

Minor Rationalism

Curated by Eric Schmid

Staged by Baader-Meinhof

July 9, 2021 - August 21, 2021

The difference between minorities and majorities isn't their size. A minority may be bigger than a majority. What defines the majority is a model you have to conform to: the average European adult male city-dweller, for example ... A minority, on the other hand, has no model, it's a becoming, a process. One might say the majority is nobody. Everybody's caught, one way or another, in a minority becoming that would lead them into unknown paths if they opted to follow it through. When a 'minority creates models for itself, it's because it wants to become a majority, and probably has to, to survive or prosper (to have a state, be recognized, establish its rights, for example). But its power comes from what it's managed to create, which to some extent goes into the model, but doesn't depend on it. A people is always a creative minority, and remains one even when it acquires a majority. It can be both at once because the two things aren't lived out on the same plane. It's the greatest artists (rather than populist artists) who invoke a people, and find they "lack a people": Mallarme, Rimbaud, Klee, Berg. The Straubs in cinema. Artists can only invoke a people, their need for one goes to the very heart of what they're doing, it's not their job to create one, and they can't. Art is resistance: it resists death, slavery, infamy, shame. But a people can't worry about art. How is a people created, through what terrible suffering? When a people's created, it's through its own resources, but in away that links up with something in art (Garrel says there's a mass of terrible suffering in the Louvre, too) or links up art to what it lacked. Utopia isn't the right concept: it's more a question of a "fabulation" in which a people and art both share. We ought to take up Bergson's notion of fabulation and give it a political meaning." – Gilles Deleuze

This exhibition is linked together by a loose thread, which connects artists in what would have been called "subcultural" or "counter-cultural" in a previous time. Today, I will be calling this loose thread "minor." The Deleuzian minor is best explained by his expression "becoming-minor". The minority lacks a people. Kafka had no home: he was a German-speaking Czech Jew. The artists in this exhibition are what Liam Gillick has called in Erasmus is Late as "not at the center of power, but central to power". Secondary characters, which are willfully obscure or willfully supplemental to a traditional career or whatever narratives one crafts with traditional artist biography. The "minor" is related to the Deleuzian "middle ground".

In Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's first plateau of A Thousand Plateaus, "Introduction: Rhizome", they introduce a non-identitarian "image of thought," that does not fall victim to the binaries of the arborescent (tree-like) structures, which begin from roots or origins outward in a dualistic hierarchical fashion to a predetermined end. The conception of knowledge of the qualitative multiplicity or rhizome is "ceaselessly established connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles... rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle,,

between things, interbeing, intermezzo.”

“The line of flight” or becoming is the rhizomatic connection between one multiplicity and another, and the connection itself between multiplicities define the multiplicities that connect to one another, for a change in the number of connections (or determinations or dimensions) of these multiplicities fundamentally retransforms these multiplicities’ determinations or dimensions. Becoming or drawing, (affirming or creating) lines of flight is contrasted to the arborescent structure’s connective strategy of being or tracing, (reacting to) pre-existing lines or structures. So while being is predicated on identity, invoking no temporality, becoming is movement through pure difference invoking temporality. Furthermore, “the middle ground” is introduced by Deleuze first in *The Logic of Sense* as “the event” to describe the productive interactions of pure forces. The dynamism of the event actualizes in many, many ways, rendered distinguishable in bodies or states, but the event itself is a confluence of pure intensities; the event has no beginning or end point, only a “middle ground” for which “becoming” moves through. For example, becoming-clandestine, becoming-minor, or becoming-animal move through “middle grounds” of rhizomatic space.

This manifesto is a call-to-arms for a new artistic movement, which I have dubbed “minor rationalism”. What unifies the artists in this exhibition, is that they operate on a decentralized network as opposed to a centralized hierarchy. They exhibit or don’t exhibit. They have run legendary project spaces that were at the vanguard of Context / neo-Conceptual art. They were the brother of a famous painter, but they were committed to being a Genius Dilettante. They exhibited at a Bed-Stuy project space for grit-minded artists. They ran a tape label anonymously, fortifying a certain rhythmic non-techno aesthetic. They were the background figure of an irreverent art collective and post-ironic trend forecasting group. They made work for years that was the outré to the Downtown scene. They recorded for years anonymously under a pseudonym and performed cold wave nights. They had an internet practice that transformed into being jack-of-all-trades. They made irreverent work that was guest curated at a former-project-space-turned-LES-gallery. They were obsessed with Odilon Redon and made a body of work that attempted new topologies of Redon’s space. They went to Städelschule and found a home for being a total weirdo/freak. They ran a project space that exhibited every artist that was “off the beaten path” at that time. They were in an outsider rock band and became an avant-garde composer. They ran an LES gallery that was a home for conceptually-visionary artists. They made sound poetry/sound compositions that were simultaneously elegiac and lowest fidelity. They were America’s Greatest Noise besides Emil Beaulieu himself. They curated a non-exhibition in Milan. They were in an industrial band. They are a “record head” and made paintings about post-digital abstraction. They ran a seminal art blog that was formative for many artists 10 years ago. They started a gallery as a student. They frequently exhibited besides/alongside other austere conceptual artists. They theorized about noise and capitalism. They institutionally critiqued a gallery. They knocked off Kippenberger. They released on a legendary Detroit label. They ran an apartment gallery focusing on the intersection between the art world and music world.

“Minor rationalism” entails creating what Deleuze has called “circuit breakers”. Deleuze writes, “We’ve got to hijack speech. Creating has always been something different from communicating. The key thing may be to create vacuoles of non-communication, circuit breakers, so we can elude control.” “Minor rationalism” is “becoming-minor”. It is creating a minor-literature, a minor-music, a minor-art. It is purposely “non-communicative,” a form of speech that hasn’t been co-opted, that hasn’t become meme-ified. “It’s true that, even before control societies are fully in place, forms of delinquency or resistance (two different things) are also appearing. Computer piracy and viruses, for example, will replace strikes and what the nineteenth century called “sabotage” (“clogging” the machinery). You ask whether control or communication societies will lead to forms of resistance that might reopen the way for communism understood as the “transversal organization of free individuals.” Maybe, I don’t know. But it would be nothing to do with minorities speaking out. Maybe speech and communication have been corrupted. They’re thoroughly permeated by money—and not by accident but by their very nature.”

A minor art is at the vanguard, epistemologically un-controlled by “societies of control”.

In a text of mine called Prolegomenon to a Treatise on Mathematical Structuralism, I discuss some of the precursors to what I now call “minor rationalism”. I write:

“If one were to follow Diedrich Diederichsen in Kai Kein Respekt, an artist could hypothesize a homofuturism/homosociality that is an anti-systematic transcendental without the ‘given’ or ‘thesis’ based on a domestic phenomenology of friendship or ‘twin speak’. A non-communication based on intimacy (‘soulmates’?). Deleuze had said about control societies... Deleuze resounds Klossowski’s Living Currency, which is a psychic individuation (pulsion) or Bataille’s Story of the Eye, which lays out a currency of the sexual. For Klossowski, in his Sade, My Neighbor, there is no Godhead (‘headless’) in Republican society. Therefore these questions about the sacred or divine beauty are meaningless. But what is the real material correlate before money and commoditization of the thing, before currency? The best solution to this question of the ineffable Real is to be found in the aesthetic work of Gerald Donald, Dieter Roth, Theo Parrish, Robert Filliou, Hermann Nitsch, Dominik Steiger, Dorothy Iannone, Andre Thomkins, Isa Genzken and Jutta Koether. For example, listen to Parrish’s ‘Soul Control’ or ‘Command Your Soul’ or Donald’s Dopplereffekt or ARPANET.”

But what of this “rationalism” in “minor rationalism”? In the current zeitgeist, there is a new force online, specifically that of neo-rationalism, which is a revitalisation of the pragmatist philosophies of Sellars, Peirce, Brandom in the works of Brassier, Negarestani and Wolfendale. Negarestani writes in his essay Labor of the Inhuman:

“The description of the content of human is impossible without elaborating it in the context of use and practices, while elaboration itself is impossible without following minimally prescriptive laws of commitment-making, inference, and judgment. Describing human without turning to an account of foundation-

al descriptions or an a priori access to descriptive resources is already a minimally but functionally hegemonic prescriptive project that adheres to oughts of specification and elaboration of the meaning of being human through features and requirements of its use. 'Fraught with oughts' (Wilfrid Sellars), humanism cannot be regarded as a claim about human that can only be professed once and subsequently turned into a foundation or axiom and considered concluded. Inhumanism is a nomenclature for the infeasibility of this one-time profession. It is a figure for the impossibility of ever putting the matter to rest once and for all."

"Minor rationalism" is the multi-modal conceptual navigation of the epistemological landscape, unmooring the classical relationship between "subject" and "object" (and the tethering between the two) and deracinating/uprooting mind from an "a priori" axiomatic foundationalism (of say atomistic first-order predicate logic) that is set-ahead of itself and defined totally as the ideological program of a movement beforehand (say of the avant-garde or neo-avantgarde).

This exhibition is interested in the development of subcultures, whether that music-world or art-world for example. We are particularly interested in the notion of "homosociality" and "homofuturism" advocated by Diedrich Diederichsen in his essay *Intimacy and Gesamtkunstwerk*. The personal "du" as it communicates and exemplifies the aesthetics of subcultural familiarity, as well as an esoteric vocabulary—whether that Kraftwerk's music or Berliner Neue Deutsche Welle or even Fassbinder's *Beware of a Holy Whore* commune. This thesis could be aligned with the Gnostic-Futurism of Francois Laruelle, which defines an anti-systematic vision of the visionary, which is non-identical to Being/Thought (or any authorizations of theologico-political remainders of pre-modernity) and therefore, non-thematic. Rather than ontologize language with an "a priori faktum" (e.g. as opposed to Heidegger's *Dasein* as a mode of accessing Being), Gnostic-Futurism presents a heretical, non-Christian eschatology in the immediacy of the here-and-now through the science of the "human qua human". For example, the highly stylized experiences within Samuel Delany's/Drexciya's mythopoeia de-sublimate the aura of traditional artistic narratives, while simultaneously exemplifying an underground vision.

What interests me most is how these aesthetic experiences come from subculture. The show is "about" subcultural intimacy and the creation of niche communities for (A) psycho-social integration of the individual, but also (B) to create esoteric artistic visions through the shared vocabulary of an underground community and (C) to de-sublimate the aura of the artwork in the sense of "mechanical reproduction". Through de-sublimating rarified notions of aura, bands like Die Todliche Doris presented the possibility for alternative visions through the anti-systematic poetry of very concrete, deconstructed actions.

Minor rationalism has two meanings. First, a political meaning of "minor", and second, an epistemological meaning of some basic intelligibility to the world predicated on some transcendental computationalist intelligence. A mind which is unmoored from temporality and properly universal in scope because of its transhistorical meaning of a sociality which re-attempts the failures of the Enlightenment project

(i.e. Reason). Reason is anchored not in the capitalist engine of exchange-value (i.e. communication), but rather the most essential contours of a structure through a universal construction which finds a geometric invariant above varying ideologies, philosophies, programs, perspectives. Alex Boland, in his afterword to my treatise, writes:

“This method is at the heart of Eric’s treatise, where the genetic epistemology of Piaget, the individuation of Simondon, the theories of difference of Deleuze, and the ‘non-philosophy’ of Laruelle dovetail with the synthetic approaches of emerging areas of mathematics such as category and type theory to sketch out a kind of idealism by which one can play out new tactics for addressing the Real through a rigorous construction of the universal where the active craft of epistemology replaces the endless regress of fundamentally constipated questions that refuse to further develop and differentiate their affordances. Or, to put it another way, rather than naively positing a static a-priori backdrop as either a set of building blocks or a stage upon which everything else fundamentally acts, one effectively converges on an ideal through the construction of universalities rather than merely uncovering a passive a-priori.”

The method of discovering this universality follows after the mathematician and philosopher Rene Thom, when he writes:

“Modern science has made the mistake of foregoing all ontology by reducing the criteria of truth to pragmatic success. True, pragmatic success is a source of pregnancy and so of signification. But this is an immediate, purely local meaning. Pragmatism, in a way, is hardly more than the conceptualized form of a certain return to animal nature. Positivism battened on the fear of ontological involvement. But as soon as we recognize the existence of others and accept a dialogue with them, we are in fact ontologically involved. Why, then, should we not accept the entities suggested to us by language? Even though we would have to keep a check on abusive hypostasis, this seems the only way to bring a certain intelligibility to our environment. Only some realist metaphysics can give back meaning to this world of ours.”

Only some “realist metaphysics” can save us from this philosophical quagmire. Thom goes on to argue for, in Semiophysics, “the necessity of restoring by appropriate minimal metaphysics some kind of intelligibility to our world.” Minor rationalism is without “a people” and completely esoteric, subcultural, countercultural, but it is also a philosophical agenda, one that is free from the pitfalls of modernist utopia and ideology. Alex Boland writes in his afterword to my Prolegomenon:

“In category theory, all such universal constructions therefore exist ‘up to isomorphism’, where any two things that are isomorphic are things that are different in name only; by finding such isomorphisms, one further deflates excess ontological gestures in favor of the only operationally relevant thing: the pattern; a set, at least in category theory, no longer represents a collection of anything in the usual sense, but simply plays a role in a system defined by other sets... This leap from contingency to unequivocal syntactic entailment is one in which the universal is not a given, either as a detached set of rules or an inscrutable

oneness by which any idea of free will is rendered moot, but a fundamentally uncertain journey from bricolage to empiricism to reason by which tinkering within one's local neighborhood is contextualized by its burgeoning interactions with an unavoidable outside and ultimately subsumed into a universalism of our own making, thus avoiding the idle mysticism that Reza Negarestani mercilessly (and correctly) pans in his aforementioned essay on the 'localization of the concept'."

"Minor rationalism" is an esoteric universalism, a construction of the global, piecewise, from the local.

- Eric Schmid

NOTES

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