**Simulacra and the structure of the work of art**

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**Abstract**

The concept of simulacra, with its propensity to diverge into in-betweeness, is a complex notion at the best of times. A dualistic structure of communication made up of signifier and signified that always produces a floating signifier, links simulacra with experience as an active agent of change. A story of divergence in an artwork can simultaneously affect the communication of it, even given no apparent narrative. This article then identifies three ways the simulacrum effects the communication of a work of art in artist-curator practice through the Deleuzian concept of simulacra, as a living recurrence of difference.

**Keywords**

Gilles Deleuze

simulacra

experience

floating signifier

Platonic overthrow

rule of convergence

artist-curator practice

Aesthetics suffers from an agonizing dualism. On the one hand it designates a theory of feeling as the form of possible experience; on the other, it marks out a theory of art as the reflection of real experience. In order for these two meanings to join, the conditions of experience in general must become the conditions of real experience. [...] This, then, is the way the conditions of real experience and the structure of the work of art reunite: the divergence of series, the decentering [sic] of circles, the constitution of a chaos that comprises them, the internal reverberation and amplified movement, the aggressiveness of the simulacra. (Deleuze 1983:51-52)

**Introduction**

The word ‘structure’ in the Deleuze quote above is enigmatic. I understand this not in terms of the actual construction of a work of art, but in terms of its function within its relative context or network. Therefore, ‘structure’ could be understood as the totality of an artwork’s form, the context of its making and the connection it has to networks beyond the artist’s studio. ‘Structure’ can also be understood as a series of two: signifying and signified, which produces in their gap a ‘floating signifier’ that ignites imagination. ‘Structure’ will be used in both these terms throughout this essay, which are not mutually exclusive by any means.

While the subject of Deleuzian simulacra is highly complex, this essay will discuss the significance of the link between experience and simulacrum. I will present very real examples of what happens through the reunification of experience and the work of art described by Deleuze. As will be discussed below, to understand how Deleuze viewed simulacra, is to understand his role in attempting to overturn Platonism, so I will give a brief overview of that project in the first section of this article.

Those conversant with the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze will be very familiar with his viewpoint, but for those who understand simulacra in terms of science-fiction cyborgs and hyper-reality, the Deleuzian view will be in opposition to everything they know about simulacra. And for those readers not quite sure what ‘simulacra’ means; because we live in an age of neo-liberalism and increasing nationalism, ‘fake news,’ social media communications, and the mediation of nearly everything through images it is timely to discuss a view of simulacra which is an affirmation of difference and diversity.

In the second half of this article I will discuss three ways the simulacrum reunites the conditions of experience with the structure of the artwork, outlined in the quote above, by discussing my own practice-based research outcomes. However, my research suggests that the simulacrum does not always reunite experience with structure. Sometimes it deflects and frustrates it, as it did in *Phantom*, a case study exhibition I curated for the Ruskin Gallery in 2017, where audience experience was problematized by the exhibition’s curatorial methodology, thereby suggesting there may be other possibilities beyond reunification for the conditions of experience and the structure of the work of art through the affirmation of simulacra.

**What is simulacra?**

In order to introduce the Deleuzian view, I must first give a brief synopsis of the views held by the players in the Platonic project: Plato, Friedrich Nietzsche and Gilles Deleuze. For Plato in ancient Greece, the notion of the simulacrum came down to selection; to a process of sorting original from copy, copy from false pretender, truth from deception (Deleuze 1983:45-46). In Plato’s world, the *Idea* was the true original, a copy was the manifestation of an idea and therefore an icon, which held resemblance. The simulacrum, under Plato’s logic, was a copy of a copy; a degraded semblance of the idea, a deception and distortion of truth. God originated the idea of the grape, the farmer manifested this idea by growing grapes, but the artist distorted the idea by painting grapes so realistically even the birds were fooled, pecking in vain at nothing (Plato 360BCE).[[1]](#endnote-1) Near the turn of the twentieth century German philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche, defined his task in philosophy, and the general task of philosophy of the future was to overturn Platonism and to assert the ‘power of the false’ as a positive force that interiorized difference (Deleuze 1983:52-3). This power casts its spell through phantasm, presenting its face as a mask, only to reveal an endless succession of masks beneath, bringing with it a gleeful collapse into anarchy (Deleuze 1983:53). This rendered similarity and resemblance as an operation of the simulacrum through the shared condition of being simulated (Deleuze 1983:53). For Deleuze in the mid to late twentieth century, the status of resemblance is at stake, as either a previous form, what Deleuze calls ‘identity,’ (a copy) or a congruence produced through an essential disparity (the simulacrum). An essential disparity of this sort can be seen in Magritte’s ‘Ceci n’est pas une pipe.’ Two pipes, not only the one depicted in the painting, but also the one conjured in our heads, contest the statement’s claim to truth without producing the real pipe. There is congruity amongst fundamentally different claims of where the real pipe is (Foucault 1983). Once this effect of a superficial resemblance occurs, difference anchors a skewed system of similarity (Deleuze 1983:52). In other words, this imbalance creates the conditions for difference to recur and the *Idea* becomes the generator of difference, not the measure of a Platonic truth.

The problem no longer concerns the distinction Essence/Appearance or Model/Copy. This whole distinction operates in the world of representation [...] The simulacrum is not a degraded copy, rather it contains a positive power which negates *both original and copy, both model and reproduction* (Deleuze 1983:52-53, italics in original).

What does this mean to ‘negate both original and copy’? Contrary to what might appear to be a function of non-differentiation through such a negation, to deny both original and copy is to realise the force of difference through a function of synthesis, resulting in a collapse of hierarchy and the production of diversity. This notion originates in Nietzsche’s concept of the Eternal Return where the return is not a realisation of the identical, but a synthesis which repeats difference thereby producing diversity (Deleuze, 1962:43). However, this is not a repetition of what was, in exactitude, but a recurrence of the like or a type, as another difference of the same. It’s through this kind of synthesized recurrence where the negation of original and copy happens through the blurring of distinctions and a reduction of priority of one over the other. As in Magritte’s synthesised pipes – which has priority, the one in our heads but not present, or the one represented in paint?

One possible example where the complexity of synthesis results in diversity is in what David Joselit (2009; 2016) calls ‘transitive painting.’ This discourse takes under its banner artists such as Martin Klippenberger, Jutta Koether, Stephen Prina, Cheyney Thompson, Wade Guyton and R. H. Quaytman. Joselit gives the *Oxford English Dictionary* definition of transitive as ‘expressing an action which passes over to an object’ (Joselit, 2009:128). Transitive painting has the capacity to relate two kinds of ‘passages’ (the term favoured by Joselit), at once; one that is internal to the painting, with a second that is external to it.

Related to the deductive painting of Frank Stella’s black stripe paintings, which generated content based on the size and shape of the canvas support instead of inventing it from imagination or gestural acts of intuition, transitive painting contends that ‘the structure of a painting is profoundly affected by the external conditions of display and reception that frame it’ (Joselit 2016:813). These artists work with deductive procedures, finding content in form, while breaching the physical limitations of form to engage in conversation with its context or the network of its production and dissemination. This creates more than an iteration of form in context, it is a synthesised structure of ‘the “inner echo” of the physical limit of the canvas [...] paired with an “outer echo” in which qualities and allusions from outside enter the interior of the work’ (Joselit 2016:813). For example, Cheyney Thompson’s ‘Robert Macaire Chronochromes’ (2009) take their content from digital scan enlargements of the linen support. At the same time, the hue and tonality of the images are self-reflexive indexes to the time of day they were produced (Joselit, 2016:813-15). Taken together, there is a remarkable variation of tone and pattern through repetition, which is an otherwise incremental and invisible difference.

It is important to realize through this example that for Nietzsche and Deleuze, the simulacrum is not a kind of death through a debased or hyper-replication, but an affirmation of the living recurrence of difference; therefore, not ‘resemblance’ to a supra-sensuous, transcendant ‘original’ – but the ‘force’ of difference and its ‘affects.’ Nor is the simulacrum equivalent to the act of representation, as in a copy. For Deleuze, representation is dead because it fails to encompass the decentered and divergent multiplicity of difference; it repeats only that which it imitates, a single and receding perspective leading to a false depth (Deleuze 1968:67). ‘[Representation] mediates everything, but mobilises and moves nothing’ (Deleuze 1986:67).

In *Différence et Répétition/Difference and Repetition* (Gilles Deleuze, 1968), Deleuze encapsulates his theory of simulacra, stating:

Everything has become simulacrum, for by simulacrum we should not understand a simple imitation but rather the act by which the very idea of a model or privileged position is challenged and overturned. The simulacrum is the instance which includes a difference within itself, such as (at least) two divergent series on which it plays, all resemblance abolished so that one can no longer point to the existence of an original and a copy. It is in this direction that we must look for the conditions, not of possible experience, but of real experience (selection, repetition, etc.). It is here that we find the lived reality of a sub-representative domain. If it is true that representation has identity as its element and similarity as its unit of measure, then pure presence such as it appears in the simulacrum has the “disparate” as its unit of measure – in other words, always a difference of difference as its immediate element.[[2]](#endnote-2) (Deleuze 1968:82-83)

When Deleuze speaks of the ‘difference of difference,’ he’s not speaking of a repetitive duplication. He’s describing divergence. He’s evoking the emanation of an idea. This is an emanation not only because of a source, but because of a dispersion. An idea is a mutable, intangible thing that alters according to the multiplicity of its reception (Smith 2005b:136-7). It is disruptive and divergent. It is a temporal displacement, an empty signifier, and often an ‘operational order of the real,’ (Durham 1998:54) which initiates a code of all possible meanings in a single recognizable reading. An example of this operational order is Andy Warhol’s images of Marilyn Monroe. Her image in ‘Gold Marilyn,’ for example, becomes the signal to run the ‘Marilynity Code,’ (Durham 1998:57) which is an understanding of all things ‘Marilyn Monroe,’ though it is no longer important whether the understanding is actually related to the real Marilyn Monroe. Through this signal, it is *the idea* of Marilyn Monroe which has become as recognizable as a corporate logo (Durham 1998:57). An idea becomes the manifestation of difference; ‘difference is internal to the Idea’ (Deleuze 1968:26-7).

The notion that the *Idea* can be synonymous with the simulacrum is the essence of the Deleuzian project to overturn Platonism. However, the overturning is not a simple inversion. Plato used the Idea, while drawing on myth to formulate a system of measure to sort out the true claimant from the false (Smith 2006:94-95). This, according to Smith, is not a sorting into genus and species.[[3]](#endnote-3) In the Platonic method, ‘[i]t is a question of [literally] “making the difference,” but this difference does not occur between species, but lies entirely within the depths of the immediate, where the selection is made *without mediation*’ (Smith 2006:94, emphasis in original). In other words, for Deleuze, the difference must be found from what is intrinsic rather than what is relative.

To truly invert Platonism means that the difference between copies and simulacrum must be seen, not merely as a difference of degree but as a *difference in nature.* The inversion of Platonism, in other words, implies an *affirmation* of simulacra as such. The simulacrum must then be given its own concept and be defined in affirmative terms. (Smith 2006:100, emphasis in original)

Embodying something of this notion, R.H. Quaytman’s approach to painting in ‘chapters,’ where each exhibition of her work is considered a chapter in a book, and all the work in the chapter is related to the location of its exhibition, illustrates the affirmative terms of an active simulacrum whose changing nature presents rich diversity. For Quaytman, the viewing of painting by the audience has changed away from a focus on depth and surface, i.e. replication and depiction of space, to a lateral reading that happens through changing locations and adjacencies (Bessa 2014). This poses a problem of losing the narrative traditionally attached to a program of depicting depth in painting, but through a process of change, Quaytman has discovered there is a narrative which forms in the lateral reading, which is a positive way of bringing abstraction back into the discourse (Bessa 2014).

To overturn Plato meant to complete the Platonic thesis (Smith 2006:105). Deleuze took this implication of an affirmation literally, therefore transforming the concept of the simulacrum into one of a positive transformer, rather than the negative deceiver of Platonism. Smith states that for Deleuze, the concept of the simulacrum differs in three ways: (1) ‘the copy is an image endowed with resemblance, the simulacrum is an image *without* resemblance’ (Deleuze, 1969 quoted in Smith 2006:100, emphasis in original), this means resemblance, which is now superficial and exterior in the simulacrum, has become merely semblance (Magritte’s pipe). (2) Describing the manner Plato himself outlined of the way the simulacrum produces this effect of an externalised resemblance, Deleuze wrote, ‘the simulacrum implies huge dimensions, depths and distances that the observer cannot master. It is precisely because he cannot master them than [sic] he experiences an impression of resemblance’ (Deleuze cited in Smith 2006:102). Therefore, ‘[t]he simulacrum...is constructed on an internal difference, a fundamental internal disparity, which is not derived from any prior identity: it has “the disparate” [*le dispars*] as a unit of measurement and communication’ (Smith 2006:102, emphasis in original). In other words, the external resemblance is caused by an elusive internal disparity, not by any association of similarity in a prior form, which is how ‘identity’ is understood in this context. R. H Quaytman’s chapters would be an example. (3) ‘The simulacrum can only appear under the mode of a *problem*, as a *question*, as that which forces one to think, what Plato calls a “provocative” (“Is it true or false, good or evil?”) [...] The “problematic” nature of simulacra points to the fact that there is something that contests *both* the notion of copy *and* that of the model, and undermines the very distinction between the two’ (Smith 2006:104, emphasis in original). ‘Robert Macaire Chronochromes’ by Cheyney Thompson with the revelation of the temporal change that happens through the series is an example. This work poses the question ‘is this a copy of the linen substrate or is it a self-reflexive chronical of time?’ What is the model and what is being copied? Therefore, everything is simulacra in a Deleuzian inverted Platonism (Smith 2006:103).

In *After Art*, David Joselit (2013) describes contemporary artists working with the correlations between images and their location ‘to demonstrate the behaviour of images within populations,’ claiming this effort is to shift the emphasis of figure/ground from the internal composition of a work to an external structure of oscillations between work and environment (Joselit 2013:32). Joselit names four methods in which artists have achieved this since the 1990s: (1) recontextualising found imagery, also known as appropriation, (2) visualising the temporal passage of time through accumulation or live action (3) causing a change of state through reimaging, reworking, restaging, or reiterating content (4) revealing a hidden function or structure through research, often associated with institutional critique (Joselit 2013: 34-7). As Joselit points out, ‘[e]ach of these strategies is devoted to manipulating the situational or performative nature of content rather than inventing new content.’ This strategy allows for a discussion of the fluctuating states of experience, causality and Being, all of which are associated with the Deleuzian simulacrum, rather than being locked in a dialectic of objects, depth and gesture.

For Deleuze, the simulacrum acts in the reciprocal relationship of an idea to its receiver; both ends of that relational transference being mutable (Deleuze 1968:26-27). The simulacrum is a masked difference working under the guise of similarity, but it is always an unresolved resemblance that provokes questions of instability. It is without hierarchy, decentring any attempt to make a distinction between a model and a copy. Being without hierarchy means it is also without temporality, or rather, it is poly-temporal. The simulacrum compresses time by making past and future available in the present. In other words, it is a barely describable set of shifting instabilities that invoke an uncanny sense of something being out of place, often appearing in a state of in-betweenness. This description suggests *the conditions* in which difference happens; the conditions which give rise to *an idea*.

**How the simulacrum reunites experience with the structure of the work of art**

The quote at the beginning of this essay suggests the simulacrum is key in joining up real experience and the structure of the work of art. Delving further into this passage, Deleuze describes the simultaneous telling of several stories as a characteristic of this structure. He states:

This is certainly the essential character of the modern work of art. It is in no way a question of different points of view on a single story understood as the same, for these points remain subject to a rule of convergence. It is, on the contrary, a matter of different and divergent narratives, as though to each point of view there corresponded an absolutely distinct landscape. (Deleuze 1983:51)

To understand more fully what Deleuze means by ‘structure,’ it is important to consider his discussion of the subject in *Logique du Sens/The Logic of Sense* (Gilles Deleuze, 1969, pp.51-4). He describes a series of two: signifying and signified, which exist in disequilibrium, one always presenting an over-abundance and the other a lack, respectively. Through this persistent relationship, what is found in the excess, and passes between the two, is a ‘*floating signifier*, which is the servitude of all finite thought, but also the promise of all art, all poetry, all mythic and aesthetic invention’ (Claude Lévi-Strauss cited in Deleuze 1969:52, emphasis in original). The floating signifier is also the simulacrum because it is a part of both sets simultaneously, circulating unceasingly between them. It is always displaced in relation to itself; in one set representing the excess of an empty square, while at the same time, an extra pawn without location in the other (Deleuze 1969:52-53). ‘It has the function of articulating the two series to one another, of reflecting them in one another, of making them communicate, coexist, and be ramified’ (Deleuze 1969:53).

Even though Deleuze speaks of the ‘modern’ work of art, we need not confine the application of this characteristic to Modernist works. Contemporary works still engage this procedure of simultaneous story-telling. Even the absence of a story, as evidenced in Sherry Levine’s *Knot Paintings* from the late 80s for example, still presents a narrative, albeit a problematic one. In his discussion in *The Return of the Real*, of simulation in New-Geo art, also known as ‘simulationism,’ Hal Foster (1996:100-104) asks us to consider the disruption of the historical logic of abstraction posed in Levine’s Knot Paintings. But he warns, in a conventionalist reading, which sees not abstract paintings, but a symbol of painting:

[...] it might evince a posthistorical perspective, according to which art appears stripped of its historical contexts and discursive connections – as if it were a synchronous array of so many styles, devices, or signifiers to collect, pastiche, or otherwise manipulate, again with no one deemed more necessary, pertinent, or advanced than the next. (Foster 1996:104)

Regardless of Foster’s specific analysis on the result of these paintings, what is evident in Levine’s *Knot Paintings* is a provocative narrative, in its lack of narrative. All of the hallmarks of the Deleuzian simulacrum are in this quote by Foster, and Levine’s *Knot Paintings* seem to embody the essence of the statement above by Deleuze on the structure of a work of art. This is only one example of many, but it serves three purposes: (1) to illustrate even with an apparent lack of ‘story’ there remain numerous narratives at work within the artwork, (2) that these narratives provide the signifying and signified set of two, while propagating the floating signifier through the artwork, and (3) to confirm the point Deleuze makes on the rule of convergence via Foster’s ‘synchronous array.’

The rule of convergence is a ‘prolongation that links the individual to such and such a world’ (Smith 2005b:145). This means that ‘different points of view of a single story cannot be understood as the same’ because each point of view brings its own context to the single story. However, ‘different and divergent narratives’ coming together as a ‘synchronous array’ function to tell a synthesized story of divergence presented within the syntax of experience. This experience may not be explicit but is discernible in every decision an artist makes in constructing a work. Not only is the story of divergence a story of the simulacrum and experience as presented in the artwork, it is also the active simulacrum effecting the experience of the work of art through the signifying and signified set of two that produce a floating signifier, as the structure of this story-telling.

**The simulacrum unchained**

How does the simulacrum become activated within the conditions of the studio and exhibitionary space of artist-curator practice? Does it function to always reunite the work of art with experience, as Deleuze suggests? In my practice-based research, I have identified three locations where this dualism of simulacra and experience is communicated through the work, and simultaneously how it effects the conveyance and encounter of the work. First, through the structure of the artwork as a totality of its form, context and connectivity outside the studio; it is precisely this matrix of multiple narratives and this duality of simulacra and experience which brings meaning to the work. Second, through an articulation of space where artwork is brought into relationship with the architecture of the gallery interior, and third, within the communication of the exhibition premise to the audience. These last two points happen within the curatorial activity of artist-curator practice. There may be a fourth ‘location,’ though this would remain a virtual concept of location because there is no specific place where the work in the studio transfers to a concept for an exhibition. This is a liminal space and deserves more space than I have here to discuss.

My practice involves fine art studio production in a variety of media along with a concurrent curatorial practice. Looking at my artistic activity as a process, it moves through a trajectory, which is not linear in actuality, but may be easier to understand by a linear description. It starts with an autobiographical trace, which acts as a latent generator to the work; this trace usually remains invisible and known only to me. It will appear in the artwork through the use of a material, a gesture, a repetitive iteration, or an appropriation from my personal experience which is used as a symbolic element. This autobiographical trace is one of many narratives at work within the artwork and is usually the first point of departure in the divergence of narrative meaning. A strategy of using old work to make new work enables the simulacrum to actively effect the communication of the work through divergence, repetition, indexicality, fragmentation and reconstruction. Figure 1

From the studio output, the autobiographical trace, which has become indexical of both my presence and an indicator of my experience (Krauss 1977a and 1977b), translates into signifiers relative to time and space through curation. The curatorial activity involves an articulation of these material registers by making a deliberate interaction between artwork and the architectural features of an exhibition space, and often with other artworks. Even when I curate other artists’ work, often the artwork I choose is work I wish I had created myself, so other artists afford me a kind of visual subsidy when they allow me to curate their art. This leads to readings of my aesthetic and intellectual interests, which come back to the autobiographical, without ever having produced work that would be considered conventional autobiography in, for example, self-portraiture, images of intimate domestic scenes or of family members.

Through this process, the curatorial or exhibitionary practice becomes a socially expanded mirror of the work I do in the studio; work which often requires a spatio-temporal realisation to initiate its full expressive potential. This is where experience, divergence, repetition, indexicality, fragmentation, and reconstruction come into significance. And from which point the simulacrum exerts further influence on communications through the curatorial methodology of the exhibition. Figure 2

Deleuze goes on to say:

There is of course a unity of the divergent series, as divergent, but it is a continually decentered chaos, itself at one with the Great Work. This unformed chaos, [...] is not just any chaos, it is the power of affirmation, the power of affirming all heterogeneous series, it “complicates” within itself all series. [...] Within these basic series a sort of *internal reverberation* is produced, a resonance that induces a *forced movement* that overflows the series themselves. The characteristics are all those of the simulacrum when it breaks its chains and rises to the surface. (Deleuze 1983:51, emphasis in original)

Finally, I discovered through a case study exhibition I curated in 2017 called, *Phantom*, that there is a direct correlation between an open-plan relational curatorial strategy, where artworks from different artists were in direct association with each other, and the communication of the simulacral conditions of the translation process. By which I mean, the conditions where translation took place activated aspects of the simulacrum. This concurrence resulted in a disrupted, divergent message shifting from the individual artworks to the conglomerate whole of the exhibition. I was able to measure how the open-plan functioned within my curatorial design and to gauge the simultaneous readings of the artworks inherent in the open-plan.

This simultaneous reading of the artworks was a significant condition within the exhibition methodology which allowed for the appearance of the simulacrum. Usually the simulacrum is used as a noun, this kind of active description, to say ‘the simulacrum appeared,’ may deviate from the norm. However, when Deleuze says ‘difference is internal to the Idea,’ he suggests ‘it unfolds as pure movement, creative of a dynamic space and time which correspond to the Idea’ (Deleuze 1968:26-27). The ‘difference’ he is discussing is the simulacrum, and it was this kind of active force that displaced the message of the artworks in *Phantom*.

I did not plan for such a displacement to happen. Nonetheless, it caused a frustrated reading which both confounded and intrigued viewers’ experience. A repeated mention in viewer survey comments of wanting to see the exhibition in a white cube setting or wanting more space to be given to the individual works, suggested the vexation visitors experienced at not being able to pin down meaning in the works. This was a call for a *discontinuity*, breaking the continuum of an open plan exhibition structure. Smith (2005b:139) says, ‘Continuity is defined as the act of a difference insofar as the difference tends to disappear. Continuity, in short, is a *disappearing* or *vanishing difference*’ (emphasis in original).

*Phantom* produced this kind of vanishing difference, and as a result effected a resonant ‘internal reverberation’ causing an overflowing ‘forced movement’ of meaning Deleuze mentions in the quote above. Figure 3

**Conclusion**

In this article, I have given a brief introduction to the Deleuzian view of simulacra in relation to contemporary visual practices. I have shown how Nietzsche and Deleuze contested the Platonic notion of the simulacrum, radically changing the function of *the Idea* from an original truth, to a site of divergence, generating diversity through inherent difference. I have discussed ways that experience and the structure of the work of art come together, and also break apart from each other, and how this can allow the active appearance of the simulacrum. I have also shown three possible ways the simulacrum can affect the communication of a work of art through a structure of dualism: signifying and signified producing a floating signifier in their gap, which is simultaneously the story of simulacra, given to intrinsic difference and the rule of convergence, where no point of view can be seen as the same when considering a single story.

When working with this divergent force of the simulacrum, it is important to relinquish moral judgements of right and wrong, good and bad, positive and negative. ‘Breaking’ is no more negative, than ‘reuniting’ is positive. These are simply terms of functionality, rather than hierarchical terms on a moral scale. It is through these different functions that a change in meaning occurs by allowing the differential motor of the simulacrum to engage with experience, thereby energizing the communications made through it. So then, how is the simulacrum a timely affirmation of difference and diversity as I suggested in the introduction?

The accusation of ‘fake news’ is a charge against multiplicity, against any message not in line with the sanctioned rhetoric. A news story tarred as ‘fake’ is one deemed insignificant in the hierarchy of messages preferred to be publicised and is therefore to be ignored. Together with the intolerance of nationalism, anti-humanist views of neo-liberalism, the bewildering virtual spaces of social media, and the deluge of images, the question becomes how to navigate these forces? Where is the mark of authenticity? When is a message reductive and when is it expansive? Michel Foucault, contemporary of Gilles Deleuze, presents one possibility through his discussion of Magritte:

Each element of "this is not a pipe" could hold an apparently negative discourse – because it denies, along with resemblance, the assertion of reality [that] resemblance conveys – but one that is basically affirmative: the affirmation of the simulacrum, [an] affirmation of the element within the network of the similar. (Foucault 1983:47)

This is how knowledge of the simulacrum can be beneficial against our current socio-political context. Each of these things, fake news, nationalism, neoliberalism, social media etc. affirms an ‘element within the network of the similar’ (Foucault 1983:47). Through such a network that maintains a system of mediation through images, the simulacrum affirms the fakery of false claims, the isolation from a pluralistic society, the revisions to a political philosophy, the emotional need to connect to others. A claim of 'fake news' doesn't expose an untrue reportage, it reveals a claim against truth, a denial of fact, a rebuff against implication. Calling the phenomenon of networked communication ‘social’ does not make a new society, it exposes the traits of our humanity, both the positive and the negative. So, to understand the claim alone misses the value of the revelation through the simulacrum. The ‘fake’ is not the news, but the rhetoric of the fake, the ‘national pride’ is not the pride of a nation, but the fear of what is different, the ‘neo’ is not new, but a distortion of what came before it, the ‘social’ is not the function of a people, but a manifestation of how we function. Without understanding the role of an affirmative simulacrum, we may miss the deeper message.

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**Image Captions**

Figure 1: Jane Boyer, *Ground Zero*, 2017. Reprogrographic prints. 76.3 x 56.8mm each. Cambridge UK. ©Jane Boyer.

Figure 2: (Left) Marion Piper, *A Conference*, 2015. Pencil on paper. 29.5 x 21cm each. High Wycombe UK. ©Marion Piper. (Right) Kate Palmer, *Fall Line*, 2008. Acrylic and mixed media on canvas. 114 x 353cm. London. ©Kate Palmer. In *Phantom*, 2017. Ruskin Gallery, Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge. 26 January – 18 February. ©Jane Boyer.

Figure 3: *Phantom*, 2017. Ruskin Gallery, Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge. 26 January – 18 February. ©Jane Boyer

**Biography**

Jane Boyer is a doctoral candidate at Cambridge School of Art, Anglia Ruskin University. Her research is engaged in explaining the ways repetition, autobiographical trace, and fragmentation can be used to facilitate the communication of artwork and the exhibition of it through artist-curator practice. This interest stems from a desire to understand how the simulacrum, indexicality and synecdoche make the relationship between artist, audience, and institution mean. She is an artist and a curator currently based in Cambridge.

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1. In Book X of *The Republic*, Plato (360BCE) gives an example of God being the creator of a single essential notion of ‘bed,’ while the craftsman or producer copies this idea to create a specific bed, which the artist then creates an appearance of a bed in his painting. This is conflated with the apocryphal story of Zeuxis, ‘who painted grapes so realistically that birds attempted to pluck them’ (Hall 1974:78). [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Deleuze synthesized the influences of French novelist, Pierre Klossowski, Freud, Nietzsche and the poet Lucretius to form his concept of the simulacrum. Liebniz was also significant, however, this relationship deserves more space than I have. I briefly touch on Liebniz’s contribution to Deleuze’s conception of the simulacrum. These four thinkers together represent a discourse of internal agitations as manifested impulses – Klossowski (Smith 2005a), a complex process of disguises and repressions formed by counteracting series of influences – Freud (Deleuze 1968:18-9), a never-ending cycle of repetition whose inherent imbalance presents not a repetition of the same, but the divergence of the like – Nietzsche (Deleuze 1968:50-1), and the thought of the infinite as an affirmation leading to a concept of simulacra as an element of experience – Lucretius (Deleuze 1969:286). [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Aristotle preferred a sorting system of genus and species, and this was his objection to Plato’s method. Aristotle saw no ‘reason’ or mediating term in which to make divisions within the Platonic truth and myth system, where truth and myth made up a foundational narrative in which to compare against the *Idea* (Smith 2006:94). [↑](#endnote-ref-3)