

## **A review of *A Becoming on the line: Painting and the genesis of form***

Jacquie Phipps

Whitecliffe College of Arts and Design

This piece of written thinking both fascinates and frustrates me. The subject is interesting and the premise is ambitious, satisfyingly complex and plausible. I am captured and convinced by the author's passion and belief and the seductive glimpse into an artist's creative process: "In front of my eyes painting opens a vertical gaze into the genesis of form" (95). As with most art, I do not understand it all, especially the opening sections, where the language and theoretical claims are sometimes mystifying, redolent with implication and rich in vocabulary. References are allusive. My expectations of prose's reasoning are thwarted. The artist goes on, however, to explain taking an idea and a work and pushing it further with other media, technology and processes and how one thing becomes another and how experimentation allows new works to emerge as an artistic methodology; a methodology of becoming born of Deleuze and physics with indirect nods to Kant. This is a form becoming. It might be an art work, it might be a piece of creative writing. It is not a conventional expository essay. It is thinking emerging in words.

The key premise of the author's main and most recent reference is one of seeking open-endedness to the future rather than the closed, mechanistic visions wrought of nineteenth century science. It proposes "a neo-Kantian theory of perception" (De Landa, 1998) positing a relativist open-endedness that challenges essentialist and rationalist views – and finally a Deleuzian "neo-realist approach" – that allows for the existence of the world, of form, of reality autonomous from humanity (or human perception) and free from the predestination implied by causality. The De Landa conference paper is a complex interweaving of philosophy and physics and assumes some knowledge of both resides in its gentle readers. I know this because, rather baffled by the submission, I sought out some of the background material directly. The artist has grappled with these ideas and found connections with his or her own creative practice – the ideas resonate with the artist's painting experience (or experience of painting). Explaining that resonance is hugely challenging in terms of testing writing skills, aligning with scholarship or creative text (I'm not sure which). Given that the writing extrapolates personal experience and understandings into (possibly) generalized theories, some guidance from the author on his or her intentions would have been useful. I have to hedge my bets with multiple clauses and parentheses as I struggle with this "open-endedness".

At times the creative or possibly erroneous grammar is a distraction. Metaphors are mixed creatively. Can dynamism be rooted? Is it the aesthetic or aesthetics that the artist understands? The distinctions are important in a discussion of this complexity. If these are artful ploys, I have missed their subtleties and meaning. The language has the feeling of a translation, an unnerving slippage occurs between one language, one form and another and between painting (both the act and the artifact) and the written word.

The voice, authorship or authority is elusive – in the opening sections particularly. Who is speaking, from where, on what authority and for whom, shifts and remains unclear. The piece makes broad and bold claims for all art and all artists.

The subject matter is potentially valuable and interesting. The exploration of the possible relationships between physics and Deleuzian becoming and painting within the shared territory of creativity is clearly relevant to this artist and this is not uncharted territory. Sutton and Martin-Jones believe becoming offers insight into acts and experiences of creativity. They describe it as a complex and elusive idea of life, growth and identity that is always in motion or “restless” (Sutton & Martin-Jones, 2008, 45). Painters in the past have observed qualities of open-endedness in art making. Cubist Juan Gris noted “you’re lost the instant you know what the result will be” (in Stiles & Selz, 1996, 11) and Peter Selz observed that post-World War II artists using gestural abstraction “worked in a realm of ambiguity and communicated through their gestures and aesthetic of incompleteness” (Stiles & Selz, 1996, 12). From an orthodox scholarly position, the third person prose – the generalizing authoritative voice – therefore is presumptuous here given the meager reference to literature or other artists, art and examples and the use of the second person “we” in the sections on causality and open-endedness is unwarranted in its assumption of shared understandings and positions. But such scholarship may not be the intention here.

The language and ideas waver between the poetically evocative and accessible and the problematic and impenetrable – like abstract and expressive painting. Provocatively and prophetically the writing speaks of painting as the interplay between chaos and coherence. It has “an aim above and beyond the fulfillment of material immediacy”; it is open and unpredictable. Sadly, the paintings are never referred to directly although they are numbered as if they will be. The writing definitely becomes stronger, however, as the artist writes about his or her own working processes and experiences in the first person.

The writing of artists is valuable. Kristine Stiles tells us “artists’ theories and statements are a part of the material evidence and conceptual apparatus of their work” (Stiles & Selz, 1996, 8). Ever since art was “academicized” painters have attempted to articulate their practice and experience and writers have attempted to explain and extrapolate and translate and reach out to painting. It’s a fraught business. There are reasons why some forms and ideas are painted and others are written, why a person chooses one medium or another. Cross-disciplinary explorations and experiments of this kind – the very stuff of this journal – defy definition and problematize criticism. For me this paper comes to life in the final section *The Works: Painting as Multitude*. It offers subjective insight and reveals many of the ideas that lie mired in the previous sections.

This piece of writing echoes the elusiveness of reading painting and the elusiveness of Deleuzian philosophy and complex physics. As Bogue observes in his book *Deleuze: On Music, Painting and the Arts*, Deleuze (and his partner in theory Guattari) are known in their writing for suggestion – hints that are easily and often misconstrued and are themselves accused of vagueness and allusion, of making associative links, which they justify and support as appropriate when the ideas are non-verbal (Bogue, 2003, 93–95).

It is appropriate, then, here to view this piece like a painting; to allow the eye and mind to slip and delve, and understanding to flicker; to be arrested by a phrase, absorbed or repelled by a metaphor, drawn along a line of thought, to have direction for a moment before being left abandoned, incomplete, a little vague and floating ready to alight upon the next word or mark. To be open-ended

## References

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