

SCALES

It is a matter of *seeing* again, if not a return to 0, for emergence to reoccur. These powers of return, however fluid, are structured at every level, are matters of power and negotiation. We are supposed to know, from Internet porn to a U.S. presidential candidate singing “bomb, bomb, bomb bomb Iran “ to the tune of the Beach Boys’ “Barbara Ann,” that size matters. But that’s not enough. It is not enough to label developments “micro,” “middle-range,” or “macro” in character, for example, when it is rather the mobile *shifting* of levels that needs to be accounted for. “It is *traveling* from one frame to the next that we want to achieve, “ Bruno Latour has written. “We all know this pretty well, since we have witnessed many cases where relative size has been instantaneously reversed – by strikes, revolutions, coups, crises, innovations, discoveries.”¹ A pan, a zoom, a dolly shot are all elaborately constructed; we are supposed to know that, and know how this happens, even while the world itself, as Deleuze remarked, increasingly appears to us like a bad film. It is not a matter so much (any longer) of examining in static images vanishing points or “blind spots,” such as those examined by filmmaker Harun Farocki in his *Images of the World and the Inscription of War* (1988), where CIA analysts pick out in aerial photos the concentration camp hutch next to the Allied bombing target, a little late, some thirty odd years after the event. It is capacity for mobility and connection. “Size and zoom,” Latour advises, “should not be confused with *connectedness*.”² We are entrusted to follow the connection. This is less and less a matter of choice, of whether we want to, but of what Nietzsche evoked as *amor fati*. It is more simply a dilemma of survival and necessity. And of beginning again.

¹ Bruno Latour. *Reassembling the Social*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005. p. 186.

² *Ibid.* p. 187.

*Before the hold of this block of sensation, this nucleus of partial subjectivation, everything was dull, beyond it, I am no longer as I was before, I am swept away by a becoming other, carried beyond my familiar existential Territories.*³

It was during the Clinton administration that Secretary of Labor Robert Reich said it was no matter whether Toyota or GM owned the factory, but whether jobs were provided; this extremely misleading statement belied the fact that the often over-hyped process of ‘globalization’ is so precisely about scale.⁴ As if local ownership, whether corporate or public and workerist, and transnational corporate ownership, were at all comparable. The looming crisis of ecocide, accelerating so far ahead of projections – whether it is a matter of disappearing polar bears, Arctic ice sheets, or extinct tongues of human languages – also reinforces this. In this instance many of the principles of bioregionalism are becoming more and more salient. Whether it is a “micro” question of fuel efficiency in cars, recycling, feasibility of wind farms, the dispensing of pollution credits, or a “macro” one of North-South distribution of goods, “What really matters, in fact, is the overall physical scale of the economy with respect to nature, not simply the efficient allocation of resources.”⁵ This has also long been the case in discussions around political representation and democracy, from James Madison’s contributions to *The Federalist Papers* (1787-8) and Thomas Jefferson’s advocacy of a radically-decentralized “ward-republic” in the early 1800’s, to the suspicions against *clientalismo* in Venezuela and *horizontalidad* in Argentina today.⁶ Likewise, famous alternatives to ‘globalization’ like Gandhi’s *swadeshi*, or village-economy, were creatures of scale, centralization being

³ Félix Guattari. *Chaosmosis*. Trans. Paul Bains and Julian Pefanis. Bloomington/Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995. p. 93.

⁴ See for instance the contributions of Erik Swyngedouw, Méric S. Gertler, and Murray Low in Kevin R. Cox. Ed. *Spaces of Globalization: Reasserting the Power of the Local*. New York/London: Guilford Press, 1997.

⁵ Wolfgang Sachs, “The need for the home perspective,” *The Post-Development Reader*. Ed. Majid Rahnema with Victoria Nawtree. London: Zed Press, 1997. p. 298.

⁶ In Marina Sitrin’s oral history collection of participants in self-organization in Argentina, one sees how adamantly “post-political” and non-ideological in the usual sense, these developments in direct representation are. See Marina Sitrin. Ed. *Horizontalism*. Oakland/Edinburgh: AK Press, 2006.

“inconsistent” to Gandhi for any non-violent society. This was true even if Gandhi could say, “the village of my dream is still in my mind.”⁷

So it is a question of vision, of dreaming – of metamorphoses visible and invisible. Following the lead and of nothing most of the time so stable as a form, or of what Guattari terms the crystallization of a “good form.” It is because a complete “revaluation” (in Nietzsche’s coinage) or overcoming and recasting of values is called for, is in fact inexorable, that “an ecology of the virtual world is thus just as pressing as ecologies of the visible world.”⁸ So new scientific and aesthetic paradigms merge and collaborate in conserving endangered species, like certain human perceptions and feelings, capacity for discriminations and experience, and creating new ones, new valorizations in every sense and sphere. This remains very much in the sense of Brion Gysin’s quip “who runs may read.”

If it is a matter of grasping “machinic” metaphors and operators, and of dispensing with notions of “system” and “structure” as both Latour and Guattari recommend, it means coming to grips with incorporeal and virtual universes, what Duchamp heralded when he described art as a “road which leads towards regions that are no longer governed by time and space.” Francisco Varela’s autopoietic (which specify their own limits and bounded organization) and allopoietic (which produce something other than themselves) machines, are defined as “the set of inter-relations of its components independent of the components themselves,”⁹ and therefore lie outside of the usual energetic, spatial and temporal coordinates. Extending the range of autopoietic machines to include social and technological and a whole host of other collective entities is to emphasize their complementarity and “already existing” relation to other machines beyond their human constructors, producing a sort of “‘non-human’ enunciation, a proto-subjective diagram.”¹⁰ It is increasingly difficult to locate the “human,” somewhere between the structure of feedback loops and homeostasis, haunted, Guattari writes, by the

⁷ Mahatma Gandhi, “The Quest for Simplicity: My Idea of ‘Swaraj’,” in *The Post-Development Reader*. p 306.

⁸ Guattari. *Chaosmosis*. p. 91.

⁹ Francisco J. Varela. *Principles of Biological Autonomy*. New York: North Holland Press, 1979.

¹⁰ Guattari. *Chaosmosis*. p. 37.

desire for infinity although functioning through a principle of eternal return, and the autopoietic machine, an emergence inseparable from catastrophe, breakdown and abolition.

*In the future much more than the simple defense of nature will be required; we will have to launch an initiative if we are to repair the Amazonian ‘lung,’ for example, or bring vegetation back to the Sahara. The creation of new living species – animal and vegetable – looms inevitably on the horizon, and the adoption of an ecosophical ethics adapted to this terrifying and fascinating situation is equally as urgent as the invention of a politics focused on the destiny of humanity.*¹¹

The works in “Scales” traverse these territories, making one intensely aware of how one auto-grammatizes or models their existence and navigation. Beyond the beautiful paradoxes of fractals and the construction of scaling, is what Guattari called the “‘futurist’ and ‘constructivist’ opening up of the fields of virtuality.”¹² We remain fixated by archaisms, Guattari advises, “only as long as there is no investment directing it toward the future.”¹³ In “Scales” we are thrown into our imaginary ecology, while at the same time forced to recognize the social and institutional “remote-control” that is inextricably a part of it. In Gregory Chatonsky’s *Hisland day* (2008) series, the well-nigh universal form of state identification and control, the fingerprint, is de-realized into a virtual field of becoming and imagination. With the products of a digital fingerprint, in the interactive installation *I just don’t know* (2008) Chatonsky provides a condensation, a surrealist *marvelous*, an object-lesson, out of incorporeal if nonetheless very real universes. Chatonsky’s prolific experimentation often evokes our self-construction, or fictional modes of realization, as if to confirm there can be no pure self-reference, but that we must pass through our various narratives and mythicizations, enacting ourselves as our own metaphors for the world’s complexity and organization.¹⁴ Who runs may read. Similarly, Michael Zansky’s photographs of dioramas provoke a Rorschach splash. Like

¹¹ Félix Guattari. *The three ecologies*. Trans. Ian Pindar and Paul Sutton. London/New Brunswick: The Athlone Press, 2000. pp. 66-7.

¹² *Ibid.* p. 38.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Mary Catherine Bateson. *Our Own Metaphor*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991.

the effects of the great comedians, from Buster Keaton to the Marx Brothers or Lenny Bruce, we can't always place our hilarity, that borders on hysteria, while finely placed details question all first responders. Whether in these dioramas, or in his over 800-foot in length *History as Ruins* (2006), Zansky freezes, converts, and up-ends the cinematic image. If our universe is a ceaseless negotiation of chaos and complexity, it can also feature wild swings between ever accelerating and proliferating information, and a yawning, also apparently unprecedented emptiness. Zansky's *mise-en-scenes* of Voltaire statues and dime-store dolls populate that void. Michael Rees' recombinant creations are due to various CAD programs, and in his use of these and especially of rapid prototyping technology, he has been, as artist Matthew Barney has attested, "nearly on his own." Bastard offspring of a complex human and non-human morphology, Rees' sculptures exist only in their own dimension, while impacted with an all-too-human perversity. Perhaps in common with Zansky's miniature stage sets, in modes of animation, we see in Rees' sculptures the relation to moving image and a certain cinema, although one no one is likely to actually make.

If indeed there is an Ariadne's thread that enables us to go from the local to the global, to connect the human to the nonhuman, it is through our skein of networks.¹⁵ In "Scales" these networks are often a reactualization of virtual worlds, traversed in their very process or movement of invention. It is irremediably social. Any possible "scale" of measurement or amplification of effect is also a link establishing the existence and correspondence of multiple levels of "states of affairs" -- in all their flux. In beginning again.

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Scales: Gregory Chatonsky, Michael Rees, and Michael Zansky, October 31 – December 18, 2008, Corn Exchange Gallery, Edinburgh, Scotland

¹⁵ Bruno Latour. *We Have Never Been Modern*. Trans. Catherine Porter. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993. p. 121.