgement that one of the outcomes of the "new social history of art" that she is describing here (and which she appears to align herself with) is that "what was previously puzzled over as a mystery has now come to be understood as the task of fitting a work [...] to a particular set of describable historical conditions", that is, to a set of historical facts. But using her own argument, it may be contended that such preoccupation with the historical facts precisely obscures the specific ("mysterious") nature of the art object. Svetlana Alpers: *Is Art History?*, in: *Daedalus* 106 (1977), 1-13.

¹¹ See Becker: the "historian cannot deal directly with the [past] event itself, since the event itself has disappeared. What he can deal with directly is a statement about the event. He deals in short not with the event, but with a statement which affirms the fact that the event occurred." The historian is dealing with an "affirmation about the event", which persists – "and it is this affirmation that constitutes for us the historical fact." Thus, "the historical fact is not the past event, but a symbol which enables us to recreate it imaginatively." "the actual past is gone and the world of history is an intangible world recreated imaginatively and present in our minds.", through the functioning of memory. Id.: *What Are Historical Facts?* [note 7], 124, 126, 128.

consider the very status and role of facticity in art historical study. For if a past work of art is not simply historical but ‘living’ and insistent in the present, if it is not just a static, factual object of knowledge and representation, but a dynamic object of experience, then it would surely seem that the preoccupation with facticity is one to be queried. Unlike other species of historian, the art historian is able to attend to the material facticity of the work through an experience that renders the past work of art present. He has the opportunity and perhaps the imperative, insofar as this acknowledgement attests to his discipline’s very distinction, to consider the fact of art’s work as a fact of currency, beyond its historicity, and thus turn to the question which Hubert Damisch argued ought to be art history’s driving concern: the question of why works of the past still concern us.¹² This challenge to historical fact does not however necessarily bring with it an overturning as such of what we have called the representational regime of the fact. For even if the art historian acknowledges the ‘transhistoricity’ of the work and its challenge to the designation of historical fact, he may nevertheless continue to submit the work to an act of representation for the sake of declared epistemological ends.

The problematic of how the work is to be experienced, if the representational regime of facts is jettisoned, takes us to the very heart of Deleuze’s ontology of art. For Deleuze, the work of art – specifically, the ‘creative’ work of art, and not all works equally – is what he calls a “being of sensation”, that is, an expression of sensation in its excess to the forms by which sensation is given to the act of representation. This material excess – for it is an excess, in the first instance, of the work’s line, and colour to its form – imparts to the work an autonomous “logic of sensation” that wrests it both from the flux of sense–data and the forms by which it may be represented.¹³ It must be added that colour, line and texture may also be given to representation, as particular qualities – the discrete term of the colour “red” for instance. But in their character as passage, or traits between discrete terms, line and colour are experienced differently. Between two sensations in their perceptible condition as sense–datum there is a continuous gradation of “minute” sensations which can only be sensed, and the experience of which makes the sensibility confront its own limit and raise itself to the level of a superior or transcendent exercise.

Thus, whereas von Hadeln, Ilchman and Echols see facts as the foundation upon which “all other considerations” concerning the work of art, including aesthetic considerations, are to be grounded, Deleuze reminds us of the primacy of the artwork’s sensible singularity, an aesthetic singularity that renders it an object for the art historian’s attention to begin with.¹⁴ Accordingly, Deleuze acknowledges the material workings of the artwork as the condition for our treatment of it. The dis-

¹² Yves Alain Bois, Denis Hollier, and Rosalind Krauss: *A Conversation with Hubert Damisch*, in: *October* 85 (1998), 3–17, 9.

¹³ As the title to Deleuze’s book on Francis Bacon indicates: Deleuze: *Francis Bacon – The Logic of Sensation* [note 1].

¹⁴ In several places within *Francis Bacon – The Logic of Sensation* [note 1] Deleuze conflates “aesthetic” with the “sensible”. *Ibid.*, 51, and 112.

crimination that is implied in this association provides a compelling counter to the tired claims of “objectivity”.

Deleuze, Michelangelo, and Ghirlandaio: The Pictorial “Matter of Fact”

Rather than the scene for a representation of the given as fact, or an object that can be known simply as a set of facts, painting exposes, Deleuze claims, the pictorial fact, or event, of its own occurrence.¹⁵ This is not simply a question, as has been implicated above, of the work’s experiential currency – its insistence as an object for our experience in the present. Whilst clearly many works may still be experienced today, it is also clear that not all of these will partake of an exposure of the fact of their occurrence. We are familiar with the narrative of this exposure as an archetypal characteristic of modernist painting – the displacement of a representation of content with an exposure of painting’s painterly condition. But for Deleuze the battle against representation is not one inscribed within the historical onset of modernism in the late 19th century; rather, it is one that has been waged by painting “for all time”, even if hitherto (up to the late 19th century) concealed under historical necessities.¹⁶ Furthermore, Deleuze presents this exposure not simply as another historical fact to be verified and known, but rather as the condition for a new order of experience – a transcendental or superior empiricism that destroys the epistemological and representational edifice. It is in the ‘tranhistorical’ possibility of this experience that our attention is called to Michelangelo.

Of Michelangelo’s *Holy Family (Doni Tondo)* (circa 1507) (fig. 1, p. 110) Deleuze remarks that “what we call a ‘(pictorial) fact’”, is “first of all the fact that several forms may actually be included in one and the same Figure, indissolubly, caught up in a kind of serpentine”.¹⁷ We have in this work, and specifically in the use of the serpentine figure, a manifestation of art’s exposure of the event of its own occurrence. The awkward contraction of the Mary, Joseph and the Christ Child into a single tense and whirling movement is striking. A curve spirals from the Virgin’s right foot, past her knees and Joseph’s left leg to return through her arms and terminate finally in the arms of the baby Jesus. This collapse of figurative distinction – the spatial distinction between separately delineated figures as forms – by the continuous whirling movement of the serpentine displaces the Albertian convention, still prevalent in Michelangelo’s time, according to which the figures of the *historia* – defined by Alberti as a “significant human action” – were to be clearly and distinctly presented in order to communicate the narrative.¹⁸ Instead, the three

¹⁵ The English ‘fact’ is a translation of the French ‘fait’, which also means event.

¹⁶ Deleuze: *Francis Bacon* [note 1], xiv.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 130–131.

¹⁸ In accordance with Alberti’s famous dictum, narration and figuration are interwoven; the telling of stories or historical events (*historia*) relies on human figures to do the telling: “A very great achievement of the painter is the *historia*; parts of the *historia* are the bodies, part of a body



fig. 1: Michelangelo Buonarroti: *The Holy Family with the infant St. John the Baptist (Doni Tondo)*, 1506, Tempera on panel, diameter 120 cm, Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi Florence. © 2015. Photo Scala, Florence – courtesy of the Ministero Beni e Att. Culturali.

figures of The Holy Family are shown to be generated by a single movement of matter, an intermeshing of the pictorial traits of line and colour. Michelangelo's innovation is highlighted if we consider a work of the same subject by his teacher, Domenico Ghirlandaio. In Ghirlandaio's *Nativity* (1492) (fig. 2., p. 111), the Christ Child is placed in the foreground, and is surrounded adoringly by the kneeling figures of Mary and Joseph, who in their retention of a marked distance from their object of veneration, inform the viewer of the narrative hierarchy between these figures. The three figures are organised in the customary triangular arrangement. The heads of a curious donkey and a no less curious cow – whose inclusion reinforces the apprehension of the work as the scene of the Nativity – peer into the scene from the right hand edge of the composition. In the distance, a verdant land-

a member, part of a member the surface [...] from the bodies one obtains the *historia*.” Leon Battista Alberti: *On Painting* [1435/36], ed. and transl. by Cecil Grayson, London 1972, 2.33, 2.35.

scape of hills and pastures of grazing sheep fades into a serene horizon. The composition is clear and legible as an organisation of forms.

In *What Is Philosophy?* Deleuze and Guattari distinguish what they call the artwork's "plane of organisation" from a "plane of composition". In a plane of organisation, forms are projected onto matter, through mechanisms of organisation such as perspective. Here, the sensation of the work's matter is confined to its capture by forms. In a plane of composition, no such projection exists, and matter "ascends" into sensation, generating a composition that is not determined or regulated by form.¹⁹ Anti-formalism is here articulated in terms of painting's competing condition as a being of sensation. In Ghirlandaio's *Nativity*, a plane of organisation is projected onto the matter of painting, in accordance not only with perspective but also with the law of naturalism. An artist described by Henry James as "not subtlety imaginative [...] but gladly observant and richly true"²⁰, Ghirlandaio casts forms onto the matter of his work in accordance with the observed forms of sense-experience.

Michelangelo's *Tondo* replaces a plane of organisation with a plane of composition. The narrative clarity we find in his master's work is no longer present. Indeed, it is not even immediately evident that we are looking upon the Holy Family. Here, Mary, not Jesus, is the centrepiece. A strangely contorted figure, she twists awkwardly towards the child who, also contorted, rests on her muscular shoulder and at the knee of the scowling Joseph crouching immediately behind her. These three virile and athletic figures, with heads brought together in intense proximity, all appear to be extremely uncomfortable. They lack the form and expression which



fig. 2: Domenico Ghirlandaio: *The Nativity*, 1492, Tempera on panel, 85 x 63 cm, The Fitzwilliam Museum Cambridge. © The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.

¹⁹ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari: *What Is Philosophy?* [1991], transl. by Graham Burchell and Hugh Tomlinson, London/New York 1999, 193, 194.

²⁰ Henry James: *Italian Hours, The Autumn in Florence*, [1873] in: Id.: *Collected Travel Writings – The Continent*, New York 1993, 590.

the history of painting has confirmed as proper to this scene. Jacob Burckhardt remarked that “with sentiments of this kind nobody ought to paint a Holy Family”²¹. Carl Justi complained that the work transformed “the idyll of parental felicity” into “a gymnastic exercise”²². Indeed, we are made to feel to be gazing more upon an anatomical study than upon a depiction of the eponymous subject – a sense that the inclusion of a group of naked, anatomically well-executed figures in the background only serves to heighten innovation displaces the propriety of the picture’s form and content and the viewer is attracted less by the pictorial representation than for this liberation of artistic expression. The placement of the Christ Child on the shoulder, a symbol that Tolnay tells us derives from medieval art of the victory of a “new principle over an old”, here suggests not only the victory of the New over the Old Testament (already present in Ghirlandaio’s work); it indicates too the victory of a new form of painting, one which exposes the fact of its own occurrence, over a traditional form that conceals this movement of matter with the superimposition of figures relaying narrational content.²³

Figuration and narration are, Deleuze claims, two principle ways in which art has historically bound itself to the task of representation – through the organisation of forms in which they both partake. This organisation proceeds through the forging of the relations between part and part, and part and whole. Parts (figures) are related to each other within a given whole (the composition) that encloses them within a defined space. Figuration thus implies at once the relationship of the figurative form to the object it represents and the relationship of the figurative form to other figurative forms within a “composite whole that assigns a specific object to each of them”²⁴. In this state of affairs, narration “slips into” the space between two figures in order to “animate the illustrated whole”²⁵. The question of representation thus emerges not only as a question of the reference of a figure to its object, but as a question of the way in which this reference impacts the form of relations within the work. In Ghirlandaio’s *Nativity*, the intelligible relations between the discrete figurative forms of Mary, Joseph and the Christ Child are determined by the referential relation of the figures to the painting “as a whole” organisation.

Michelangelo abandons this logic. In his work, whilst “the forms may be figurative, and there may still be narrative relations between the characters [...] these connections disappear in favour of a ‘matter of fact’ or a properly pictorial (or sculptural) ligature, which no longer tells a story and no longer represents anything but

²¹ Quoted in Ludwig Goldscheider: *Michelangelo – Paintings, Sculpture, Architecture*, London 1964, 11.

²² Quoted in *Ibd.*

²³ Vasari notes that Ghirlandaio was “dismayed by the new manner and the new imitation” of Michelangelo. Quoted in Charles de Tolnay: *Michelangelo*, 5 vol., Princeton 1945–64, vol. 1: *The Youth of Michelangelo*, Princeton 1969, 15.

²⁴ Deleuze: *Francis Bacon* [note 1], 2–3.

²⁵ *Ibd.*

its own movement”²⁶. Here, painting announces a liberated condition that exposes its material genesis, and presents new relations that are unintelligible with respect to the given *historia*, and which announce the eruption of painting’s construction into the naturalistic order that pre-exists it. In Michelangelo’s case, this exposure is staged through the *figura serpentinata*. The three figures of the *Tondo* are not separated as discrete forms between which intelligible relations are constructed within a figurative and narrational whole. Rather, painting displays an intensive condition comprised of the relations of material traits: patches of colour and fragments of line. The deep purple of Joseph’s robes pulse with Mary’s ultramarine; a circle dances in the interlocked linear traits of the arms of Christ and Mary; the shoulder of Joseph, and the two feet of Joseph and Mary play in a tensed triangle.

Thus these two paintings present two distinct approaches to the fact. Ghirlandaio’s work remains within a representational regime of the fact, by concealing the genesis of painting with painting’s representation of a content through its narrative, figurative forms – a concealment which accedes to the pictorial traditions of the *historia*, and naturalism. In contrast, Michelangelo liberates painting’s matter of fact, overturning the formalism by which painting posits itself as an organisation of matter and which manifests in his time through the traditions of the *historia*. The differing ways in which these two paintings pictorially implicate the fact in turn condition contrasting orders of experience. Whilst of course, both works may be treated in the same way – both may be subject to the demands of knowledge-acquisition, and the projected completion of fact – the idea that emerges in Deleuze’s work is that a painting such as Michelangelo’s *Doni Tondo* demands a different mode of response to his teacher’s. Ghirlandaio’s work, with its formal organisation and legibility, offers itself to an act of representation that will in turn impart to it the intelligibility that is integral to its construction. Its forms permit a factual treatment – through them we are able to place the work within a particular historical time, and attend to it as a collection of facts that express verifiable data. The forms of Ghirlandaio’s *Nativity*, the treatment of the landscape and the figures, and the particular palette he employs – all permit a representation that grasps the work as an assemblage of facts. But in Michelangelo’s *Tondo*, whilst of course forms still remain, the exposure of the painting’s material genesis forecloses representation for a different kind of experience, an experience of difference.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 160.

*Transcendental Empiricism and Matters of Fact:
Hume, Deleuze and the Work of Art*

This experience of difference – the material passage of sensation in excess to the discrete forms through which the sensible is given to representation – constitutes what Deleuze calls a transcendental or superior empiricism. An idiosyncratic reading of the 18th century philosopher David Hume informs Deleuze’s articulation of the relations between matters of fact and transcendental empiricism.²⁷ From Hume, Deleuze takes the notion that relations are external to the terms they relate, and that this autonomy of relation gives rise to a “matter of fact”. But Deleuze ultimately challenges Hume’s inscription of relations within the form of habit. As the mechanical appeal to clichés by which experience has been reduced to generalisations, habit is pernicious in its inscription of difference under what has already been. The task of a transcendental empiricism involves the breaking of habits constituted and the integration of difference into the realm of experience. This position is made clear in *Logic of Sensation*, where Deleuze describes the surface of the canvas as “already invested virtually with all kinds of clichés, which the painter will have to break with.”²⁸ It is the clichéd, sedimented form of the habit that Deleuze critiques. In the following, I will attend to these three aspects of Deleuze’s investment of Hume: 1. the exteriority of relation to terms 2. the critique of habit 3. the conception of the work of art as the destruction of habit and the condition of transcendental empiricism.

1. In *Logic of Sensation*, Deleuze makes a distinction between the pictorial fact or matter of fact and “intelligible relations of objects or ideas”. He associates the former with Michelangelo’s *Doni Tondo*, and the latter with the representational regime of narration, and figuration that we have associated with Ghirlandaio’s *Nativity*.²⁹ This distinction is lifted from Hume’s division of the “objects of reason” into “relations of ideas” and “matters of fact”.³⁰

For Hume, both relations of ideas and matters of fact have as their source experiential impressions – whence the famous dictum that all ideas are copies of impressions.³¹ Relations of ideas are logical, or geometric truths, which do not

²⁷ Deleuze’s two major pieces of writing on Hume are his early *Empiricism and Subjectivity. An Essay on Hume’s Theory of Human Nature* (1953) written while he was still a student (transl. by Constantin V. Boundas, New York/Oxford 1991) and his later essay on Hume, written in 1972 and published in English as *Pure Immanence: Essays on A Life*, transl. by Anne Boyman, New York/London 2002.

²⁸ Deleuze: *Francis Bacon* [note 1], 10–11

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.

³⁰ David Hume: *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* [1748], ed. by Eric Steinberg, Indianapolis 1993, 4.I.

³¹ “All perceptions of the mind are divided into two classes or species, which are distinguished by their different degrees of force and vivacity. The less forcible and lively are commonly denominated THOUGHTS or IDEAS. The other species [are called] IMPRESSIONS [which mean] all our more lively perceptions, when we hear, or see, or feel, or love, or hate, or desire,

require experience for their verification – for instance, the proposition that if A is longer than B, and B is longer than C, then A is longer than C. They include in short, “every affirmation which is either intuitively or demonstratively certain”, every affirmation that is “discoverable by the mere operation of thought, without dependence on what is anywhere existent in the universe”.³² Experience will not prove them to be incorrect, and if we were never to encounter them in experience, they would nevertheless “retain their certainty and evidence.”³³ In contrast, a “matter of fact” is experiential, and can be proven to be otherwise. It is an affirmation about which the contrary is still possible, but in which we only believe out of habit. Hume’s most well-known example is the rising of the sun: “that the sun will not rise to-morrow is no less intelligible a proposition, and implies no more contradiction, than the affirmation, that it will rise. We should in vain, therefore, attempt to demonstrate its falsehood.”³⁴

Deleuze draws on Hume’s distinction of two objects of reason to characterise the two states of painting we have been considering: painting as an organisation of forms, linked by intelligible relations, that affirms a representational regime, and painting as a composition of matter, that exposes its “matter of fact”, and produces a logic of sensation. This distinction clearly takes liberty with Hume’s definitions; for painting, whether representational or not, can never be an affirmation that is “either intuitively or demonstratively certain.” Such affirmations, Hume contends, belong solely to the dominion of logic and geometry.³⁵ However, Deleuze never pretends to be a faithful disciple. He is simply using Hume’s distinction to make a point – one that is not within Hume’s remit – concerning what he deems to be the “eternal task” of painting: the challenge to the form of representation. Insofar as it presents relations of intelligible ideas or objects, painting remains within a representational regime. It is the “constructive” character of matters of fact that is crucial to the work of art’s displacement of this regime.

“Construction” in the first instance means going beyond the given. This transgression *is* something that Deleuze claims is present in Hume’s philosophy, in what Deleuze sees as Hume’s “exteriority” of relations. For Hume, “all reasoning concerning matter of fact seems to be founded on the relation of Cause and Effect. By means of that relation alone we can go beyond the evidence of our memory and

or will.” *Ibd.*, II.

³² *Ibd.*, 4.I. For Hume this rational certainty comprises the intuitive and the demonstrative. The intuitive is what is known immediately, the demonstrative what is known by means of rational inferences, such as the square of the hypotenuse is equal to the square of the two sides. Experience supplies these ideas – they are not *a priori* in the sense in which Kant understands geometrical truths. For instance, we cannot reason about the angles of a triangle without experience of triangles. Even mathematical principles are derived from experience.

³³ *Ibd.*, 4.I.

³⁴ *Ibd.*, 4.I.

³⁵ Even in the case of the conceptual paintings of tautological statements, such as those made by Lawrence Weiner and Joseph Kosuth, it remains the case that the works are not themselves making the proofs, but only stating proofs already made.

senses”³⁶. Thus, a matter of fact is not given directly in experience, but deduced through the relation of causality.³⁷ It is in this way, Deleuze says, that the relation is rendered “external” to its terms, and “an autonomous logic of relations”³⁸ is made possible. Hume thus breaks with “simple” empiricism for which ideas have their immediate origin in the sensible, introducing instead a constructive instant into empiricism.³⁹

This position returns us to our initial claim that a fact was a sense-datum with the addition of evidence. For Hume it is the relation between the sense-datum and evidence (which is, for him, merely another fact, itself deduced/inferred from another fact, in a chain of causality that terminates in “some fact which is present to your memory or senses”⁴⁰, and which acts as the foundation for the deduction) that constitutes the matter of fact. The fact that the *Doni Tondo* was painted in 1506, the fact that it was painted in tempera, the fact that it depicts the Holy Family – none of these are immediately evident to the senses, but are deduced from the evidence – the evidence of chronological dating, the evidence of technical analysis, the evidence of iconographic deciphering – which act as their foundation through the law of causality.

2. The phrase “matter of fact” for Hume thus refers to the conclusions of causal inference. These conclusions are not drawn from reason, but from what Hume calls “habit” or “custom”. Habit is produced, or in Deleuze’s terms “contracted”, from an association of repeated perceptions. It is only the repeated sighting of carmine in Titian’s works that makes me associate the separate instances, posit a causal relation between the one and the other, and reason, habitually, that when I see Titian’s works I will see the colour carmine. I anticipate carmine based on my previous experience – there is nothing within the given term ‘Titian’ that could lead me to infer it. Terms are associated solely through the experience of their casual relation, as well as the belief, itself grounded in experience (but not rational), that the future will resemble the past.⁴¹ We thus see how the operations of habit are grounded

³⁶ Hume: *Enquiry* [note 30], 4.I.

³⁷ In the *Treatise* Hume distinguishes seven kinds of philosophical relation: resemblance, identity, relations of time and place, proportion in quantity or number, degrees in any quality, contrariety and causation. There may be divided into two kinds – those that depend only on ideas, and those that depend not only on ideas. The latter include identity, spatio-temporal relations and causation. With the first two the mind does not go beyond what is immediately present to the senses. Only causation allows us to infer something from another thing given. David Hume: *A Treatise of Human Nature* [1738], London 1977.

³⁸ Deleuze: *Immanence* [note 27], 37.

³⁹ Notably, the Lockean conception of the mind as a *tabula rasa*, and ideas as the imprint of sense impressions.

⁴⁰ “[...] though our conclusions from experience carries beyond our memory and senses, and assure us of matters of fact, which happened in the most distance places and most remote ages; yet some fact must always be present to the senses or memory, from which we may first proceed in drawing these conclusions.” Hume: *Enquiry* [note 30], 5.I.

⁴¹ Hume: *Enquiry*, 5.I: “For wherever the repetition of any particular act or operation pro-

in what Hume calls the laws of “association”: the “universal” principles of human nature: causality, contiguity and resemblance.⁴²

Deleuze retains the introduction into empiricism of a constructive element (an element that goes beyond the given), but departs from Hume’s categorisation of relation under the three natural principles of association within universal human nature. Deleuze’s philosophy presents a sustained critique both of universal traits within and a natural constitution of human nature. He departs too from Hume’s dualism, whereby repetition is enclosed “between two elements which are both determined and joined together by a relation of opposition”.⁴³ Such a position introduces negativity into the process of determination, whereas Deleuze conceives of difference as a wholly affirmative element, producing without integrating negation. And he challenges, finally, the precedency of habit.

The problem here is not the genesis of habits, but rather the subsuming of future experience under habits created. In the application of habits to the determination of future matters of fact, habit traps itself under “the form of the general” – for particular present empirical cases are contracted by the imagination to project general futures.⁴⁴ Generality “expresses a point of view according to which one term may be exchanged or substituted for another”.⁴⁵ For example, the experience of the separate cases of a causal association between Titian and carmine might lead to the general expectation that a painting by Titian will contain carmine. All future paintings then become general expressions of a relation that determines them in advance, and in this regard they become exchangeable. We approach a Titian painting with a generic expectation to encounter the attributes we have previously experienced. From this Humean perspective, the relation between Titian and the colour carmine, or Tintoretto and large-hewn canvas is one recognised from previous experiences, and under an image of thought furnished with the principles of association. Indeed, the very appeal to and investment of facts by the art historian is arguably a matter of such habit in action, whereby every new object of study is submitted to terms already studied, and with which the new object is understood to be associated; where future objects of study are approached as generalities determined by past particular cases. Under such a form of generality, Deleuze argues, the object of habit becomes an object of recognition and common sense that blocks

duces a propensity to renew the same act or operation, without being impelled by any reasoning or process of the understanding; we always say, that this propensity is the effect of Custom.”

⁴² Kant would of course say that these “principles” are *a posteriori* and contingent deductions, and thus have no necessity or universality; that repeated experience does not increase their necessity. He says that if only Hume had considered the example of pure mathematics, he would have conceded that necessary rules cannot be derived from experience (Immanuel Kant: *Critique of Pure Reason* [1787], transl. and ed. by Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood, Cambridge 1998, B20). But Hume had in fact claimed that even mathematical principles are derived from experience.

⁴³ Gilles Deleuze: *Difference and Repetition*, transl. by Paul Patton, London/New York 1994, 72.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 73.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.

difference – for difference is that which bears *no* resemblance or contiguity to what has already been.

Representation returns by the back door. Under what we have till now called a representational regime, a fact might be conceived either (and in accordance with a Kantian position) as that form by which the sensible is given to the representational act of the subject, or (in accordance with a Humean position) as that relation by which the sensible is associated with previous sense-datum of experience, that function, through the application of the principles of association, as its foundation. Both options are inadequate for Deleuze, insofar as in both cases difference is submitted to the general form of the principle. His transcendental empiricism rejects given principles and given images of thought, and rejects the law of generality. It concerns solely the genesis of matters of fact as the expressions of difference, not as repetitions of previously held associations. “Repetition is not generality”, he writes, but takes as its object “free or untamed states of difference in itself”, the unique or singular that has no equal or equivalent and which cannot be replaced.⁴⁶ In the name of thought as a creative enterprise, *Difference and Repetition* opens with the call for the liberation of repetition from “the worm of habit” that is “essentially moral”.⁴⁷ Repetition in its “opposition” to both “the ancient category of reminiscence and the modern category of habitus” is “the thought of the future”.⁴⁸ For it is as such that thought frees itself from the shackles of a ground, the impoverishment of generality, as well as the constrictions of lived time as the element in which it is conducted.

This question of the temporality of habit is the final axis upon which we witness Deleuze’s going beyond Hume. The Humean contraction of habits occurs within what Deleuze calls the “time of the living present”. To this time, the past and the future are determined as a retained immediate past and an anticipated immediate future. The living present thus passes “from the particulars which it envelops [or ‘retains’] by contraction to the general which it develops [or ‘anticipates’] in the field of expectation”.⁴⁹ But for Deleuze, transcendental empiricism concerns the singular, exceptional conditions under which difference in-itself is experienced.

3. As a “capture of difference in its differing”⁵⁰, the capture of sensation in its differential character as passage between qualitative datum, the work of art functions as the condition of a transcendental empiricism. Far from serving as the object of representation, it incites an experience beyond lived perceptions, feelings and affections, “beyond the strength of those who undergo them”, presenting itself as imposition, a violence that breaks habits of thought, in particular the natural image

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 140.

⁴⁷ In the opening line of the *Enquiry*, Hume describes his philosophy as “moral philosophy [...] the science of human nature”. Hume: *Enquiry* [note 30], 1.

⁴⁸ Deleuze: *Difference and Repetition* [note 43], 6-7.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 70-73.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 56.

of thought as representational.⁵¹ Thus the one who experiences becomes creative in the experience of creation.

Whereas Ghirlandaio's work, in its reverence of the tradition of narrative painting remains within the form of recognition, and the established historical forms of the past, Michelangelo's *Tondo* supplies us with such an experience of difference as the element of the unrecognisable not determined by the already established. This is achieved through his construction of what Deleuze calls a diagram.

Matters of fact, the Diagram and Michelangelo's Serpentine Figure

A diagram is the means by which given habits are destroyed, and matters of fact constructed. It is a map of sensation "that does not represent, even an existing reality", but constructs "a reality yet to come" by integrating the differential traits of sensation that exceed the forms by which an existing reality is given.⁵² It is an "operative set of relations" which plays a "piloting role". Deleuze describes it as "pure matter-function", a function that operates directly in matter without the intermediary of form – where matter "is a substance that is unformed either physically or semiotically" and has "only degrees of intensity" and "function has only 'traits' of content and of expression, between which it establishes a connection."⁵³

In *Logic of Sensation*, the diagram is explicitly related to the process by which the work of art exposes the event of its own occurrence. This occurrence is not simply a revelation of the genesis of form, but an imposition of matter whose violence consists in the destruction of the regime of representation that is superimposed onto painting in advance of its act. The revelation of pictorial genesis is in itself insufficient for this rejection – for genesis may show itself to be utterly in collusion with the process of representation that is being conjured, for instance, through the processual erection of mechanisms of perspective. In the case of Bacon this notion of violence is taken from the artist's own characterisation of his painting, as "returning fact onto the nervous system in a more violent way".⁵⁴ As painting acts directly upon the nervous system, bypassing the representational act of cognition, it becomes the condition of transcendental empiricism, forcing the faculty of sense to expand beyond its natural limits. The destruction of the representational regime – which includes those figurative and narrative clichés "that face the painter before he begins painting"⁵⁵ – is thus coupled with the initiation of the violent experience of transcendental empiricism.

⁵¹ Deleuze/Guattari: *What Is Philosophy?* [note 19], 168-169.

⁵² Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari: *A Thousand Plateaus – Capitalism and Schizophrenia* [1980], transl. by Brian Massumi, London 1987, 141, 142.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ David Sylvester: *The Brutality of Fact – Interviews with Francis Bacon*, London 1987, 59.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 87: "Figuration exists. It is a fact, and it is even a prerequisite of painting."

Bacon makes this diagram through an assemblage of random marks, scrubbing, sweeping, wiping the canvas in order to clear zones of matter, throwing the paint from various angles and at various speeds. This is a mode of preparation that departs from the projection of form to involve instead the violent clearing of a zone of matter that frees matter to capture new sensations on a plane of composition. From this diagrammatic mapping of matter emerges the pictorial fact, a “Figure” that is an expression of “free or untamed states of difference in itself”⁵⁶ which does not, however, exhaust diagrammatic potential.⁵⁷

As such, diagrammatic synthesis comprises an initial destruction (of given habits), a conjunction of new relations (traits of matter) and an emergence of a new Figure (the pictorial fact). From the givens of figuration and narration, the diagram extracts the material traits of line and colour. “Irrational, involuntary, accidental, free, random [...] nonrepresentative, nonillustrative, nonnarrative”⁵⁸, these traits are brought into relation, and from these relations the pictorial fact emerges. Intelligible relations between forms are displaced by the new intensive relations of matter. This diagrammatic work of painting is an “experience of the chaos-germ” (chaos in relation to the figurative givens, but a germ in relation to the new order of the painting), “a properly pictorial experience”, rather than a mode of experience by which painting becomes just another object given to the subject.⁵⁹

In the *Doni Tondo*, the diagram might be understood in the first instance as that concentrated zone in the centre foreground, where traits of colour-patches and line-traits collide and intermesh. The serpentine figure is the pictorial fact born of this diagrammatic assemblage of painting’s matter. In the contraction of Mary Joseph and Christ, we witness the revelation of the diagram as a power of deformation, an intensive movement that, in Deleuze’s words, makes the figures “crack or swell, imposes a spasm on them, and puts them into relation with forces”.⁶⁰ And indeed, we might remind ourselves that in the early 16th century, the serpentine figure was understood as the expression of unnatural movement of forces within painting. The 16th century Milanese theorist Gian Paolo Lomazzo, the first to conceptualise the notion, has attributed it directly to Michelangelo. For Lomazzo, the serpentine figure generates the “living” quality, or *furia* of the work, the sense of life or movement that, in contrast to the “descriptive or narrative” aspects of painting, are derived from the artist.⁶¹ Whereas figuration refers to a given reality that it represents, the *figura serpentinata* exposes painting’s matter of fact. In the words

⁵⁶ In his investment of the Figure, Deleuze is indebted to Jean-François Lyotard’s anti-phenomenological and anti-structuralist development of the figure as the milieu of difference outside intelligible structure in: Id.: *Discours, Figure*, transl. by Antony Hudek and Mary Lydon, Minneapolis/London 2011.

⁵⁷ The diagram is “‘only a possibility of fact’, whereas the painting exists by making present a very particular fact, which we will call the ‘pictorial fact’”. Deleuze: *Francis Bacon* [note 1], 160.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 100

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 102.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 160.

⁶¹ David Summers: *Michelangelo and the Language of Art*, Princeton 1981, 60–62.

of David Summers, it bears “a significance of its own prior to its appearance in any recognisable gesture of action”; it surpasses natural movement, and is “alive from within, undisturbed from without and isolated”.⁶² Artistic construction imbues the work with a vitality more intense than naturalistic laws by which painting is made to correspond to the lived.

In his resurrection of Michelangelo’s ‘lesson’ for a practice of painting, Deleuze draws attention to mannerism’s nascent modernity. Liberated style, or *maniera*, effects the power of a detachment from representational exigencies, signalling an aesthetic experimentation by which a second nature is constructed. Painting’s components, till now harmoniously synthesised under the law of naturalism, are disassembled and extremised, as colours intensify, lines attenuate, proportions distend and expressions exaggerate. Art constructs its own laws at a distance from nature’s measures, and this new constructive logic testifies to a freedom to which Deleuze assigns contemporary possibility. Thus the liberation expressed by Michelangelo is understood as a breakthrough that returns across the history of art, to be affirmed in the work of Bacon, which will in turn give it the sense that it could not have attained under the perceptual conditions of its own historical time. Whilst the liberation of Michelangelo’s mannerism is perhaps historically betrayed in the ossification of mannerist traits into the tradition of *maniera*, its subversive potential for a future time insists. It is as such that his diagram deploys consequences that go beyond it, to function as a map of a reality yet to come.

Implicit in Deleuze’s reading is that Bacon experiences the *Doni Tondo* not as a historical fact to be known, but rather for the way it reconfigures the forces of painting in its historical time to overpower the given form of painting as narrative and figurative. For Bacon, the experiential value of this work exceeds its status as historical fact given to a representational act conducted in the name of knowledge – and Deleuze positions this artistic experience of the past as central to his philosophical reconsideration of experience as such, with the (Nietzschean) implication that this discriminatory artistic experience has an instructive value for our use of history.⁶³ It was precisely such a distinction between discrimination and knowledge that Aloïs Riegl, with a prospective gaze, noted when he declared that “in the future, confronted with every single available fact, we will find it necessary to ask what the actual value of that fact is. Even historical value is not absolute, and it is not only the knowing [of the fact] but also the ability to ignore it at the right moment that has its advantages for the researcher.”⁶⁴ A diagrammatic artistic practice that integrates this discrimination and this forgetting into the matter of fact that it bears upon experience has something to offer the practice of art history as forecast here.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 87.

⁶³ This is an implication worked through by Nietzsche in his 2nd *Untimely Meditation: On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life* [1874], ed. by Daniel Breazeale and transl. by Reginald J. Hollingdale, Cambridge/New York, 1997.

⁶⁴ Aloïs Riegl: *Spätromisch oder orientalisches?*, in: *Beilage zur Allgemeinen Zeitung* 93 (April 23, 1902), 133–156 and 94 (April 24, 1902), 162–165, here: 94 (April 24, 1902), 164.

Conclusion: Art History as Diagrammatic Enterprise?

Clearly art history cannot relinquish its use of facts. The descriptive, interpretative, and epistemological aspects of this usage fulfil irreplaceable disciplinary requirements, as well as an indubitable function for all those who wish to know about artistic practices. More modest than any call for methodological overhaul, the question that Deleuze's philosophy raises is that of whether this representational use of facts might be augmented by a conception of fact that foregrounds what the work of art itself does.

In response to this question, the distinction of these two regimes of fact – a representational regime on the one hand, and a regime of the work's "matter of fact" on the other – has been invested in this paper as the means for an exploration of how the singularity of art's work might impact its study. What Deleuze calls – after Hume, but departing from Hume – the work of art's matter of fact, a facticity constructed through its diagram, offers possibilities very distinct to the disciplinary reliance on fact with which we opened this paper. There, foundation and closure were understood as the primary methodological motivations for a reliance on the fact as something with verifiable reality, used for the aims of representing the work of art as given object, and coming to know it. In this representational regime of the fact, the work is presented as an object of recognition to a framework of intelligibility within which it bears associations to the previous terms of art historical investigation. Such reliance effects a subordination of the work of art to disciplinary preoccupations that preexist the encounter with it, and overlooks the difference of the work of art as that which cannot be represented. It furthermore entrenches art history within foundations and the past suppositions of discourse, whilst entertaining the pernicious forecasting of a putative end.

The irreducibility of art's diagrammatic regime of its matters of fact to a representational regime of fact thus invites a reconsideration of the discipline's habitual practices. It is one that puts the question of experience at the foreground of critical methodological investigations – experience newly considered as a transcendental empiricism that begins with the shock elicited by the difference in the sensible. In art's diagrammatic regime, the work in its difference forces itself upon experience to obscure any habitual reference to already acquired facts, disrupt the foundational schema of representation and frustrate the dream of closure.

This then would be the form of one question posed by Deleuze's philosophy to art history – how art history might attend to the difference of works of art as an element that cannot be represented and rendered intelligible, how the work of art's matters of fact might be treated in a matter of fact manner.