



Brain Falls: The Power of The Falls

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Dans ce texte, je considère le film de Greenaway, *The Falls*, comme une méditation deleuzienne élargie sur les modes de réception d'un Événement. Je soutiens que (1) le film déterritorialise la forme documentaire à travers la narration mensongère des réactions à un événement invisible et inexprimable (appelé le Grand Événement Inconnu), (2) que son contenu revient à n'être que le catalogue de ces différentes réactions en termes de perte d'une identité préalable fixe et d'entrée dans le devenir (le film énumère les différentes modalités et degrés du devenir-oiseau, (3) que sa subjectivité sous-jacente est celle de la ligne d'envol activée par le devenir (illustré dans le film par Erhaus Falluper), et que (4) sa vision est d'ordre éthologique car il s'agit d'une typologie des degrés d'affinité entre les devenirs et la ligne d'envol, allant de la conformité à un modèle (oiseau-devenant) à l'invention d'une nouvelle possibilité de vie (devenir-oiseau).

In this text I consider Peter Greenaway's film *The Falls* as an extended Deleuzian meditation on modes of reception of an Event. I argue that (1) the film deterritorialises the documentary form with the falsifying narration of responses to an unseeable and unsayable event (called the «Vast Unknown Event»), (2) its content amounts to a catalogue of these diverse responses in terms of the loss of previous fixed identity and the entry into becoming (the film enumerates various modalities and degrees of becoming bird), (3) its subtended subjectivity is that of the line of flight empowered by the becoming (exemplified in the film by Erhaus Falluper) (4), its vision is ethological: a typology of the degree of affinity between the becomings and the line of flight, ranging from conforming to

a model (becoming-bird) to inventing a new possibility of life (bird-becoming).

Introduction

This paper stems from a series of involvements and encounters over a large number of years. First, there is my long-standing involvement with the philosophy of Deleuze in general, and with his work on cinema. I first encountered his work as a student in Australia and it amazed and inspired me to the point that not only did I teach myself French to be able to read his work, which was at that time almost entirely untranslated, but I did everything I could to be able to come to France and attend his lectures. Imagine my surprise when I arrived in 1981 and I discovered that his seminar was devoted to exploring the relation between thought and the cinema. All I knew of his recent work was *Anti-Oedipus*, *Kafka*, *Dialogues*, *Rhizome* (which was later to become the first chapter of *A Thousand Plateaus*), and some other chapters from *A Thousand Plateaus* which had been published independently.

I arrived in Paris then at a moment of discontinuity in Deleuze's teaching, when he began a new series of seminars and books, which lasted 4 years, after which there was another break and change of direction and his seminar was devoted to Foucault. My surprise was accompanied by delight as the seminar progressed and I could see how the concepts he had developed in his previous books (on Bergson, Spinoza, Nietzsche, but also in *Difference and Repetition* and *Logic of Sense*, as well as in the more recent works I mentioned) could be transformed and applied to give a new comprehension of the cinema. There was a unity after all, but it was one achieved by what Deleuze calls re-linkage over these breaks in continuity, and over the many smaller-scale ones that were manifested in the development of his teaching. So I can bear witness to both the rupture and the refined continuity between Deleuze's work on cinema and the works both before and after. For the question has often been posed of the relation between the cinema books and the rest of his work. This question has taken the form lately of: «Is a Schizoanalysis of Cinema Possible?» The term «schizoanalysis» refers to the project developed above all in volumes I and II of «Capitalism and Schizophrenia», the general title for *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus*. The question is posed precisely because of the rupture that I have talked about, and of the fact that many of the concepts and analyses developed in these books are absent in the work on cinema. There is an impression that the cinema books are somehow incomplete. My experience and my argument is that there is continuity, precisely the sort of continuity constructed by the relinking over the interstices between acts of thought that is described in Deleuze's work on the Time-Image. So it is both reasonable and desirable to make use of concepts from all of Deleuze's works to understand a particular film, and there is no need to limit oneself to the concepts employed in the cinema books.

As soon as I heard about Peter Greenaway's *The Falls* I knew that I absolutely had to see it. It is an amazing film: intelligent, strange, beautiful, absurd and immensely funny. This paper is an attempt to explain my enthusiasm for the film by using Deleuze's concept of the cinema of the brain, or cerebral cinema. But Deleuze is quick to clarify that «cerebral» does not mean «intellectual» as the brain is devoted to many functions and not just to cognition: there is the perceiving brain, the affective brain, the animal brain (including also the old mammalian brain of the limbic system and the even more archaic reptilian R-complex comprising the brain stem and the cerebellum). So in fact there is no real opposition, as in a Cartesian dualism, between the cinema of the brain and the cinema of the body. Both are aspects of the time-image and its need to replace the old stable «normal» linkages of the sensori-motor schema by more supple, more diverse, more complex, and more inclusive links appropriate to a more «rhizomatic» thought and experience. In one of his classes on the cinema Deleuze remarked that his classification of cinematic signs and images could equally be seen as a typology of lives and of modes of existence. People live in terms of existential priorities given to transcendence or to immanence, to precepts, affects or concepts, to action or to vision, to identities or to becomings etc. The ethical dimension is always present and intertwined with the ethological in the attempt to describe, interpret and evaluate modes of life. This ethical dimension is present in *The Falls* at every moment, in its humour, in its fragmentation, in its subversion of the documentary vision of truth, and in its typology of responses to an Event and to the becomings it engenders and fosters.

My plan will be a simple one based on the plan that Deleuze uses repeatedly going from (1) the molar level of formal organization (here I will describe the premise and the structure of the film) to (2) the molecular level of becomings and power relations (here I will describe the conflict between two images of thought in the film: the dogmatic image embodied in its documentary form and the

rhizomatic or nomadic image embodied in its constant parodying and undermining of that form. I will finish with (3) some considerations on the process of subjectivation which is both illustrated in and exemplified by the film.

I. Description

II.a. Premise

The premise of *The Falls* is that a far-reaching overwhelming event took place on June 13 in some unspecified year, creating 19 million victims of this Violent Unknown Event or VUE for short. These victims have all been affected in various ways, for better or for worse. There is the introduction of sexual quadrimorphism: the victims can now be divided into four sexes instead of the orthodox human two. All have ceased to age and have become practically immortal, barring fatal accidents or diseases. All have had their mother tongue erased and have begun to speak one of the 92 entirely new languages produced by the Event. All have undergone more or less severe bodily mutations that have often introduced pathological states, but sometimes enhancements, and which seem to be the beginnings of a transformation of human physiology into a more bird-like form. A recurrent pathology cited in the film is called «patagium fellitis» or «skin-wing aggrievement» in which the body's transformation seems to be sketchily trying to equip the sufferer for flight. One VUE victim, Melorder Fallaburr, apparently can fly:

The VUE had affected Melorder's sight for the better and his hearing for the worse, and the muscles along his arms, and across his chest and back had become enlarged, engorged and strengthened...It was this useful characteristic that eventually persuaded Melorder that his historical and theoretical knowledge of human-flight should be put to practical use.

The Event is never in fact depicted or described nor do we see the mutations, pathologies or enhancements. We learn of all this gradually in piecemeal fashion from the voice of the commentary that recounts the bizarre effects and consequences of the VUE while the screen shows mainly images apparently meant to be in some relation of illustration or confirmation of what is said. The screen shows us a bewildering array of filmed houses and landscapes, of photos and drawings and maps, of quizzes and interviews and recitations. The images are sober, composed, pictorial, in contrast to the bizarre and absurd biographies recounted by the commentary. The «violence» of the VUE, like the Event itself, is never represented in the film, we have only the inventory of its effects: the confusion of tongues, the sexual quadrimorphism, the bodily deformations and enhancements, the obsession with birds and flight, the dreams of water and flying, the fixation on the epicentre of the VUE which may be the Lleyn Peninsula in Wales and more precisely in the Boulder Orchard located there. The violence is not in the spectacle but in the unseeable and unsayable event and its effects. For Deleuze every event contains an intensive potential energy inseparable from a relation to the intensity zero and so to a fall. Here is one philosophical justification of the title of the film: these are the intensive falls produced by the actualisation of the event.

We may ask what is the genre of such a film, midway between Science Fiction Thriller and encyclopaedic documentary? Some writers refer to it as a mockumentary, as if conflating it with a prolonged Monty Python sketch; and it is true that humour is ever present. A better category would be that proposed in another context by Laura Marks in «Signs of the Time», where she talks about «time-image documentaries», in which the form of truth of classical documentary is treated as itself a fictional construct. In this sort of documentary the event is unseeable and unsayable in our current regimes of visibility and enunciability:

Time-image documentaries are «difficult» -not because they intentionally seek to frustrate the viewer, but rather because they seek to acknowledge the fact that the most important «events» are invisible and unvisualizable. (Marks, p.205)

However this view of a new sort of documentary does not go far enough, as for Deleuze the time-image makes use of a «new» function between those of fiction and of documentary: fabulation or the story-telling function. The problem with parody is that it is in danger of maintaining the form of truth but giving it an absurd content, whereas fabulation undermines the model of truth, as a fixed pre-normed pre-coded objective point of view. Fabulation makes use of something outside the dichotomies of representational thought, functioning according to what Deleuze, after Nietzsche, calls *la puissance du faux* -the power of the false. This is the second philosophical justification of the title of the film (*The Falls* = The False) and it is the reason why I have subtitled this paper «The Power of The Falls ».

The film purports to be based on the official Standard Directory that catalogues the nineteen million VUE victims, far too many to present to the viewer. So in order to give a representative, and suitably randomized sample, the film limits itself to presenting the biographies with suitable accompanying images of those ninety-two VUE victims whose name begins with the letters FALL. The film proceeds in alphabetical order with no unifying narrative. The unity is a loose, open-ended one based on repetitions at the level of the themes and certain constantly recurring visual elements, as well as repetition with variation in the music that accompanies the images and commentaries. Little by little the elements of music and lists of bird-names culminate in the construction of the Anthem of the Nation of the People of the Bird:

«The film closes with a credit sequence structured by the chorus of the VUE anthem-whose creation has been successively mapped throughout *The Falls* – and whose images are the film's VUE witnesses projected onto yet another screen. There is no mistaking you have been watching a film-maybe you have been watching a film of a film» (Peter Greenaway, *The New Social Function of Cinema*, BFI, 1981).

I.b. Structure

The Falls is the first feature-length film made by Peter Greenaway and was released in 1980. It contains many references to and borrowings from his previous, more experimental, short films including brief extracts, an alphabetical principle of organisation, the obsessive recurrence of the number 92, ornithology, Tulse Luper, defenestration, people struck by lightning, bathrooms, etc.

The form of the film is a series of ninety-two biographies of varying lengths, going from seven seconds up to a little over five minutes. The biographies are spoken mainly by an off-screen commentary, although sometimes we see a commentator in a sound studio, or more rarely on a site related in some way to the commentary. The images that we see are mainly of urban and rural landscapes, people inside or outside houses or cars, walking, driving, being interviewed, performing etc. These images are present as in some way illustrating or confirming the narrated biographies, without corresponding to them in any literal way. They have only an indirect relation to the commentary. Between these biographical sequences there are intervals composed of a number and a name announcing the next biography over a black screen, accompanied by the beginning of the commentary for the next sequence and the music of Michael Nyman (ninety-two variations on four bars taken from Mozart's *Sinfonia Concertante*), which runs through the whole film. These intervals are of variable length—from five up to about twelve seconds. Some of the biographies are reduced to just the interval with a very short voice-over commentary, or continue just a few seconds more in order to give a short «illustration». For example biography thirty five Cole Fallbird: «Biography subjudice pending trial for misconduct with a minah». Even in this mini-segment we can see the wordplay in the name Fallbird, and in the pun on minah (mainate) and minor, and the attention to detail, as this is not just a throwaway little joke, but is thematically related to the rest of the film. A minah is a ratite, a flightless bird, and ratites are one of the conjectured causes or instigators of the VUE.

It can be seen that «*The Falls*» espouses the form and conventions of the classical documentary: the objective-sounding commentary, the visual «proofs» or «confirmations», the precise indications of name, age, occupation, place and time. It all seems to contribute to an impression of convergence, continuity and verification. But from the beginning we see that something else is at work: Biography 1 Orchard Falla.

Orchard Falla is a Capistan-speaking young male man. He suffers from perpetually aching teeth, gross anaemia and a marrow deficiency. For his age and his condition he is heavy. There is no known photograph of him... Orchard, more often than not, spends his time at the beach, day or night, standing staring at the sea with both hands clamped tightly to his lower jaw in the unlikely hope of squeezing away the toothache. In such a position he stares fixedly to the southeast. If he had turned his gaze forty-five degrees, and stared out due east, he might have faced the horizon that hid the Lleyn Peninsula of North Wales, which is what he wanted to stare at. As it was, he misplaced his time, his energy and his anxiety by staring at the horizon that hid the coast of Pembrokeshire which was much too far to the south.

Greenaway comments that here we have introduced to us many of the repeated elements of the film, including as well as those previously discussed:

The strong visual reference of water and the 'pathetic' musical theme that will insinuate itself in many guises throughout the ninety-two biographies and become built into the ninety-two musical pieces that introduce the biographies.

He goes on to indicate:

This first biography also contains the first and only 'real' image of a bird - a seagull and a dead one - and in the person of Orchard Falla, whose first name foreshadows the Boulder Orchard, the epi-centre of epi-centres on the Lleyn Peninsula, hints that the film as a whole, like Falla, might be looking in the wrong direction entirely in its concern to investigate the Violent Unknown Event. (Peter Greenaway, *The New Social Function of Cinema*, BFI, 1981)

1.2. Time-image and the brain

In his two books on cinema, Deleuze describes two states of the cinema and of its images:

1) the movement image, in which time is subordinate to movement. Movements take place in a common-sense universe where time is a straight line, identities are fixed, and the nature of reality is a given. The action is usually regulated by a sensory-motor schema where the perception of a (more or less) recognizable situation gives rise to determinate actions which give us a changed situation to perceive and to act on (or in), and so on. The sensori-motor schema guarantees the possibility of action and the continuity of plot. Time is presented only indirectly as concluded from (and as already organizing) movement.

2) The time-image, in which the sensori-motor schema breaks down and identities become uncertain and changing, and time becomes a labyrinth of virtual situations and states. The very notion of a single univocal truth no longer applies, and the narration dissolves into a confusing mix of conflicting versions. Time is presented directly in its virtual labyrinthine form.

Deleuze's *The Time Image* is an inventory of the techniques and styles that are used to give us this direct presentation of time. One pole of this time-image cinema is what Deleuze calls the cinema of the brain. He gives us several characteristics of this cerebral cinema:

1) the film is composed of separate sequences of images separated by an « irrational » (in the mathematical sense) cut, that belongs neither to the preceding nor to the following sequence.

2) the sequences are in a relation no longer of narrative continuity but of re-linkage across the irrational cut. There is no one single narrative, but disparate sequences re-linked by various thematic, affective and formal modes of connection.

3) the black screen takes on an autonomous value and existence.

In this cerebral cinema there is no completely unified whole that associates the images into one englobing continuity, but the whole is traversed by a dispersive force that gives us one sequence and then another and then another. We have incommensurable blocks of sound and image. Moreover the cut also passes between sound and image inside the blocks, separating them into (partially) overlapping but heterogeneous sub-blocks. Cinema, like life, becomes explicitly an art of assemblage, of combination, and of multiple possibilities.

The Falls corresponds precisely to this schema of the cinema of the brain. The alphabetic ordering, the non-correspondence of image and commentary, the black screen with only a number and a name that separates each biographical sequence. The interval takes on a value in its own right as an integral part of the film in its relinking of disparate visual illustrations across a numeric and alphabetic hiatus of variable length, sometimes continuing for a dozen seconds, i.e. for longer than several of the biographic entries.

But this is a very formal characterisation of the film. We need to ask: what happens to the sound when it is no longer in a relation of domination or subordination to the visual image? Deleuze's answer is that it becomes an act of «fabulation» and that it develops and deploys its own powers, the powers of the false, which permits the visual image to do the same. The narrative becomes not just unreliable but an actively falsifying narrative, constantly correcting and contradicting itself, abounding in exceptions and anomalies and impossibilities. The images are no longer confirming instances that verify a univocal narration, but serve to «falsify» the commentary in the sense of apposing a series of incommensurable fragments.

1.3.Lines of flight

Bodies in flight do not leave the world behind. If the circumstances are right, they take the world with them – into the future. (Massumi, p105)

We now come to the final level, that of the process of subjectivation or the production of modes of existence: what Deleuze calls the tracing of a line of flight. *The Falls* is at first sight an inventory of the various «victims» of the Event. These people have been traversed by a supra-personal force, which has left their body fragile and deformed, erased their mother tongue and put in its place a new language, changed their habits and vision of the world, and left them with a series of obsessions over birds and flight, over explanations and paranoid plots, over the causes, nature, and point of origin of the Event.

For Deleuze we need reasons to believe in this world, and the key factor is not one of action but of receptivity: receptivity to the event and to its powers of becoming and transformation, to its intensity and to the effacement of identity it implicates. The biographies in this film describe people who were affected by the Event, whose receptivity to the Event led to bodily change and linguistic transformation, and to the elaboration of new modes of life.

The problem of creativity and of the good life according to Deleuze is one of tracing a line of flight. Deleuze gives us a typology of three lines:

1) the molar organised segmented or stratified line that classifies and binds us into a fixed identity, a class, an institution, a rank or a level. It often works by binary oppositions such as rich/poor, young/old, teacher/pupil.

2) a supple, floating, destratified, molecular line of anomalies and exceptions, of disturbances and disruptions of routines, of microperceptions and fluctuating forces and relations between them. Becoming-animal is possible on this line, but is always in danger of creating a new containing identity, of just adding one more fixed category to the repertoire of forced choices.

3) the line of flight, which makes a clean break with one's identity and habits, a rupture with one's prescribed mode of life in favour of the creation of new possibilities of existence.

The characters in the world of *The Falls* are for the most part caught in a transitional phase of becoming that has been re-formed into a fixated mode of existence. The intensity of the event has unmade their organized life, their body and mind, but only partially, and they have been reorganised into new distorted forms of life. The line of flight can thus be stopped and restratified, but even when it is espoused for itself it can end badly, turn into a pure line of destruction, of abolition. Instead of effacement of identity and abrogation of «truth» we have a line of sterility, death or suicide.

To trace the line of flight must they accept and reinforce an identification with a bird or is there another solution? Should they try to achieve physical flight or find an equivalent to flight or cultivate a sublimated form of flight such as singing like a bird? We are warned by Deleuze that becoming is not identification with a model, however avian or aerial, as this is just substituting one conformism for another. Becoming is creating a co-evolution of ourselves and what we become:

It is like Mozart's birds: In this music there is a bird-becoming, but caught in a music-becoming of the bird, the two forming a single becoming. (*Dialogues*, p.3)

So not so much a becoming-bird as a bird-becoming, inventing a new style of life and of creative activity. The figure of this becoming as a way of life in the works of Peter Greenaway is Tulse Luper, fictional alter ego of Peter Greenaway, and variously described as thief, confidence-man, trickster and ornithologist. Tulse Luper is cited on several occasions during the film, and is also credited as «production advisor». One of the characters, Erhaus Falluper, seems to be a pseudonym for Tulse Luper and indirectly for Greenaway: «If it had been necessary, Falluper could easily have invented the Violent Unknown Event». He was marked by the «compulsion to draw up maps, index disaster and break chaos into pieces that he might rearrange those pieces in a different way, perhaps alphabetically». Veritable incarnation of the power of the false, he is «accused» of «manufacturing fictions and deliberately confusing identities».

The Falls then is an inventory of the various ways that people have responded to an Event by resisting, espousing or prolonging the becomings opened up by it. The responses range from more or less literal imitation of a model and obsession with origins and causes (here the becoming has rejoined the first line by reconstituting a set of points of fixation, becoming-bird) to the invention of a new mode of life without fixed identity and the production of fictions (here the becoming has begun to trace the third line, it has broken not just with the past, but with the forms of the past, bird-becoming).

The irruption of an event for Deleuze is inseparable from a series of «falls», which are the virtual movements that compose it. How these falls as intensive realities are incarnated in extensive space depends on us. The virtual fall can correspond just as much to a rise in space as to a fall:

The intensive fall can thus coincide with a spatial descent, but also with a rise... It can coincide with a diminution, but equally with an augmentation. In short, everything that develops is a fall. (Francis Bacon, p.82)

Everything that develops, everything that becomes, is a fall. We can imprison those falls inside pre-given models and fixed identities or we can use their potential energy to empower us to believe in the possibilities of our becomings, to choose our way of life and create our style. Greenaway's film perfectly expresses and exemplifies this post-modern, post-identity ethic, affirming in both form and content the power of *The Falls*.

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