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Introduction: The Smooth and the Striated

Flora Lysen and Patricia Pisters

A Thousand Plateaus' '1440: The Smooth and the Striated' introduces smoothness and striation as a conceptual pair to rethink space as a complex mixture between nomadic forces and sedentary captures. Among the models Deleuze and Guattari describe for explicating where we encounter smooth and striated spaces, the maritime model presents the special problem of the sea (Deleuze and Guattari 1988: 479). The sea is a smooth space par excellence: open water always moved by the wind, the sun and the stars, nomadically traversable by noise, colour and celestial bearings. Increased navigation of the open water resulted in demands for its striation. Although Deleuze and Guattari note that this took hold progressively, the year 1440, when Portuguese discoverers introduced the first nautical charts, marked a turning point in the striation of the sea. Maps with meridians, parallels, longitudes, latitudes and territories gridded the oceans, making distances calculable and measurable. It meant the beginning of the great explorations – and of the transatlantic slave trade and the expansion of the European State apparatus. The smooth and the striated concern the political and politics.

While the smooth and the striated are not of the same nature and *de jure* oppositional, Deleuze and Guattari indicate that *de facto* they only exist in complex mixed forms. Moreover, the smooth and the striated work in different domains. If the sea is the spatial field par excellence that brings out smoothness and striation, art is perhaps the domain that can give the most varied and subtle expression of the complex dynamics between them. The present collection investigates the smooth and the striated in the broad field of artistic production. It was instigated by the Third International Deleuze Studies Conference

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2 Flora Lysen and Patricia Pisters

in Amsterdam (2010) that focused on the connections between art, science and philosophy. Along with conference papers, the role of art was explored through the work of participating artists and in a curated exhibition, *The Smooth and the Striated*. This exhibition focused on the constant interplay between delineating and opening forces in the works of the eight participating contemporary artists. Together, the installations, videos, drawings and photographs spurred a wealth of new connections and ideas in relation to the concepts of smoothness and striation: the artworks touched upon the solidification of historical memory and the transformation of ever growing archival material; the striation of subterranean city space; the politics of vast demographic datasets; the visualisation of scientific patents; and more.¹

Similar to the exhibited artists in the context of the Deleuze Studies Conference, the authors in this volume think with art to shed new and interdisciplinary light upon the concepts of smoothness and striation, and, conversely, upon the way the smooth and the striated can give important insights into artistic practices. The smooth and the striated directly address processes in (social, political, geographical, biological) life, taken up in philosophy and art. Most of the contributions in this volume discuss the concepts of the smooth and the striated in relation to specific artworks that, in Claire Colebrook's words, 'are not representations of images of life', but, if we consider the emergence of the genesis of art and philosophy, can be understood as 'something of life's creative potential' (Colebrook 2006: 30). Hence, the singular artworks or artistic practices are not to be taken as illustrations of the concepts but as singular ways of embodying or expressing the various aspects that the smooth and the striated envision. 'If we *intuit* the forces that produce any single work of art or any single concept, then we might begin to approach singularity as such: the power of making a difference' (Colebrook 2006: 30). The essays in this special issue contribute to this power of difference in the complex interweaving between the smooth and the striated in its philosophical and artistic dimensions.

In the opening article, Eric Alliez argues for a conception of contemporary art theory as diagrammatic agency that differs from the aesthetic regime of contemporary art as defined by Jacques Rancière. The latter describes a regime in which the experience of art is always organized according to the image-metaphor. In contrast, contemporary art very often disorganizes the image, expressing directly the powerful forces of inorganic life (that are then connected to other assemblages of power). Ernesto Neto's sculptural environment *Leviathan Toth* (2006)

produces a semiotics of intensities that breaks through the image of power of the State by undoing the image with a red thread and white cloth. Smoothness is expressed in a non-organic Body without Organs, which is a Body without Image. While Alliez looks at the force-signs that are produced in the smooth spaces of contemporary art, Jay Hetrick returns to the question of nomadic art by retracing Deleuze's understanding of Riegl's haptic space through a reading of Benjamin's concept of *Kunstwollen* and the value of minor art forms that are able to produce a 'shock to thought', touching the spectator directly in close vision and haptic space. Hetrick gives significant emphasis to the role of cinema in modernism, the *kinaesthetic*, as moving sensation at the origin of all modern art.

After Eric Alliez' and Jay Hetrick's closer look at genealogies of art theory in relation to nomadic diagrammatics of intensive forces and movements, Colin Gardner and Todd Satter present important alternatives to conventional, modernist art-historical readings of painting and architecture. Gardner turns attention to the pre-eminent modernist painter, Barnett Newman, to show how the conventional formalist understanding of his large colourfield canvases fails to account for Newman's intricate relation to time and temporality. Reading with Deleuze and contra the famous formalism of modernist art critic Clement Greenberg, Gardner's Newman is a painter of *sites* of time; time is the event of the picture itself. Gardner proposes to read Newman's pictorial invention named 'zip' as the aesthetic figure that brings about this temporal sensation and a glimpse of the infinite. In a similar vein, Todd Satter's alternative, nomadic reading of the work of James Stirling unveils an underexposed side of architectural modernism. Opposing a dominant functionalist discourse, Stirling's sites generate a dynamic interplay between extensive (spatial) and intensive (temporal) forces in fragmented and indeterminate architecture, one that resituates embodiment and propagates assemblages between subjects and the environment.

Two artistic practitioners and scholars, designer Guy Keulemans and artist Charlotte Knox-Williams, argue for a dynamic interplay between theory and artistic practice. Deleuzian theory, for Knox-Williams, needs to be activated in, with and through art practice. By interweaving reflections of her own studio practice in film and drawing with thoughts on memory in Deleuze and Bergson, Knox-Williams' essay causes actual slippages and snags, thereby expounding on attention and inattention, matter and memory, on different, interlinking levels. In a different way, Guy Keulemans puts Deleuzian theory to use in several case studies

4 Flora Lysen and Patricia Pisters

of generative design. He considers special approaches in designing yachts, vases and chairs to point to different trajectories and links between designers, input and output. Deleuze's emphasis on open-ended possibilities is important for understanding generative design as constituted offers in play.

The last three contributions to this volume focus explicitly on the different body politics that concern forces of smoothing and striating. Asli Özgen Tuncer takes as her starting point the activity of walking as a way to explore boundaries and openings in striated spaces. In a reading of several films by Agnes Varda, she identifies the body of the female protagonists as the embodiment of encounters with different types of striations such as the operations of a society of spectacle, the social pressure involved in settling down, and the process of aging. In this way Özgen Tuncer discusses a particular feminist body politics that Varda articulates in her films as nomadic resistance through an encounter with the outside world, expressed in the bodies of her heroines and through her cinematographic language. Zach Horton's essay investigates body politics through the work of 'hunger artists' Franz Kafka and Steve McQueen. He demonstrates how the fasting body of Kafka's 'Hunger Artist' creates a Body without Organs that resists the normal organization of the organism (and smoothes out the stratified body) while being captured by the powers of capitalism-spectacle. In his film *The Hunger* Steve McQueen not only shows the fasting and starving body of IRA-activist Bobby Sands (Michael Fassbender) as a BwO, but cinematographically he also presents the prison, striated place par excellence, as a giant BwO. As such, the body of the protagonist multiplies, spills over into the audience and traces the intensities for new resistances to come. Jean Hillier closes this volume with an investigation of the liquid spaces of the work of two contemporary artists, Antony Gormley's *Another Place* and Olafur Eliasson's *Your Watercolour Machine*. While subjected to countless striations through state regulations and institutional forces, both works invite the spectator to engage with assemblages of water, light, sound and metal that provoke smoothing effects through the vibrations and sensations of matter and non-organic life. Inviting us to embark among the waves they entice us, as Eliasson maintains, 'to consider everything from the perspective of waves'. And so, at the end of this volume and after having encountered a variegated spectrum of organic and non-organic embodiments that all art practices seem to call for, we return to the sea. The sea as work of art, one of these 'other places' that engages us more intensely with the smooth and the striated.

Note

1. See www.thesmoothandthestriated.wordpress.com

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