

Why Do Performing Arts Need Deleuze and Guattari? A Methodological Inquiry

By Christina Banalopoulou*

Are performing arts doomed to numerous meta-interpretations that bare the masks of a first-order transcendence? Is the dramatized event imprisoned within representation? Do theoretical abstractions lack reality or they unfold life's artistic and virtual potentialities? For Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari performing arts not only challenge both interpretational and representational thinking but also offer a fruitful plane for theory to grasp what has not yet been imagined. In the following pages, I am introducing performing arts as an assemblage of the force relations of performance and art. I am focusing on a 10-minute scene from Dimitris Papaiwanou's *Medea2*, in order to offer intensified ground to Deleuze and Guattari's conceptualization of Bodies without Organs (BwOs) and becoming-minor. I argue that their theoretical abstractions unfold revolutionary capacities of the performing arts that would otherwise remain unexplored.

Anti-Prologue: Deleuze, Guattari and Performing Arts

Deleuze and Guattari's fascination with performing arts emerges from their understanding them as an assemblage of the force relations between performance and art. While performance envelops the capacity to affect through multiple processes of intensification, art offers materially tangible extensities to the virtual and not-yet imagined aspects of reality. According to the authors of *Anti-Oedipus* assemblage is a plane of pure difference, heterogeneity and multiplicity that "is defined by the inseparability of a finite number of heterogeneous components".¹ This inseparability of the heterogeneous components is what makes the plane of assemblage to perpetually become something different.

In the case of performing arts, the plane of assemblage emerges from the force relations between the heterogeneities of performance and art. These force relations are relations that can take their assembled heterogeneities out of their comfortable equilibrium and move them "into far-from equilibrium crisis, which reveals the influence of virtual multiplicities".² In other words, the relations between performance and art are forceful because they envelop

* PhD Student, University of Maryland, USA.

1. Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition - European Perspectives* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 30.

2. Mark Bonta and John Protevi, *Deleuze and Goephilosophy: A Guide and Glossary* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), 88.

the capacity to affect, and therefore to qualitatively differentiate, any crystallized moment of entropic balance.

I understand affect as the dynamic capacities of any kind of body, not only to produce effect but also to undergo through modifications. In their book *Deleuze and Geophilosophy: A Guide and Glossary*, both Bonta and Protevi describe affect as an expression of "what a body can do and what it can undergo".³ According to Bonta and Protevi, the translator of Deleuze and Guattari's first collaborative work *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Brian Massumi, implies that "the use of this term derives from Deleuze's reading of Spinoza".⁴ Based on his reading of Spinoza, Deleuze understands affect as "the change produced in the affected body by the action of the affecting body in an encounter".⁵ As a result, I argue that affect expresses performance's degrees of differentiation or, in other words, degrees of qualitative change that occur during perpetual repetition.

If affect is an expression of the differentially scalar force of performance that emerges from repetition, then intensity is the multiple becoming(s) of this scalar differentiation. According to Deleuze and Guattari the actualization of these kinds of intensified becoming(s) are completely unpredictable. This is why critiques of their work regard not only a metaphysical reading of their ontological presupposition according to which difference is linked with repetition but also to the fact that they assign change to processes that are ungraspable.⁶ Art has the capacity to turn this virtual and ungraspable aspect of intensified reality into materially tangible extensities.

Reality is not oppositional to its artistic and virtual aspect. On the contrary it is immanent to it. This is why Deleuze argues that the virtual potentiality of the artistic unexpected that has to do with the interplay between repetition and difference should not be misconstrued with the possibility of the one that is perceived and experienced as representational. More specifically he argues that, "the possible is only the concept as principle of the representation of the thing, under the categories of the identity of what represents, and the resemblance of what is represented. The virtual by contrast does not resemble the actual".⁷ Art does not resemble or represent

3. Ibid., 49.

4. Brian Massumi, *A User's Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Deviations from Deleuze and Guattari* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992), 10 and 16.

5. Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, trans. Robert Hurley (San Francisco: City Lights, 1988), 49.

6. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), 45.

7. Gilles Deleuze, *Desert Islands and Other Texts, 1953-1974* (Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2004), 11.

reality. If dramatizing representation means making it different then the possibility of actual resemblance gives its place to the artistic potentiality of virtual assemblage.

From this point of view, representation is not a constitutive aspect of the implied concept of performance and performing arts. On the contrary it is just an institutionalized epiphenomenon of repetition. As a result, its intensification has the capacity to decode its representational over-coding. This is because as Cull argues, representation for Deleuze "is nothing but a real creation not a second-order mode of being".⁸ In the paper titled *The Method of Dramatization*, a paper that Deleuze presented to the Societe Francaise de Philosophie on 28th of January of 1967, the French philosopher claims that, "things in themselves dramatize (...) it's that dynamisms, and their concomitants work beneath all the qualified forms and extensions or representation".⁹ It is my contention that Dimitris Papaiwanou's *Medea*, does exactly that: as an assemblage of the force relations between art and performance, *Medea* resists representation and intensifies any notions of human positioning in this world.

Medea2 – The Solo Chair Scene

Dimitris Papaiwannou's *Medea2* is always already in motion. The tragic becoming of *Medea*, moved from dramatic text to the dance theatre, and then straight to Robert Wilson's Watermill Center. Having the dramatic text and as his point of inauguration, Papaiwanou came up with two different dance-theatre productions of *Medea*. In the case of *Medea2*, a differentiated repetition of *Medea*, the Greek avant-garde artist did not remain imprisoned within interpretational linguistics of embodied representation. *Medea2* took place in a proscenium theatre where a camera from backstage was recording the front side of the audience and the actor-dancers from behind. The stage had a shape of a two-dimensional rectangular plane, made of white fabric. Bodies were moving continuously and linearly from stage left to stage right, challenging human ways of embodied positioning in the world. Different extensities of intensive technicities were part of this process: Jason was embodying heavy boat miniatures that served as alternative κόθορνοι. *Medea* was either on a top of a white sheet that someone was pulling, or on an iron surface that was connected to a pulley, which was manually handled by one of the actors on stage.

8. Laura Cull, "Performing Presence Affirming Difference: Deleuze and the Minor Theatre of George Lavadant and Carmelo Bene," in *Contemporary French Theatre and Performance*, ed. Clare Finburgh and Carl Lavery (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 5.

9. Deleuze, *Desert Islands and Other ...*, 67.

Once the two-dimensional stage was turned into a three-dimensional white box, Evangelia Rantou created an embodied assemblage with one of the chairs on stage. One of the actors ripped the white fabric that served as curtain and revealed the cubic box that had a shallow pool, full of water, on the bottom. The sets that were posited within this box included wooden black chairs and wooden light brown tables. Medea, having a white torn dress on, part of which she was holding with her teeth, and no make up on, overturned two of the black chairs and used them as prosthetic extensions of her feet while holding them with her hands. She started walking on them while deflections of her shadow reflections on the water were projected both onto the back paper side of the box and her white wet dress. After performing a cyclical movement, she remained in a five-second active stillness while facing the audience. After the five seconds, she let the chairs fall, allowing her body to succumb to gravity.

Throughout this two-minute scene, Eleftheria remained silent. Her face muscles were initially engaging to the action of biting the white and wet piece of her dress. While walking on her extensive "chair legs", her upper torso was folding towards her lower body. Allowing the weight of the chairs to hold her down, she shaped a curve in space with her back. Her wet white dress allowed her spinal movement to be accessible to the audience's gaze and her dark hair was left loose on her shoulders, offering a visual antithesis to all the whiteness of the cubic box. After having completed a circle, she looked at the audience and she allowed the chairs to fall on the shallow pool making a rumbling sound that broke the sound of her body silence. The chairs fell bilaterally, perturbing the water of the pool and forcing her legs to open. She grabbed her dress with her hands and threw herself to the shallow water, embodying the vibrations that came along with the rebound.

Robert Wilson chose this scene to be one of the 25 "readymade" performances that assembled his 22nd Annual Watermill Summer Benefit, *Circus of Stillness: the power over wild beasts*. This assemblage of the 25 readymade performances took place at Wilson's personal laboratory for performance known as the Watermill Center. The 22nd Annual Watermill Summer Benefit, *Circus of Stillness: the power over wild beasts* included a silent auction, a live auction and readymade performances and art installations from all over the world. The "solo chair scene" was performed by Evengelia Rantou 20 times in a loop on one of the ponds of the Watermill Center garden. The 25 readymade performances included body-painting, bodies blending with and augmenting not only the artificially planted trees, ponds and bushes that shaped labyrinths but also the architectural constructs that were embedded within this area.

Medea as Body without Organs (BwO)

Bodies without Organs (BwO), is an aesthetic metaphor introduced by Antonin Artaud¹⁰ and philosophically analyzed by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari.¹¹ Through this conceptualization Artaud looks for the production of bodies that are not turned into organisms and thus refuse to serve any kind of sociopolitical ordering that preserves the function of the organism of capitalistic democracy. In *The Judgment of God*¹² his body howls: "They've made me an organism! They have wrongfully folded me! They have stolen my body!" and he continues: "The body is the body. Alone it stands. And in no need of organs. Organism it never is. Organisms are the enemies of the body".¹³ Artaud saw in dancers, and specifically in Balinese dancers, the capacity to produce BwOs that are in no need of organs.

According to the authors of *Anti-Oedipus* thanks to the established relations between organs and capital, organs are assigned specific social functions. For instance, voice is for communication among individuals and sexuality a concern of marriage.¹⁴ As a result Deleuze and Guattari offer a post-modern analysis of the Artaudian concept of BwOs since they deal with the latter not as counter-produced bodies that pre-require dialectic antithesis in order to perform political resistance, but as already fragmented bodies that carry the potential to establish relations that move beyond the axioms of privatization and capital.¹⁵ From their point of view, BwOs should be understood as the point of an affirmative departure that instead of negating or destroying that "which is"¹⁶ it affirms the given in order to open the horizon towards everything that is beyond and in place of it.

During the solo scene, Medea embodies the upside-down chairs as prosthesis of her body's limbs. This prosthesis is not an additional entry that is imposed on Medea's body. On the contrary it is a tangible extensity of the intensity of her body. From this point of view, Medea is perpetually becoming a BwO that actualizes what Deleuze and Guattari define as "machinic assemblage". According to the authors of *Anti-Oedipus* machinic assemblage is the assemblage that links heterogeneous organs and flows. Through this non-

10. Antonin Artaud, *Antonin Artaud: Four Texts* (Los Angeles: Panjandrum Books, 1982).

11. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 149.

12. Artaud, *Antonin Artaud: Four Texts*.

13. Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 159.

14. Jeffrey A. Bell and Claire Colebrook, *Deleuze and History* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 12-13.

15. Gilles Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 223.

16. *Ibid.*, 18-19.

representational understanding of the body Deleuze introduces indirectly his notion of theatricality. He specifically argues that theatricality is "an unbalanced, non-representative force that undermines the coherence of the subject through its compelling machineries".¹⁷ Within this context, any kind of performed mimesis is performed "in-difference"¹⁸ in such a way that the spectrum of performance and its affect is perpetually widening.

Medea is not representing a BwO. On the contrary she is establishing new ways of human positioning in the world. As a result, Medea's body slips out of domination and "remains difficult to conceptualize".¹⁹ For Deleuze and Guattari, this capacity to non-conceptualization²⁰ prohibits any kind of accumulated power, either institutionalized or not, to be exercised onto their bodies. Medea can never become a personality or a subject. She is always becoming "impersonal"²¹ through bodily but non-human non-intentions.

Additionally, Medea's non-intentional and imperceptible production of BwO is a newly emerged form of political praxis that, because of its capacity to destroy organisms, it can disturb the socially constructed and politically imposed organism of capitalistic democracy. Dance, as an ongoing process of bodily experimentation has the capacity to produce BwOs and as a result to disturb the homeostasis of any kind of full bodies, including the social ones.

This is when the dancing body starts performing on the realm of the political. According to John Protevi, a professor of French Studies that specializes on the dynamic interplay between Deleuzian Studies and political affect, political praxis "need not be an organism".²² He argues that the BwO brings together "the social and the somatic" because it challenges "the tendency towards fixation, especially when we are being forced into stereotyped roles that make possible the regulation and reproduction of unjust social dynamics".²³ This forced fixation resembles the structure of an organism that creates creditor-debtor hierarchies in order to survive.

Medea's affirmative relation between processes of embodying the given in order to move beyond it is ontologically based on the relation between repetition and difference. In short, for Deleuze and Guattari repetition is the repetition of the unrepeatable.²⁴ According to them repetitive embodiment produces differential subjectivities whose bodies are not only coded by their

17. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition ...*, 3.

18. Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, 34.

19. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature. Theory and history of literature*, v. 30 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 399.

20. Massumi, *A User's Guide to Capitalism ...*, 47 and 81.

21. Bonta and Protevi, *Deleuze and Geophilosophy: ...*, 47.

22. John Protevi, *Political Affect: Connecting the Social and the Somatic* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 94.

23. *Ibid.*, 4.

24. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition ...*.

relation to capital but also by their revolutionary potential.²⁵ Capitalism, as Deleuze and Guattari suggest, "gives rise to numerous flows in all directions that escape its axiomatic".²⁶ Therefore the instituted and founded relation between BwOs and capital is a simultaneous production of potential revolutions that start with and from the body.

Medea as Becoming-minor

Non-representational art and performance, like Papaiwanou's *Medea2*, is directly linked to the interplay between difference and repetition. While Aristotelian thinking sees in repetition a falsely mimetic reproduction of an unreachable and un-replicable essence of reality,²⁷ the Deleuzian concept of repetition sees infinite multiplicities of becoming(s).²⁸ According to the French philosopher the actualizations of some of these becoming(s) are linked to the intensive aspect of the repetitive process: in other words, on repetition's capacity to move itself outside of its comfort zone to points of crisis and modification. This process of intensification is a perpetual "movement of subtraction, of amputation that gives birth to and multiplies something unexpected, like a prosthesis".²⁹ Therefore, this movement of subtraction is not a deduction. If that were the case, then the latter would manifest itself as power of exception. On the contrary it is an affirmation that unfolds positive processes and new becoming(s).

Papaiwanou's *Medea* repeats the unrepeatable through constantly challenging and disturbing any kind of pre-given materializations. It is my contention that Euripides' dramatic text falls under this category of the abstract of the pre-given that is experimentally affirmed and challenged on stage. The preformation of the story of Euripides' *Medea* is there in order to be performed and eventually reformed. Papaiwanou does not revisit Euripides in order to offer a resembling repetition of antiquity on stage. On the contrary he actualizes a virtual subtraction of the story of Medea in order to challenge our experience of the limits of humanity.

These prosthetic subtractions that actualize themselves through art, are found in the core of the work of many novelists. Marcel Proust for instance, who was one of Deleuze's main influences since one of the first Deleuze's

25. Laura Guillaume and Joe Hughes, *Deleuze and the Body* (Edinburg: Edinburg University Press, 2011), 179.

26. Ibid.

27. Αριστοτέλης, *Περι Ποιητικής* [*About Poetry*], trans. Συκουτρός (Athens, Greece: Εστία, 2011).

28. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*

29. Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, 239.

works was *Proust and Signs*,³⁰ talks about "masterpieces that are always written in a kind of foreign language".³¹ Additionally, another one of Deleuze's main forces of inspirations that lead to the creation of the first collaborative work between Deleuze and Guattari titled *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature*, Franz Kafka, claims that these not-yet actualized potentialities are like "the greater swimmer who did not know how to swim".³² Therefore, these becoming(s) have nothing to do with a false representation that negates what is already given. On the contrary they affirm the differential becoming(s) of the already given.

Becoming-minor is the becoming that according to Deleuze is revolutionary enough not only to exclude itself from the already given authority of majority but also to no longer denote a state of rule.³³ Deleuze despises majority and the demagoguery that the latter imposes on difference and heterogeneity. According to Deleuze within a condition of an authoritative majority "the people are missing".³⁴ As a result theatre is the one that should discover an anti-representational function that would affirmatively allow to "variation to vary itself".³⁵ This affirmed variation can be nothing else, but minor.

This becoming-minority is a manifestation of the force of becoming something other than what majority imposes. As a result, according to Deleuze "theatre will surge forward as something representing nothing but what presents and creates a minority of consciousness as a universal becoming".³⁶ This collectively and publically created minority rejects any kind of majority politics that establish "the other" in order to legitimate itself. This establishment of "the other" by the legitimate majority in question presupposes a transcendental authority that bears the mask of the outside and absolute necessity.

Papaiwanou's Medea does not resemble or represent a legitimized way of existing. Medea is always in-between: between mistress and wife, mother and murderer, dragon and human, tragic heroine and monster, mortal and immortal. Medea never picks a dialectical side in order to perpetuate notions of otherness and identity. On the contrary, Medea moves outside the laws

30. Gilles Deleuze, *Proust and Signs: The Complete Text. Theory out of bounds*, v. 17 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).

31. *Ibid.*, 78.

32. Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor ...*, 67.

33. Timothy Murray, *Mimesis, Masochism and Mime: The Politics of Theatricality in Contemporary French Thought* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 257.

34. *Ibid.*

35. *Ibid.*, 254.

36. *Ibid.*, 255.

and customs of the already established territory resisting any crystallization of signs, meanings or symbols.

Anti-Epilogue

For Deleuze and Guattari performing arts are more real than everyday life because they actualize life's virtual potentialities. This actualization moves beyond interpretational and representational constructs that territorialize themselves as internal relations to human existence. This is why Cull argues that, "for Deleuze, art and theatre can be more real than life or at least bring us closer to the reality of difference".³⁷ Criticisms that read Deleuze and Guattari's work as metaphysical abstractions that do not have any tangibly material manifestations, are criticisms that put in words mathematical abstractions through oversimplifying them.

Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy is an empirical philosophy that focuses on the creative potentialities of the matter. In their own words, their philosophy is a "transcendental empiricism"³⁸ that, as Slavoj Žižek very picturesquely describes it, "is infinitely richer than reality-it is the infinite potential field of virtualities out of which reality is actualized".³⁹ Is not this the intention of both performance and performing arts though? To intensively enrich what is already given, or in other words to point towards "not-yet-imagined" virtual potentialities of the tangible and already given actual, through an endless play that affirms repetition and non-representational difference?

This is why I contend that performing arts need the methodological conceptualizations of Deleuze and Guattari. In this paper my focus was particularly placed on the forceful capacity of the assemblage that emerges from art and performance. I argued that this assemblage cannot and should not be imprisoned within notions of representation and interpretation that are nothing more than poetic crystallizations that bare the masks of absolutes. While performance envelops the capacity to affect and intensify anything that appears to be pre-assigned or pre-given, art actualizes any virtual conceptualizations of performance. For Deleuze and Guattari the virtual capacities of reality are immanent to it.

Transcendence and Immanence are not ontological conditions of being. On the contrary, they are different ways of understanding the variation that

37. Cull, "Performing Presence Affirming Difference: ...," 103.

38. Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 96-98.

39. Slavoj Žižek, *Organs Without Bodies: Deleuze and Consequences* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 4.

surrounds us. According to Cull, while transcendent modes of creation become absolutely external to the activity in question, immanence places the emphasis on "the ways in which material bodies organize themselves rather than being construed as molded into an organized form by an external force".⁴⁰ As a result, transcendence manifests itself in the various understandings of the relations between the individual and the collective, between body and mind and between structure and agency. While transcendence perpetuates either/or dialectical dualisms, immanence calls for an inclusive, affirmative and very prosthetic AND. I argued that Medea's body moved beyond these oppositional dualisms. Understanding Medea as both becoming a BwO and becoming-minor I argued that Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy offers theoretical abstractions that can unfold revolutionary capacities of the performing arts that would otherwise remain unexplored.

Bibliography

- Artaud, Antonin. *Antonin Artaud: Four Texts*. Los Angeles: Panjandrum Books, 1982.
- Bell, Jeffrey A., and Claire Colebrook. *Deleuze and History*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009.
- Bonta, Mark, and John Protevi. *Deleuze and Geophilosophy: A Guide and Glossary*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004.
- Cull, Laura. "Performing Presence Affirming Difference: Deleuze and the Minor Theatre of George Lavadant and Carmelo Bene." In *Contemporary French Theatre and Performance*, edited by Finburgh Clare and Carl Lavery. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.
- Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983.
- Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature. Theory and history of literature, v. 30*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986.
- Deleuze, Gilles. *The Logic of Sense*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1990.
- Deleuze, Gilles. *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*. Translated by Robert Hurley. San Francisco: City Lights, 1988.
- Deleuze, Gilles. *Difference and Repetition - European perspectives*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.

40. Cull, "Performing Presence Affirming Difference: ...," 29.

- Deleuze Gilles. *Essays Critical and Clinical*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997.
- Deleuze, Gilles. *Proust and Signs: The Complete Text. Theory out of bounds, v. 17*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000.
- Deleuze, Gilles. *Desert Islands and Other Texts, 1953-1974*. Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2004.
- Guillaume, Laura, and Joe Hughes. *Deleuze and the Body*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011.
- Hardt, Michael, and Antonio Negri. *Empire*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000.
- Massumi, Brian. *A User's Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Deviations from Deleuze and Guattari*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992.
- Murray, Timothy. *Mimesis, Masochism and Mime: The Politics of Theatricality in Contemporary French Thought*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997.
- Protevi, John. *Political Affect: Connecting the Social and the Somatic*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2009.
- Žižek, Slavoj. *Organs Without Bodies: Deleuze and Consequences*. New York: Routledge, 2004.
- Αριστοτέλης, *Περι Ποιητικής* [About Poetry]. Translated by Συκουτρής. Athens, Greece: Εστία, 2011.

