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Crystalline, Organic, Energetic: Analogy, Modulation, and Art History in Deleuze's Lectures on Painting (1981)

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Abstract

One of the main features of Gilles Deleuze's lectures of 1981 concerns the importance accorded to the notion of modulation as a philosophical definition of painting. The novelty of such a framework lies in the correspondences established between analogical operations and artistic spaces of Western art. This article establishes the main moments of this analysis and thus point out its main technical, historical, and aesthetic implications. Ultimately, the notion of modulation is considered as the conceptual operator of a "heterogenetic" history of art within the framework of Deleuze's philosophy.

Résumé

L'une des principales caractéristiques du cours sur la peinture de Gilles Deleuze en 1981 concerne l'importance accordée à la notion de modulation en tant que définition philosophique de la peinture. La nouveauté d'un tel cadre réside dans les correspondances établies entre des opérations analogiques et des espaces artistiques de l'art occidental. Cet article vise à déterminer les principaux moments de cette analyse, signalant ainsi ses principales implications techniques, historiques et esthétiques. Finalement, l'article propose de considérer la notion de modulation comme l'opérateur conceptuel d'une histoire « hétérogénétique » de l'art dans le cadre de la pensée de Deleuze.

Keywords: Deleuze; painting; analogy; modulation; art history; heterogenesis; Deleuze's lectures

1. Introduction

One of the main features of Gilles Deleuze's lectures given at the University of Paris VIII in the spring of 1981¹ concerns the importance accorded to the notion of

¹ I use the recent edition of Deleuze's lectures published in French under the title *Sur la peinture. Cours mars-juin 1981* (Deleuze, 2023). This is the first official publication in French of Deleuze's courses. The text is edited by David Lapoujade, who previously edited the two volumes of articles *L'île déserte* (Deleuze, 2002) and *Deux régimes de fous* (Deleuze, 2003b), as well as the collection of letters, articles, and interviews *Lettres*

“modulation” as a philosophical definition of painting. If such a concept will be further explored both in Chapter 13 of Deleuze’s *The Logic of Sensation* (see Deleuze, 2003a, pp. 111–121) and in the famous “Post-Scriptum on the Societies of Control” (Deleuze, 1995, pp. 177–182), moreover, there are various applications of this notion throughout his so-called “third period,”² applications that range from cinema to history, politics, and philosophy.³ In the 1981 lectures, however, modulation appears tied to Deleuze’s account of painting as the “highest analogical language known to this day” (Deleuze, 2023, p. 181). In this sense, considering painting through a sequence of analogical operations, Deleuze will deploy different moments in the history of Western art as a means to understand and map the main periods of development of modern European painting in the 16th, 17th, and 19th centuries. The novelty of such a framework lies in the correspondences established between analogical operations and artistic spaces of Western art. Through a focus on artists such as Caravaggio, Rubens, Cézanne, Gauguin, and Van Gogh, and establishing a dialogue with art historians such as Alois Riegl, Wilhelm Worringer, and Heinrich Wölfflin, art scholars such as Xavier de Langlais or Josef Albers, as well as authors such as Gilbert Simondon, G.-L. L. Buffon, and Gregory Bateson, Deleuze will deploy an original conception of modulation in regards to a philosophical understanding of painting. This article seeks to determine the main moments of development of Deleuze’s concept of modulation deployed in the 1981 lectures and argue that this concept offers a “heterogenetic” vision on the history of art. By establishing the sequence of analogical operations in which Deleuze inscribes the notion of modulation, this article outlines the main historical, technical, and aesthetic implications that such a framework holds in regards to the relation between Deleuze’s thought, art history, and the history of modern European painting.

In doing so, this article seeks to contribute to the: (1) further exploration of painting that Deleuze’s philosophy proposes, (2) understanding of Deleuze’s concept of modulation, and (3) inquiry into the relations between the categories of event, history, and art history in Deleuze’s philosophy. Although several studies (Crowther, 2012; Smith, 2012) have indicated the conceptual trajectories of Deleuze’s discussion of painting in his 1981 book *The Logic of Sensation*, highlighting both the affective and intensive dimension of Bacon’s work (Didi-Huberman, 2021; Johnson, 2016; Sauvagnargues, 2013), as well as Deleuze’s art history sources (Ionescu, 2011; Meister & Roskamm, 2014), it is not clear how the concepts of analogy and modulation play a role not only in the definition of

et autres textes (Deleuze, 2015). I offer in each case my own translation of the French version of Deleuze’s lectures. I have taken into account the English translation available online on the website *The Deleuze Seminars* (<https://deleuze.cl.a.purdue.edu/>), especially concerning the last lecture (translated by Samantha Bankston). I have also taken into account the critical apparatus of notes contained in the French edition and in the English translation.

² On the three periods of Deleuzian philosophy, see Igor Krtolica (2015); Daniel W. Smith (2012).

³ In *Cinema I*, Deleuze characterizes Jean Epstein’s method as “a mobile section, that is, a temporal perspective or a modulation” (Deleuze, 1986, p. 24); modulation will also be evoked as a “universal variation or universal interaction,” i.e., a world before man, or what Cézanne called the “iridescent chaos” or the “virginity of the world” (Deleuze, 1986, p. 81; see also Deleuze, 2023, pp. 26–27). In *Cinema II*, modulation is called “the operation of the Real,” insofar as it constitutes and reconstitutes the identity of image and object (Deleuze, 1989, pp. 27–28). In *Foucault*, modulation is briefly evoked in relation to the subjectivation of the free man (Deleuze, 1988, p. 103), and, defined as a continuous and variable mold, modulation is also present in *The Fold* (Deleuze, 1993, pp. 19, 132–133).

painting, but also in its historical development. Moreover, the general problem of the notion of modulation has been primarily read as the critique of a hylomorphic understanding of art (Sauvagnargues, 2016). As will be shown, the general problem in which modulation appears will be not so much the insufficiency of the matter-form matrix, but rather the immanence of the different ways of producing and reproducing resemblance. In this sense, the notion of modulation will provide a technical, aesthetic, and historical dimension for understanding the act of painting as such. The development of these three elements would not only enrich the political understanding of modulation that authors such as Yuk Hui and Louis Morelle point out (Hui, 2015; Hui & Morelle, 2017), but would also provide relevant points on discussions about the creative nature of the event in Deleuze's vision of history (Bell & Colebrook, 2009; Lundy, 2012), as well as on the connections between Deleuze and the discipline of art history (Chirolla & Mejia Mosquera, 2017; van Tuinen, 2017; Vellodi, 2019).

To this end, in Section 2, I explore Deleuze's determination of painting as an analogical language. Defined as an immanent production and reproduction of resemblance, this article shows how the 1981 analysis on analogy not only differs from Deleuze's treatment of this notion in *Difference and Repetition*, but also how this concept will come to be defined through a succession of technical processes such as mold, module, and modulation. Accordingly, in Section 3, I consider the aesthetic and historical correspondences that Deleuze establishes between the sequence of analogical operations and the different spaces of the history of Western art encompassed by his analysis of painting. More specifically, I will show how Egyptian art deploys a "crystalline" space, how Greek art and 16th century Renaissance painting belong to an "organic" dimension, and finally how Byzantine art and 17th century Luminist painting, as well as 19th century Colourism, belong to an "energetic" domain. In Section 4, the article discusses the connections between Deleuze's 1981 lectures and *The Logic of Sensation* concerning analogy and modulation, as well as the relationship between the categories of event, history, and art history in Deleuze's conception of art. In this latter discussion, I'll propose the notion of "heterogenesis" — a notion used by Deleuze (2006), Félix Guattari (1995) and Deleuze & Guattari (1994) — as a means to understand the main historical implications of Deleuze's analysis of painting in his lectures.

2. Painting as an Analogical Language: Mold, Module, Modulation

The main goal of Deleuze's 1981 lectures is to arrive at a dialogue between philosophy and painting, a dialogue in which painting could have something to bring to philosophy, "and for the answer not to be at all univocal, for the same answer not to be the same for music as for painting" (Deleuze, 2023, p. 17). If concepts are precisely what philosophy can expect from such a dialogue, these concepts appear "in direct relation to painting, and to painting alone" (Deleuze, 2023, p. 18). Thus, Deleuze focuses in the lectures on two concepts: catastrophe and modulation.⁴ Whereas the

⁴ While both the 1981 lectures and *The Logic of Sensation* share the development of thematic concerns such as the notion of the diagram, the tension between painting and photography, or the analysis of the invisible forces that painting renders visible, among other themes, their scopes diverge. The lectures consider

analysis of catastrophe explores both the psycho-physiological and pre-pictorial conditions of painting known as the “diagram” (Deleuze, 2023, pp. 97–113), as well as the painter’s constant fight against clichés (Deleuze, 2023, pp. 44–49, 52–59), the analysis of modulation will consider painting in turn as an analogical language, “perhaps the highest analogical language known to this day” (Deleuze, 2023, p. 181). How should we understand such a statement?

First, an analogical language appears opposed to a “digital” language, and this concerning the way resemblance can be produced or reproduced. For Deleuze, although a digital language can produce resemblance (in the form of an image or a sound), the process of production of such a resemblance does not occur on the same plane as the resemblance produced. This happens, for example, in the case of a portrait produced by a computer or in the case of an integrated synthesizer. Defined through a process of code articulation, where a finite number of discrete meaningful units enter into a given number of binary relations, the production of resemblance in a digital language occurs on a distinct, integrated plane. On the contrary, Deleuze sees in analogy the possibility of *producing* resemblance not only through non-resembling means, but also through an operation that remains on the same plane as its product (as is the case with analogical synthesizers). This possibility does not exclude the fact that analogy also characterizes operations of *reproduction* of resemblance, such as analogical photography. Conceived primarily as a language, analogy appears in the 1981 lectures as the matrix of an immanent production *and* reproduction of resemblance, where resemblance can be either the principle of production or the product of a play of non-resembling instances. If painting essentially designates a form of *production* of resemblance,⁵ in what sense is modulation part of this process? Moreover, how can the very coherence of the concept of analogy be maintained if it seems to regroup both a productive and a produced resemblance? And, more importantly, what is the relation between this conception and the discussion of analogy developed in *Difference and Repetition*?

In *Difference and Repetition*, analogy refers primarily to “analogy of judgement” and, together with identity in the concept, opposition in the predicate, and resemblance in perception, it forms the “quadruple yoke of representation” (Deleuze, 1994, pp. 28–30, 33–35, 262–272). It is under these four elements that difference is “tamed” by representation: outside the constraints of these four “iron collars,” difference appears as unbounded, uncoordinated, and inorganic, “too large or too small, not only to be thought but to exist” (Deleuze, 1994, p. 262). In this context,

a dialogue with painting *in general*, whereas *The Logic of Sensation* develops a structural analysis of Bacon’s work, addressing themes that we don’t find in the lectures, such as the concept of “pictorial athleticism” or the “hysterical presence of painting,” as well as the relationship between painting and rhythm, among others. Notably, certain themes, including analogy, modulation, and Colourism, appear in both places but will receive a special attention in the lectures. The continuities and differences between the lectures and the book on Bacon will be examined further in Section 4.

⁵ By defining painting in this way, Deleuze seeks to move away from any figurative, narrative, or representational definition: painting doesn’t tell a story, it doesn’t depict a scene, it doesn’t illustrate a landscape. As Deleuze says: “The question of painting [. . .] is not to paint visible things, it is clearly to paint invisible things. The painter only reproduces the visible precisely in order to capture the invisible” (Deleuze, 2023, p. 74). Hence, the link between painting and analogy: painting produces form through a capture of invisible forces, i.e., it produces resemblance through a play of non-resembling instances.

analogy appears as the site of a twofold illusion: one where difference is defined through a hierarchical ontological distribution and one where repetition is defined as a bare, material, and mechanical “generality.” In such a case, analogy determines the upper and lower limits under which difference can appear in representation, the former corresponding to the ultimate determinable concepts (the genera of being or categories), while the latter representing the smallest determined concepts (species). In this way, analogy concerns a distribution by which being is not only said in determinable forms, but also partitioned among well-determined beings. Analogy grounds, therefore, the complementarity of an “analogical” conception of being⁶ and the determination of its derived concepts. To this extent, it implies a mechanical model in which repetition is assimilated to a cycle that goes from matter to matter, difference being reduced to the repetition of a same concept, precisely because analogy appears here as repetition without concept (see Deleuze, 1994, pp. 271, 19–26). Accordingly, if for the analogy of judgement only “similars differ,” Deleuze will ultimately show the contrary, that is, only differences “resemble one another” (Deleuze, 1994, p. 301). In this sense, beyond the illusions of representation, resemblances do not pre-exist, but are *produced* by a univocal distribution of difference and *reproduced* in the eternal return of the dissimilar.

There is thus a difference between *Difference and Repetition* and the 1981 lectures. Defined as an immanent production and reproduction of resemblance, the conception of analogy developed in 1981 does not seek to criticize analogy as one of the pillars of representation, but it apprehends it within a more positive and productive framework. Indeed, conceived in general as a language — and no longer as a “yoke” of difference in judgement — Deleuze sees now a fundamental continuity between the transport of relations of similarity *and* the production of resemblance through non-resembling means. Since the context and the problem have changed, it is no longer a question of criticizing analogy as the conceptual site of a transcendental illusion, but it is now a matter of *using* analogy as the matrix of one of those concepts that appear “in direct relation to painting, and to painting alone” (Deleuze, 2023, p. 18). Deleuze criticizes representation, arguing that philosophy should turn into a thought of difference, rather than identity, resemblance, and analogy, but in a new turn of events, when the problem is the *dialogue* of thought with artistic creation, one of the essential categories of representation will prove to be a much more fecund concept than previously conceived. In this way, the very *intension* of the concept of analogy does not appear in the lectures merely restricted to the domain of representation. Deleuze conceives of painting in 1981 as a form of production of resemblance, thus revealing that, *from the perspective of a dialogue of philosophy with painting*, the concept of analogy has a broader domain. This difference becomes evident if one considers the fact that Deleuze distinguishes three different types of analogy within the same spectrum of the production and reproduction of resemblance. If *analogia communis* designates the transport of relations of similarity where resemblance is a principle of production, however, *via* a discussion of Bateson’s article on the language of dolphins (Bateson,

⁶ On the Deleuzian reading of the analogy and univocity of being, see Smith (2012); Nathan Widder (2001). On the historical development of these two ontological approaches during the 13th and 14th centuries, see Olivier Boulnois (1999, Chapter 5).

2000), Deleuze will refer to analogy not only as a domain of *relations of dependency* between transmitter and addressee,⁷ but also as a form of expression proper to the very content of this language. This latter form will be called “aesthetic analogy” and will be defined by the *production* of resemblance through non-resembling means, painting being here the prime example.

In addition, regarding the coherence of this new vision of analogy, Deleuze will introduce a sequence of technical operations in order to further distinguish each one of its moments. In this way, if *analogia communis* is characterized by an operation of molding (*moulage*), the analogy of relations is in turn defined by an operation of internal mold (*moulage intérieur*), while aesthetic analogy is determined by an operation of modulation. If painting is essentially defined by this latter operation, what is the relevance of the other two? And furthermore, how should we understand the unity of this sequence of operations? Let’s take a closer look at these issues.

First, *analogia communis* is characterized by an operation of molding, in the sense of cast-molding, insofar as it designates a “resemblance, a similarity imposed from without” (Deleuze, 2023, p. 192). In this sense, the mold is an operation of surface or “skin-depth” information: “I place a mold on the clay and wait until the clay has reached an equilibrium position on the mold. Then I unmold it. Similarity has been transmitted” (Deleuze, 2023, p. 192). This operation denotes a sort of “pellicular” analogy, an operation where resemblance is transmitted only externally. If Deleuze characterizes this domain as a “physical” analogy, it is because he finds the model of such a process in the crystalline stage: “Crystals, as they say, have a pellicular individuation. [...] They grow by the edges. A crystal is fundamentally a surface formation that grows from the edges” (Deleuze, 2023, p. 192). Furthermore, how does this “physical” analogy differ from the analogy of relations of dependency? Introducing at this point Buffon’s concept of internal mold,⁸ Deleuze says: “the living, unlike physical reality, reproduces itself through an operation that does not simply mold its surface, but molds it from within” (Deleuze, 2023, p. 194). In this way, an internal mold can be defined as “[...] a measure which subsumes, which contains a diversity of relationships between its parts, a measure which includes, as such, several times or a variation of internal relationships” (Deleuze, 2023, p. 194). Thus, if *analogia communis* concerns a “physical” operation where similarity is transmitted from without, the analogy of relations of dependency concerns an “organic” operation where a dynamic measure is not only transmitted from without, but also reproduced from within.

⁷ Deleuze refers more specifically to Bateson (2000, pp. 364–378). Following Bateson, the domain of analogical language is characterized as a domain of highly heterogeneous instances, such as bristling hairs, a rictus of the mouth, barking, gasps, shrieks, or in general non-linguistic, even non-audible instances. The example Deleuze gives — and which Bateson also mentions — is the meow of a cat: “The cat’s morning meow when you get up [...] doesn’t say milk! milk! It says: dependency, dependency, I depend on you! With all the variations, there are meows of anger, where the [statement] is: I depend on you and I’m sick of it!” (Deleuze, 2023, p. 175). The key feature of such a language concerns the deduction of the states of affairs that the relations of dependency imply at the moment of being expressed.

⁸ In the third chapter of his *Œuvres complètes II*, Buffon says: “The body of an animal is a kind of inner mold, in which the matter used for its growth is molded and assimilated to the whole in such a way that, without any change in the order and proportion of the parts, there is nevertheless an increase in each part taken separately, and it is this increase in volume that we call ‘development’” (Buffon, 2009, my translation).

Finally, the operation of modulation is defined by its difference and continuity with respect to cast-molding and internal molding. This is why Deleuze establishes a conceptual chain where mold and modulation appear as the two extremes cases of a same continuum. Simondon (2020) is quoted *verbatim* on this point⁹:

The mold and the modulator are extreme cases, but the essential operation of taking shape [*prise de forme*] is accomplished in the same way; it consists in the establishment of an energetic regime, durable or not. To mold is to modulate in a definitive way; to modulate is to mold in a continuous and perpetually variable manner. (Simondon, quoted by Deleuze, 2023, p. 196)

If a mold transmits similarity and a module transmits a dynamic measure, modulation transmits in turn a continuous and variable process of taking shape. In this sense, even if there is a difference between *analogia communis* and aesthetic analogy concerning how resemblance is productive or produced, there is only a difference of degree when it comes to the technical operations that characterize each domain. Deleuze sees not a rupture, but a fundamental continuity between these different analogical operations, the mold being essentially the *foundation* of the process of modulation. In this way, *analogia communis* is only the lowest degree of an operation of modulation, and conversely aesthetic analogy is only the lowest degree of an operation of cast-molding. Both extreme cases reveal two ends of the same process. Following three types of legality, Deleuze fixes then the conceptual sequence or progressive series (*série croissante*) for the concept of analogy: (1) physical analogy, operation of (cast-) molding, crystalline legality, (2) organic analogy, operation of internal mold, organic legality, and (3) aesthetic analogy, operation of modulation, energetic legality (Deleuze, 2023, p. 197).

Moreover, Deleuze stresses two particularities of this sequence. First, it implies a gradation articulated around the operation of modulation. Second, this means that, *from the point of view of aesthetic analogy*, modulation can be taken in a *broad* or in a *strict* sense: in a broad sense, it comprises both cast-molding and internal molding; in a strict sense, it concerns an operation akin to the modification of the frequency or amplitude of a carrier wave, as in the case of television. In a broad sense, one could say then that mold and module both *comprise* degrees of an operation of modulation. This means that both cast-molding and internal molding will be an important part of painting's definition as *modulation*. In a strict sense, however, painting's modulation will be defined by its own operation, this is by the modification of a given signal, a signal that is equivalent to a certain space-time: "The signal is space. A painter has only ever painted space — and perhaps also time, space-time" (Deleuze, 2023, p. 210). And here is the main point: given that cast-molding and internal molding both comprise degrees of an operation of modulation, this implies in turn that every type of analogical operation will be defined according to a given signal-space. In this sense, the conceptual sequence of analogical operations (mold, module, modulation) gives Deleuze the key to articulate a framework of analysis of both the history of Western art

⁹ This quote is present also in Deleuze (1986, p. 221, 1993, p. 145, 2003a, p. 192) and Deleuze & Guattari (1987, pp. 522, 562).

and the development of modern European painting. Thus, Deleuze offers one of the key definitions of painting in his 1981 lectures: as an analogical language, “painting means modulating light or colour — or light and colour — according to a signal-space” (Deleuze, 2023, p. 210). The product of this form of aesthetic analogy is the production of the figure, i.e., the presence of that image which produces “this resemblance to the thing deeper than the thing itself, this non-similar resemblance produced by different means” (Deleuze, 2023, p. 210).

3. The Crystal, the Organism, and Energy: From Egypt to 19th Century Colourism

In the fifth course of his 1981 lectures, Deleuze enunciates the remaining problems to be developed: first, it is necessary to determine the major signal-spaces of painting; second, it is necessary to show what type of analogical operation is involved in each case. This analysis ought to be understood in terms of the double sense of modulation in general: “Each time, we’ll have to find the correspondence, and the laws of these correspondences, between the signal-space of an art period and the operations of modulation in the broadest sense — be it molding, module, or modulation” (Deleuze, 2023, p. 210). This is perhaps the major significance of the concept of modulation in regards to the history of art: this notion allows us to consider both the defining operation of a particular period of art and the chain of operations that precede or are shared by a specific period. In this section, I consider four signal-spaces through which modern European painting unfolds in Deleuze’s analysis: (1) the signal-space of Egypt, (2) the signal-space of Greek art and 16th century Renaissance, (3) the signal-space of Byzantium and 17th century Luminism, and (4) the signal-space of 19th century Colourism.¹⁰ I describe these spaces not only through their specific analogical operation (mold, module, modulation), but also through the objective disposition of their elements and the type of vision that they produce in the spectator. In case (2), (3), and (4), I introduce the analysis of the “regime of colour”¹¹ as a means to capture the concrete technical sense of painting’s modulation in each signal-space.

3.1. The Crystalline Egyptian Signal-Space

Deleuze discusses the Egyptian space as the matrix and the foundation from which Western art departs. Drawing closely on the analysis proposed by Riegl¹² in his

¹⁰ The same historical sequence is reconstructed in relation to Bacon’s painting in Deleuze (2003a, Chapter 14).

¹¹ The eighth and last lecture introduces the notion of “regimes of colour” to further characterize the technical operation of modulation. These regimes are defined by four features: (1) a determination of the ground (*fond*), i.e., the material support of painting, (2) the use of a certain matrix of colour, also called a “hue,” (3) a method for the reproduction of colour, among which the dominant wavelength method, the method of additive synthesis and the method of subtractive mixing, and (4) a corresponding type of modulation. See Deleuze (2003a, Chapter 16) for a brief echo of this discussion.

¹² Deleuze references four books by Riegl in his lectures: *Problems of Style* (Riegl, 1992), *The Group Portraiture of Holland* (Riegl, 1999), *Historical Grammar of the Visual Arts* (Riegl, 2021), and *Late Roman Art Industry* (Riegl, 1985). The discussion developed on Egyptian art is based mainly on the last two works. As Lapoujade notes, given the fact that in 1981 there was no French translation other than of *Historical*

Historical Grammar of the Visual Arts (Riegl, 2021), Egyptian art seeks above all to extract or save the essence from the world: “The aim is to save the individual in his essence, to withdraw him from the world of appearance” (Deleuze, 2023, p. 214). What is the distinctive operation of the artist here? Deleuze says: “The Egyptian artist draws out the double, which is called the *kâ*, and the double is the individual essence subtracted from appearance, death, and so on” (Deleuze, 2023, p. 215). Furthermore, this individual essence is artistically preserved by means of geometric abstraction: “Enclosure [*clôture*] is the abstract geometric line that surrounds the individual essence and withdraws it from becoming” (Deleuze, 2023, p. 215). Through a contour, each form is thus preserved as isolated from a background, and as Deleuze will say later in *The Logic of Sensation*, it is not only man and the world who receive in this way a “planar” or “linear” essence, but also the animal and the vegetal, the sphinx, and the lotus are raised here to their “perfect geometrical form” (Deleuze, 2003a, p. 123). This is why the means of the Egyptian artist concern basically a surface-level transcription: “What Egyptian art will use to extract individual essence is the flat surface” (Deleuze, 2023, p. 216). The space of Egyptian art is thus a flattened space (*espace planifié*), which signals not only a “planar” coexistence of three structural elements (form, contour, background), but also the prevalence of bas-relief as the defining model of this period.¹³

Why this pre-eminence of bas-relief? Precisely because form and background are here grasped on the same plane, following a minimum of distinction between each other. This is evident for Deleuze in the fold of clothes. The Egyptian fold appears fixed, without any shadow or depth, the drapery is pasted down, “it is a flattened fold, like a fold over which an iron stroke has been passed” (Deleuze, 2023, p. 218). Hence its inscription within a *crystalline* legality: “The cloth on the Egyptian body is like a crystal. [. . .] The Egyptian fold obeys a crystalline legality” (Deleuze, 2023, p. 219). This legality of Egyptian art is also evident in the autonomy of the geometric contour, an instance that both separates and unites on the same plane the background and the individual form. Fixing in this way the three structural elements of painting, the effort of moving beyond this “geometric crystalline world” will signal how, ultimately, we are all (still) Egyptians: “What will allow us to rediscover Egypt in our paintings? Perhaps this effort, [. . .] this effort that runs through all painting, which is to reduce to a minimum the difference between planes” (Deleuze, 2023, p. 220). Additionally, following at this point Riegl’s analysis in *Late Roman Art Industry* (Riegl, 1985), Deleuze says that this space demands in the spectator “a close-up view” (Deleuze, 2023, p. 248). An eye that can see up close is an eye that acts, in a certain way, like touch. The Egyptian space engenders thus a vision called “haptic” — from Greek *ἅπτός*, “tangible,” “palpable,” — a vision which constitutes for Deleuze “a close-up sight that perceives form and background on the same plane, equally close to each other” (Deleuze, 2023, p. 250).

Grammar of the Visual Arts, and considering Deleuze’s scant knowledge of German, it is unlikely he had direct access to Riegl’s most important works. In this sense, Deleuze’s reading of Riegl, and in general his conception of Egyptian art, is mediated mainly by Henri Maldiney’s *Regard Parole Espace* (see Maldiney, 1973, pp. 194–208) and by Worringer’s *Abstraction and Empathy* (Worringer, 1963), available in French at the time (see Deleuze, 2023, p. 213, n. 21).

¹³ For a discussion of Egyptian bas-relief, see Deleuze (2003a, pp. 122–123).

Therefore, this crystalline regime of planimetric relations and haptic vision appears constituted for Deleuze by an operation of *analogia communis*. Egyptian art operates in the same way as the pellicular individuation of a physical reality such as the crystal. From a technical point of view, this means that Egyptian art operates through cast-molding; this is, it transmits or imposes similarity from without, it reproduces resemblance through a molding of individual essence. In a bas-relief, essence is saved definitively in a manner akin to a snapshot. This Egyptian mold constitutes the technical operation from which Western art begins. To the extent that modulation is defined as an operation of continuous and variable mold, Egyptian art will mark in a certain way the point of departure that painting will decline in its own way, amplifying, intensifying, or internalizing the reproduction of resemblance that defines the mold to such a point that resemblance will no longer be a principle, but simply a product.

The transition to later art forms comes about for Deleuze not through the evolution or improvement of the Egyptian operation of molding, but through its fracture, this is, through the disjunction of planes in the same level: “It’s going to be amazing! The plane divides: a foreground [*avant-plan*] moves closer, a background [*arrière-plan*] moves further away” (Deleuze, 2023, p. 252). This event of a fracture of the Egyptian space is the source of three possible solutions¹⁴: (1) a foreground-determined space, (2) a background-determined space, and (3) an in-between planes space. If the first possibility introduces volumetric relations where Egyptian art displayed planimetric relations, the predominance of the foreground in this case will make *form* the determining instance of this space. For Deleuze, this marks the emergence of a signal-space shared by both Greek art and 16th century painting. Moreover, when the background becomes determinant, a new signal-space emerges, a space shared at the same time by Byzantine art and 17th century painting, and which in *The Logic of Sensation* will extend even to 20th century abstract art (see Deleuze, 2003a, pp. 127–129). While liberating light from all subordination to form, the analogical operation of this space will be in turn shared with another signal-space, a space that Deleuze will develop through an analysis of 19th century Colourism. Finally, the third position will be embodied by so-called “barbarian art,” also called “Gothic art,” a space characterized by what Deleuze calls, following Worringer’s *Abstraction and Empathy* (Worringer, 1963), the “abstract line,” a line that not only expresses an intense inorganic vitality, but which will also be present in 20th century abstract expressionism (see Deleuze, 2023, pp. 124–131, 133–136). And so, there is no direct line between Egypt, Greece, or Byzantium, but a series of different responses to a single problem whose elements are always being rearranged. The fracture of the Egyptian mold renders the history of Western art, in a certain sense, as a constant process of differentiation. To a certain degree, painting is and shall remain Egyptian for Deleuze, a resurrection of Egypt by non-Egyptian means; however, this resurrection will always be differential: Egypt returns, but it returns transformed, displaced, differentiated. In this sense, the sequence of analogical operations captures the series of differential

¹⁴ Although *The Logic of Sensation* presents the same three solutions, the event that triggers this passage concerns not so much the disintegration of the Egyptian space, but the “interruption” or “destabiliz[ation]” of an organic Greek space. See Deleuze (2003a, p. 127).

resolutions that both engender a new signal-space and retain the potential of their problem. As will be shown below, the operations that define modern European painting constitute, through radically different means, an amplification or intensification of the molding operation that defined the Egyptian space as the foundation of all Western art.

3.2. The Organic Signal-Space of Greek Art and 16th Century Painting

For Deleuze, the signal-space shared by Greek art and 16th century painting is defined as an essentially “organic” space. How so? Precisely because, starting with the Greeks, the individual essence is apprehended in its incarnation in the world. If that which differentiates this space is the structural primacy of the foreground, this implies in turn that the nature of the contour has changed: instead of an autonomous crystalline contour, there is now a line that comprises and depends upon the self-determination of form. In this sense, essence no longer appears separate or isolated, but now organically encompasses a collective: “The line has become organic, it has become collective” (Deleuze, 2023, p. 270). This is evident for Deleuze in the Greek invention of group harmony, a harmony that will be revived in painting in the 16th century with the “collective line”:

It’s with 16th-century painting that this prodigious idea appears: the tree has a collective line that doesn’t depend on its leaves, and the painter must render the collective line in the foreground. A herd of sheep, a group of apostles has a collective line. (Deleuze, 2023, p. 260)

Like in Raphael’s *The Miraculous Draught of Fishes* (1515-1516), a line defines the outline of a whole, organizing or enveloping the life of a group. In this sense, form is organic insofar as it appears as the relational unity of a diversity of differentiated parts. In addition, as Greek sculpture shows, according to Deleuze, form is not isolated from matter, but comprehends all the degrees of both a continual actualization, where form sinks deeper and deeper into matter, and an elevation by which matter tends more and more towards form.

Furthermore, one of the most important features shared both by Greek art and 16th century painting will be the submission of light to form. As such, this organic signal-space solicits in the subject a tactile-optical exercise of sight. As Deleuze says: “all optical effects are in some way subordinate to the integrity of form, and the integrity of form is tactile in the form of the organic contour” (Deleuze, 2023, p. 273). In other words, this space is an optical space with a tactile referent: it’s as if the hand confirmed what the eye sees, while the eye simultaneously returns to touch through a particular rhythm on the side of the object. Being essentially collective, form appears here as a measure of a diversity of *tempo*s. In this way, this space denotes “a space punctuated [*espace rythmé*] by the strong beats [*temps forts*] of the foreground and the weak beats [*temps faibles*] of the background” (Deleuze, 2023, p. 275). There is here at play, therefore, an analogical operation of inner mold, the module being “the unit of a measure whose beats [*temps*] are variable” (Deleuze, 2023, p. 276). If there is an amplified pellicular individuation in this organic world, it is because diversity is not

just molded from without, but becomes now *molded from within* according to the rhythm of a single measure. This is why the spectator finds in the work of art a conjugated or harmonious exercise of their faculties.¹⁵ An essentially organic art does not need to take the organism as its privileged object, but on the contrary it refers to the fact that “whatever the painter’s object, the spectator in front of such a work will feel a harmonious exercise of their distinct faculties, starting with the tact and the eye” (Deleuze, 2023, pp. 281–282).

However, how does this internal mold operate specifically in the modulation of 16th century painting? Following at this point the critical notes of de Langlais’ book *La technique de la peinture à l’huile* (de Langlais, 1959), this leads Deleuze into the consideration of the concrete technique that painters deploy in the 16th century. First of all, Renaissance painters paint on a white ground (*fond*), a crucial heritage coming from Jan Van Eyck. This means that “the support is coated with a layer of specially treated plaster or a fairly thick layer of chalk” (Deleuze, 2023, p. 308). On this white ground, the painter makes a first underpainting (*ébauche*), which is then washed, and it is over this washed underpainting that the painter begins to spread and apply colour in thin layers. The principle of such a technique is the following: “Thin layers of colour on a white ground so that the white ground transpires, for example, through clothing” (Deleuze, 2023, p. 311). Accordingly, the regime of colour defining such a period confers a privilege to so-called “pale” hues, meaning that the palette of colours is articulated through a matrix that favours light and washed-out colours, this is, colours with high luminance and very diluted. All of this makes the modulation proper to Renaissance painting a highly complex analogical operation. If the rhythm in the foreground defines the organic relations proper to the unity of a group, conversely, both the materiality of the ground and the colour matrix at play develop the primacy of form in general. The ground provides light and clarity to the foreground, while the colours are arranged according to the different *tempos* of a collective line. Painting in an organic space such as the Renaissance means, therefore, to internally mold the relations of dependency proper to form by establishing an underpainting on a white ground, according to which a play of colours articulated mainly around pale hues will be deployed.

3.3. *The Energetic Signal-Space of Byzantium and 17th Century Luminism*

A third signal-space comes about when the background becomes determinant, both with Byzantine art and with 17th century Luminism. Here, as Deleuze remarks, “concerning the ground [*fond*] we must say: we don’t know where it begins nor where it ends. Consequently, neither do we know where form begins nor where it ends” (Deleuze, 2023, p. 283). Form is pushed forth (*poussée*) by the background, appearing

¹⁵ The expression “harmonious exercise of the faculties” refers elsewhere for Deleuze to Kant’s determination of common sense as the ground of an accord of the three active faculties (imagination, understanding, reason), following a relationship (knowledge, desire, feeling of pleasure and pain) in which one determines the legitimate, or illegitimate, use of the others. See Deleuze (1984, pp. 21–24, 35–38, 48–50). Deleuze will be highly critical of this harmonious exercise: he criticizes common sense as one of the eight postulates of a “dogmatic” image of thought and proposes instead a “sublime” and “discordant” exercise of the faculties (see Deleuze, 1994, pp. 132–148).

here as a sort of manifestation or epiphany of the ground itself. This is why light appears not only as independent, but also as unbound (*déchaînée*): light is in the background, it is the ground, or, on the contrary, it emerges from an extremely dark background, ground and background becoming synonymous at this point. All the relations and forms in the foreground are defined according to the relative clarity proper to the background, to its relative light-dark values. In this way, this space embodies “a space of values, a space of chiaroscuro” (Deleuze, 2023, p. 288). Everything depends now on the way the artist integrates the emergence of form from the values proper to the background. In any case, light becomes determinant at the same time that the vision, on the side of the subject, is determined as a vision from a distance proper to what Deleuze calls a “pure optical space.” “Light is the optical eye. It demands an optical eye” (Deleuze, 2023, p. 251). As he will explain later, this type of vision no longer appeals to a tactile confirmation, but is “established directly by the whole of the painting” (Deleuze, 2003a, p. 128). An example taken from Wölfflin’s *Principles of Art History* (Wölfflin, 2015) highlights the differences between the tactile-optical space and this pure optical space. Where a curved line continuously delimits the contour of the body in a Renaissance nude, for example in Dürer, in a 17th century nude, the body is delimited no longer by a continuous line but by a very thin succession of flat features — what Deleuze calls a “shattered line” (*ligne brisée*) — whose function is to indicate “the way in which the body bursts from the ground [*fond*]” (Deleuze, 2023, p. 287). As a result, form seems to emanate from the space that precedes it, a feature evident both in a Byzantine mosaic and in a painting by Rembrandt.

This pure optical space is defined thus by an aesthetic analogy deployed as a modulation of light. Unbound and determinant, light takes shape here following a variable manner, which implies that an energetic procedure is here at play, more precisely, an operation concerning a continuous modification or molding of light as such. How does this modulation of light operate in the 17th century? What happens, technically speaking, at the end of the Renaissance? Following de Langlais, Deleuze says: “the ground [*fond*] becomes thicker and thicker, or at least more and more opaque” (Deleuze, 2023, p. 312). This thickening of the ground implies at least two things. First, the washing or dilution will become increasingly darker, meaning that the colours of the underpainting will affect the whole ground: “The white ground will tend, as it becomes more opaque and thicker, to become coloured” (Deleuze, 2023, p. 313). Second, the underpainting stage will tend to disappear in favour of a new method called “working *impasto* [*travail en pleine pâte*].” Deleuze defines this method as “the painter’s *pentimento* [*méthode des repentirs*]”: “Instead of a well-defined underpainting on which all that remains is to apply the colours, there will be a perpetual reworking, a working *impasto*” (Deleuze, 2023, p. 313). The painter’s marks of a perpetual reworking signal the possibility of a continuous and variable molding of light, a method that progressively eliminates the need for a form (underpainting) to be internally molded.

According to Deleuze, this technical shift was accompanied in the 17th century by two specific colour regimes: one marked by Caravaggio, the other by Rubens.

Why Caravaggio? Simply put, he invents “a blackish ground, a bituminous ground or, more precisely, a red-brown ground” (Deleuze, 2023, p. 315). This means that the support is coloured by a kind of indefinite colour: “the matrix of colour is this kind of dark bath that will form the ground [*fond*] of the painting” (Deleuze, 2023, p. 316). Hence, if this dark ground (*fond*) assures the primacy of the background (*arrière-plan*), the painter’s main task becomes now that of *colour blending* (*dégradation des couleurs*). The painter no longer places colours on a white ground, but blends colour according to this dark ground, thereby indicating how colour emerges from the background. The key example for Deleuze is Caravaggio’s *The Calling of Saint Matthew* (c. 1599-1600). In this sense, the colour matrix is articulated here around deep and muted hues, i.e., highly saturated dark colours, and very diluted dark ones. Moreover, 17th century Luminism is marked by another possibility: “colours are applied to a light-coloured ground [*fond*]” (Deleuze, 2023, p. 318). For Deleuze, Rubens is the key figure of this approach because with him the thick, opaque ground is not coloured by an indefinite dark colour, but instead becomes a light-coloured ground. The painter’s work *impasto* is no longer the blending of colours, but rather *glazing*, i.e., “fine, translucent and, if necessary, brilliant colours, applied to a light ground” (Deleuze, 2023, p. 318). As light bathes the background, the foreground emerges here through the application of thin, increasingly opaque layers of colour. In doing so, such a regime is said to be “bright” insofar as it is articulated around colours of high luminance and saturation.

Modulation, in the context of 17th century painting, means for Deleuze not only a continuous and variable molding of light-dark values proper to the background, but also a concrete technique of extracting forms from the background. Modulating light means to work *impasto* and not through the internal mold of an underpainting. This marks an energetic operation in the sense that the painter is confronted with a perpetual reworking. Figures emerge, burst, or are extracted from an infinite dark or light ground, be it through blending, be it through glazing, but the work never seems to be finished. The painter’s *pentimento* is the testimony of this continuous process. Painting in this energetic space of Luminism means, therefore, to perpetually mold the light-dark values proper to the background by establishing a work *impasto* on a coloured ground, according to which a play of colours articulated around deep and muted, or bright hues will be deployed.

3.4. *The Energetic Signal-Space of 19th Century Colourism*

There is another kind of energetic modulation: a modulation only of colour. Even if the 16th and 17th centuries both imply a certain regime of colour, colour still appears to be submitted to the constraints of form or light. For Deleuze, colour alone can respond to the fracture of the Egyptian space, implying a new possibility, a new signal-space for painting. Although a signal-space of colour appears first marked by a Byzantine inspiration — “Byzantium invented Colourism at the same time as it invented Luminism” (Deleuze, 2023, p. 298) — this possibility is historically accomplished in a specific sequence of 19th century painting, a sequence whose main moments of

development, in the lectures of 1981, concern Impressionism and Cézanne, Gauguin, and Van Gogh.¹⁶

Technically speaking, the shift from a space specific to light to one specific to colour is explained by the fact that the ground (*fond*) becomes less and less important. “The advent of Colourism in the 19th century is characterized by painters who work using colour on colour” (Deleuze, 2023, p. 323). Painters no longer need to pass through the mediation of a white outer matrix or a dark inner matrix to attain colour; on the contrary, “colour comes into existence for itself” (Deleuze, 2023, p. 323). Everything derives from colour accents, from the relationships between colours. As Deleuze will later say: “Colorism’ means not only that relations are established between colors [. . .], but that color itself is discovered to be the variable relation, the differential relation, on which everything else depends” (Deleuze, 2003a, p. 139). If the colour regime proper to this space appears to be bright (matrix of colours with high luminance and high saturation), the operating method has in turn changed: “There is no more glazing. There is no ground [*fond*]” (Deleuze, 2023, p. 325). The process of painting aims now to unfold the principal or princely relationships between colour through colour alone: “colours deal with each other and unfold for themselves, constituting a space” (Deleuze, 2023, p. 328).

The first way of creating this space comes from the Impressionists. They introduce the small pictorial unit: the famous comma- or dot-stroke, a heritage of Eugène Delacroix’s *hachure*. This means that space is constructed as a network of colour, as the linking together of small pictorial units. Following a chromatic circle, colour relationships can be constructed in two ways: on the basis of diametrical oppositions — the relations between so-called “complementary colours” — or on the basis of peripheral relations.¹⁷ The Impressionists used these two types of relations following what they called the “law of contrasts,” referring to the relations of complementary colours, and the “law of analogues” denoting peripheral relations. The great novelty here was the creation of colour-relations through the juxtaposition of spots following these two laws: “When you operate like the Impressionists [. . .] with small colouring units and no longer with sections, strictly speaking, you can juxtapose two spots, one red, one green” (Deleuze, 2023, p. 329). While some painters, like Seurat, favoured the organization of colour based on diametrical oppositions (law of contrast), others, like Pissarro, progressively shifted to an articulation centred around

¹⁶ This sequence of colourist painters is revisited in certain sections of Chapters 14 and 15 (see Deleuze, 2003a, pp. 132–134, 139–142). If Bacon is described as “one of the greatest colorists since Van Gogh and Gauguin” (Deleuze, 2003a, p. 142), it is possible to read Chapter 16, “Note on Color,” as an extension of the last course of the 1981 lectures, a course in which Bacon does not feature even once. Alternatively, it is worth noting that, both in the lectures and in his book on Bacon, Deleuze makes no major reference to painting in the 18th century. How to interpret this theoretical void? Should we see in a style like Rococo the extension of a modulation of light *à la Rubens*? Could we see in Neoclassicism the resurgence of an organic space for painting? Moreover, while Deleuze does not develop a signal-space specific to Romanticism, in the lectures, he discusses the work of artists like J. M. W. Turner and Delacroix.

¹⁷ See Lecture 6 in which Deleuze develops in great length the chromatic circle that illustrates these complementary and peripheral relations of colour (Deleuze, 2023, pp. 228–237).

peripheral relations (law of analogues). In this context, a painter like Cézanne will usher in a sort of ordered molding of colour consisting in “a succession, a juxtaposition of spots, step by step, in the order of the spectrum” (Deleuze, 2023, p. 293). In this sense, in works such as *Paysan assis* (c. 1900), what mattered most to Cézanne was “the passage from one tone to another” (Deleuze, 2023, pp. 332–333).

There is then a first way of modulating colour: modulation of the small pictorial unit by means of a juxtaposition of tones, modulation operating on colour as ground and following the relations of complementary or peripheral colours. Within this context, painters like Gauguin and Van Gogh will develop even further this modulation not only by discovering a structural function of colour, what Deleuze calls the “field regime,” but above all by introducing a new “ponderal” property of colour itself. Following Albers’ analysis in *Interaction of Color* (Albers, 1963), Deleuze sees in these two properties the discovery of a world beyond the laws used by Impressionism. This new world stems from the fact that “independently of rules of harmony, any colour ‘goes’ or ‘works’ with any other colour, if their quantities are appropriate” (Albers, quoted by Deleuze, 2023, p. 340). Thus, the space constructed by Gauguin and Van Gogh admits *de jure* any and every type of relation between colours: “at this point, everything goes with everything, if you set the right coefficients” (Deleuze, 2023, p. 340). This marks the emergence of the painter as a sort of “arbitrary colourist.”¹⁸ This is why the form and volume of the objects depicted by Gauguin and Van Gogh will be rendered through the usage of broken tones (*tons rompus*), tones that imply a “mixture of two complementary colours with the dominance of one” (Deleuze, 2023, p. 341). What is essential here is the fact that the same colour can come up twice: as the bright field of a colour structure and as the broken tone of the figure, there is then a “repetition of the bright tone via the broken tone” (Deleuze, 2023, p. 343). Ultimately, this technique provides an answer to the greatest problem of modern European painting, this is, “how to render flesh?” If broken colours are central to Colourism, it is because they do an excellent job of depicting skin¹⁹ and

¹⁸ This expression is taken from one of Van Gogh’s letters to his brother Theo [Letter 663, 18 August 1888]. This letter is also cited in Deleuze (2003a, p. 194). The context of the letter is the following: for a portrait in which Van Gogh wishes to put all his “love and appreciation” for the model, the painter talks about an arbitrary use of colour in order to attain a more powerful expression: “Instead of trying to render exactly what’s in front of my eyes, I use colour more arbitrarily to express myself more intensely” (Van Gogh, 1990, p. 165, my translation). Hence the use of the expression “arbitrary colourist”: “So I’ll paint him just as he is, as faithfully as I can — to begin with —. But the painting isn’t finished in that way. To finish it, I am now going to become an arbitrary colourist” (Van Gogh, 1990, p. 165, my translation).

¹⁹ When Deleuze talks about this problem, he characterizes it as an essentially “Western” problem: “How to render flesh? For a colourist, this is the problem of problems. Why? Because you’re constantly on the verge of the supreme danger: creating muddy [*du terreux*], earthy colours. [...] Western painting has been plagued by this task: how to get out of the muddy?” (Deleuze, 2023, p. 278). Furthermore, if he describes this problem as an “awful European problem,” a problem specific to the “Western organism,” it is precisely on the basis of the type of skin that such an organism displays: “We are pale and red and if you mix all that, it makes muddiness [*du terreux*]; it is terrible!” (Deleuze, 2023, p. 277). Does this mean that a non-pale skin type constitutes a problem that does not belong to or properly exceeds European and Western Colourism? Or does Deleuze simply not consider a skin colour other than pale as a problem in the general framework of the colourist question of how to render flesh? It is worth noting that in posing the general lines of the problem of Colourism, Deleuze relies heavily on Paul Signac (1978, pp. 38, 55, 83).

ultimately flesh²⁰: “Bluish, reddish hues, they’re made with broken colours. Van Gogh never stops insisting: the modern portrait should operate in broken tones” (Deleuze, 2023, p. 342). With this second modulation of colour, colour becomes not only the structure of painting (acting as both the ground and the background), but also discovers a new energy, a differential and ponderal energy that ultimately renders not the harmony of an organic form nor a luminous emergence coming from the background, but all the force and presence of a figure imposed now as the foreground.

Finally, if colour constitutes the ground, the background, and the foreground of painting, “wouldn’t colour be a completely autonomous and original way of reconstituting the haptic vision that the Egyptians had achieved in a completely different way?” (Deleuze, 2023, p. 251). In this sense, if a colourist space engenders a haptic eye in the viewer, as Deleuze stresses, this eye would not be located in the brain, but directly within the nervous system (see Deleuze, 2023, p. 251). The haptic vision of colour would thus apprehend directly not only all the structural elements of painting created by and through the same plane of colour, but would also confront all the psycho-physiological force of a visual sensation of colour as such, as in Cézanne’s “bloodshot eyes” or Gauguin’s eye “in heat” (see Deleuze, 2023, p. 251). In any case, the modulation proper to colour that Deleuze finds in 19th century Colourism marks a clear departure from the modulation found in 17th century Luminism. If this operation implies a continuous molding of light by a work *impasto* on a coloured ground, a modulation of colour implies a continuous molding of the inner relations of colour on colour as ground and through the accents proper to colour itself. If Luminism refers to a pure optical space, Colourism implies a resurrection of the Egyptian haptic vision.²¹ And nonetheless both Luminism and Colourism constitute the two modes of aesthetic analogy. Whereas Luminism extracts form from the background, Colourism unfolds all the energy proper to the relationships of colour alone, be it by juxtaposition of spots, be it by the structural and ponderal properties of colour. Accordingly, the *energetic* character of painting’s modulation comprises: (1) the techniques of blending and glazing, and (2) the techniques of comma- and dot-stroke, as well as the colour structure and the broken tones, both of which seeking to constitute a space of colour using colour alone.

²⁰ The analysis of flesh in the lectures appears also tied to Bacon’s series of Crucifixions (see Deleuze, 2023, pp. 79–80). In *The Logic of Sensation*, this theme will be explored in connection to Bacon’s depiction of meat, an instance that Deleuze defines as that which “retains all the sufferings and assumes all the colors of living flesh” (Deleuze, 2003a, p. 23). The analysis of flesh as meat will be one of the main features of the book on Bacon that is not present in the 1981 lectures.

²¹ Deleuze extends to painters such as Turner, Monet, and especially Bacon such a haptic function of sight (see Deleuze, 2003a, pp. 133, 135–143, 152–153). On the resurrection of an Egyptian function of sight in these cases, Deleuze says: “One might say that a new Egypt rises up, composed uniquely of color and by color, an Egypt of the accident, the accident which has itself become durable” (Deleuze, 2003a, p. 134). The resurgence of Egypt in Colourism implies then a displacement of the “original” Egyptian solution.

For a summary of the main stages and correspondences of analogical operations and historical periods in the Deleuzian analysis, see the following table:

Type of analogy	Signal-space	Modulation	Objective traits	Type of vision	Technique and regime of colour (painting only)
<i>Analogia communis</i>	Egypt	Crystalline cast-molding (<i>moulage</i>)	Flatness of elements: background, foreground, figure	Haptic close-up sight	
Analogy of relations	Greek art/16 th century Renaissance	Organic internal mold (<i>moule intérieure</i>)	Primacy of foreground	Tactile-optical sight	Underpainting; white ground; pale hues
Aesthetic analogy I	Byzantine art/17 th century Luminism	Energetic modulation of light	Primacy of background	Vision from a distance	Work <i>impasto</i> ; coloured ground; dark and muted/bright hues
Aesthetic analogy II	19 th century Colourism	Energetic modulation of colour	Flatness of elements in colour: background, foreground, figure	Haptic vision of colour	Juxtaposition of spots, colour structure, ponderal energy; colour as ground; bright hues
Analogy, modulation, and Deleuze's art history					

4. Final Remarks: Towards a Heterogenetic History of Art

Deleuze's conception of painting in his 1981 lectures appears inscribed in a complex system of analogical operations of cast-molding, internal molding, and modulation. This system is not only organized as a progressive series of sequential stages, but it constitutes also the basis on which Deleuze approaches the development of the history of Western art and, more specifically, of modern European painting. In this sense, the 1981 lectures can be considered as a sort of "laboratory" preceding a number of developments that will be later published in *The Logic of Sensation*. If the lectures advance central themes such as the digital-analogue distinction, the modulation of colour, the haptic sense of vision, as well as the exploration of Egyptian, Greek, Byzantine, and colourist spaces, moreover, in order to appreciate the novelty of the analysis previously outlined it is perhaps more instructive to insist on some of the main differences between the lectures and the published book.

First, although Deleuze defines painting in *The Logic of Sensation* as "the analogical art par excellence" (Deleuze, 2003a, p. 117), drawing thus a distinction between two types of analogy regarding the production and reproduction of resemblance, it seems that there is no possibility for these two modes of analogy to be part of a same

sequence. As seen in Section 2 of this article, this is not the case in the lectures, where Deleuze integrates in a same continuum of operations of “*prise de forme*” both the production and the reproduction of resemblance. While it is evident in the lectures that “undoing resemblance has always been part of the act of painting” (Deleuze, 2023, p. 110), this does not imply a total rejection of a productive sense of resemblance. On the contrary, it is a matter of granting it a role and position in a sequence of technical processes, a position that expresses both the foundation and the lowest degree of a process of modulation. Understanding analogy in this way allows Deleuze to reconsider a concept that was an integral part of representation in *Difference and Repetition*. This reconsideration not only gives a positive value to categories such as mold and module as defining procedures of a specific period in Western art, but it also widens the scope of Deleuze’s interrogation, allowing us to consider the different forms of modulation that define painting as such.

This last point leads us to a second difference. Although the historical discussion of painting in *The Logic of Sensation* incorporates the essential features of the historical discussion proposed in the lectures — with the exception of the sequence of analogical operations, as well as the notion of “signal-space” — this analysis seems to be developed solely in relation to the figure of Bacon. Hence the ambiguity of these historical remarks, ambiguity which Alain Badiou and Barbara Cassin note in the preface to the French edition: “Gilles Deleuze’s book on Francis Bacon is something other than a study of a painter by a philosopher. Moreover, is this even a book ‘on’ Bacon?” (Deleuze, 2003a, p. viii). The exclusion of the sequence of analogical operations from the historical analysis of painting in *The Logic of Sensation* seems to reduce the scope of the definition of painting that Deleuze outlines therein.²² Thus, by showing that, before his interest on writing a book on Bacon, Deleuze was primarily interested in a dialogue between philosophy and painting *in general*, the lectures show the broadest sense of Deleuze’s interest in painting.

In general, the main philosophical novelty of the lectures concerns the treatment of the concept of modulation. While Anne Sauvagnargues notes that it is through this notion that Deleuze distances himself from a hylomorphic scheme in his conception of art, seeking on the contrary the elaboration of new relations between materials and expressive features (Sauvagnargues, 2016), nevertheless, the general problem of modulation in the lectures is not directly related to the categories of form and matter.²³ Modulation responds to a different problem, namely the immanence of the

²² It is possible to ask why this reduction actually occurs. A first explanation might concern Deleuze’s motivation to write a book on a single painter, a motivation that would explain the need to reduce, and in many cases simplify, various themes previously addressed in the lectures. Moreover, this question raises a further one, perhaps more difficult to answer: why did Deleuze write a book on Bacon *instead* of a book on painting in general? Why not pursue the dialogue with painting with a book devoted to painting as a whole, and not only to one painter in particular? On the historical context of Deleuze’s lectures at Paris VIII, see François Dosse (2010, pp. 344–361).

²³ However, this line of argument is useful when situating Deleuze’s perspective in a wider array of contemporary philosophical approaches to painting. Following Jonathan Gilmore’s classification, one could say that Deleuze’s perspective cannot be reduced either to a “representational” or to a purely “formalist” or “configurational” approach (Gilmore, *Forthcoming*). Deleuze would be closer to a “dual account” of painting, where “content” corresponds to space taken as a signal, and “form” refers to the various technical operations by which this signal is (historically) transmitted on a flat surface.

different forms of analogically producing and reproducing resemblance. Hence the main interest of the sequence of operations in which modulation is inscribed consists in mapping the different ways of both reproducing a mold *and* producing it in a continuous and variable manner. Simondon is certainly a key influence in this respect, but the scope that Deleuze grants to modulation in his 1981 lectures constitutes something more than a simple heritage.²⁴ This novelty is evident, for instance, in the coexistence of the two senses in which this notion can be understood. If modulation taken in a *broad* sense provides a dimension where the history of Western art can be reconstructed following a progressive series involving a sequence of increasingly complex operations (from the external mold, *via* the internal module, up to the continuous and variable temporal mold), conversely, the *strict* sense of modulation describes a dimension where the act of painting is construed as the modification of a particular instance, be it form, light, or colour. Both perspectives are always at work in Deleuze's analysis, hence the rich character of the lectures and the complex chronology they establish. In this sense, the development of the concept of modulation is not just historical but also "techno-aesthetic"²⁵: *historical* because it comprises a sequence of different signal-spaces encompassing certain periods of Western art; *technical* because it comprises both an analogical framework for the production and reproduction of resemblance, and the different techniques that painting deploys in specific instances (consider underpainting, work *impasto* or the use of broken tones); and *aesthetic* because it deals with the emergence of painting as a process of experimentation.²⁶

Furthermore, the historical scope of modulation allows us to reconsider the relations between the categories of event and history within Deleuze's thought, and with respect to the field of art history. In order to better appreciate the historical contributions of Deleuze's 1981 lectures, I propose to consider the sequence of crystalline, organic, and energetic signal-spaces through the concept of "heterogenesis." This is a concept that Deleuze, Guattari, and Deleuze and Guattari formulate in different contexts. If for Deleuze the term designates a system that, being in perpetual disequilibrium, produces and relates difference as such (Deleuze, 2006, p. 361), for Guattari, "heterogenesis" designates a process that "[opens] onto singularizing, irreversible processes of necessary differentiation" (Guattari, 1995, p. 55). Furthermore, in *What Is Philosophy?*, a concept is described as a "heterogenesis," as it involves "an ordering of its components by zones of neighborhood" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 20). Similarly, thought itself is referred to by Deleuze and Guattari as "heterogenetic," as each of its elements calls "on other heterogeneous elements" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 199). In this manner,

²⁴ Regarding Simondon's influence on Deleuze, see Pierre Montebello (2008); Sauvagnargues (2010); Alberto Toscano (2009).

²⁵ On the concept of "techno-aesthetics," see Simondon (2012).

²⁶ To this extent, the perspective that Deleuze presents in his courses might seem close, under certain aspects, to the "experience of emergence" that Robert Hopkins attributes to Bence Nanay (Hopkins, 2010, pp. 160, n. 3, 165, n. 6; see also Nanay, 2010). The concept of modulation, and its historical, technical, and aesthetic determination, is key in this Deleuzian version of an "inflected seeing-in" since, contrary to Hopkins, what we see in a painting would *implicate* the process by which the painting enables us to see that thing in it.

heterogenesis designates a systematic process of producing, relating, and communicating differences or singularities as such. Furthermore, applied mainly to the domain of semiogenesis, this concept has been recently explored in the book *Differential Heterogenesis* as a becoming of forms in which form appears as the solution and recombination of a set of differential constraints proper to a given domain (see Sarti et al., 2022).

Taking this into account, a “heterogenetic” perspective on the history of art considers not only the different periods of art as singular ways of resolving and recombining the coordinates of a given problem, but also examines both the “community” and “becoming” of diverse techno-aesthetic operations shared by different periods or moments in the history of art. In this sense, the sequence of signal-spaces defined by the concept of modulation indicates not an ordered and necessary sequence built around a final moment, but a *genetic* chain of *heterogeneous* solutions to a problem that is constantly being recombined. In an interview in December 1981, Deleuze says that one must define the epochs of the history of art “materially and genetically rather than formally” (Deleuze, 2006, p. 181). Such a perspective is at work in the 1981 lectures when Deleuze reconstructs the becoming of the material and technical procedures involved in the 16th, 17th, and 19th centuries. The historical sequence that Deleuze traces does not seek a linear succession of moments that overcome one another, but on the contrary, as he notes later in *The Logic of Sensation*, this sequence ought to be thought of as a historical “recapitulation” consisting of “stopping points and passages,” forming an “open sequence” (Deleuze, 2003a, p. 135). Thus, for the case of painting alone, the history that Deleuze traces appears articulated around the different responses given not just to the problem of how to immanently produce resemblance through non-resembling means, but also to the fracture of the Egyptian space. In doing so, the sequence of operations of mold, module, and modulation can be understood as a way of accounting for the unity of painting, insofar as the unity of this domain constitutes a problem and not a goal, namely *how to rediscover the Egyptian flatness through non-Egyptian means?* This means that Egypt survives as the horizon of the problem of painting, being able to resurface in moments such as Colourism, insofar as the mold marks the foundation for the development of modulation. Since analogy encompasses the different ways of producing and reproducing resemblance, the Egyptian mold, the activity of capturing an essence on a flat surface by means of a contour, marks a sort of “paradigmatic activity” that painting constantly reconstitutes in its own way, declining, shifting, displacing, and recombining the axes of this foundation in novel and original ways.

Additionally, although an essential point of the Deleuzian and Deleuzoguattarian approach to the category of history, considered as causal-linear progression, has been the opposition of the event as a transversal, intensive, aleatory, and non-linear instance (see Bell & Colebrook, 2009), I believe that the heterogenetic sequence of crystalline, organic, and energetic signal-spaces shows an important nuance to this opposition. Although Deleuze, as well as Deleuze and Guattari, point out how history can have a repressive effect on thought (see Deleuze, 1995, pp. 5–6), comprising simply “the set of almost negative conditions that make possible the experimentation of something that escapes history” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 111), a heterogenetic history of art insists, on the contrary, on the possibility of a convergence between

history and thought, and this in a sense akin to Deleuze's reading of "history" in his *Foucault*, that is, as a "history of thought as such" (Deleuze, 1988, p. 116). In this sense, following Craig Lundy's *History and Becoming* (Lundy, 2012), the sequence of crystalline, organic, and energetic signal-spaces ought to be considered as one of those points in Deleuze's work where history appears creative, and creativity becomes historical. Not only is the passage towards Greek and Byzantine art marked by the creative responses to the event of a disjunction of the Egyptian flatness, but also the "progression" of painting between the 16th, 17th, and 19th centuries is marked by a slow transformation both in the preparation of the ground and in the concrete techniques at work. The history of painting reconstructed through the sequence of modulation renders a dimension where the response to a critical event operates the progression of history at the same time that history is built as the recapitulation of a series of creative acts. Thus, the temporality specific to this sequence should be considered not as a causal-linear progression of moments that surpass one another, but rather as a sort of *stratigraphic time*, that is, a time where not only "before" and "after" indicate an order of superpositions, but also a time where "very old strata can rise to the surface again" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, pp. 58–59). As Lundy underlines: "The critical aspect of this time is that the past is never done with" (Lundy, 2012, p. 160). Put differently, in the history of Western art, "a disequilibrium is always about to be born" (Deleuze, 2023, p. 262). Each signal-space can be resurrected, taken up, prolonged, or reshaped by a later moment, regardless of chronological progression (difference is here produced and related as such). In this way, the temporality of this matrix provides the means to consider the evolution²⁷ of the conditions of the act of painting in the history of Western art, as well as the different points of communication among its main moments of development. As such, the historical recapitulation comprised by the notion of modulation allows us to read the chronology of the history of art both from the perspective of a non-linear sequence of increasingly complex operations of molding and from the perspective of a simultaneity of different responses to a single problem. In this sense, not only can the past return at any moment, but the future can also be constructed in multiple ways. Each painter is not only capable of recapitulating the entire history of painting in their own way, as Deleuze will later state, but this manner is simultaneously inhabited by the multiplicity of a series of creative events that can resurface at any point in unexpected directions.

In this respect, the historical reconstruction of the 1981 lectures appears close not only to a "mannerist" cartography of art history (see van Tuinen, 2017, 2022), but above all it seems very close to the concept of *Nachleben* developed by Georges Didi-Huberman, insofar as this notion shows "that historical time is a plastic force that does not cease to come back, does not cease to survive, and in each survival does not cease to be metamorphised" (Chirolla & Mejia Mosquera, 2017, p. 92; see also Didi-Huberman, 2002). The survival and metamorphosis of the past are evident when one

²⁷ Evolution at this point can be understood in a sense akin to what Bernard Stiegler notes regarding the nature of "technical systems" in Bertrand Gille: "The evolution of technical systems moves toward the complexity and progressive solidarity of the combined elements. "The internal connections that assure the life of these technical systems are more and more numerous as we advance in time, as techniques become more and more complex" (Stiegler, 1998, p. 31; see also Gille, 1978).

considers that for Deleuze all Western painting is an operation that derives from Egypt and in which Egypt will be constantly resurrected by non-Egyptian means²⁸; alternatively, this is also evident by the fact that the same space can be shared by two very distant periods in time (Greece and Renaissance; Gothic art and Abstract Expressionism) or that a same inspiration can inform two very distinct types of space (Byzantium and Luminism-Colourism). Therefore, although there has been a certain reluctance on the part of art history to take up Deleuze's thought, as Kamini Vellodi notes, this philosophy offers on the contrary "a compelling means of addressing the empiricism of art history, and the function of art — as sensible being — for thought" (Vellodi, 2019, pp. 14–15). A heterogenetic history of art would thus seek to develop both the *empirical* and *transcendental* potential within this field. This means that by exploring the continuities, resonances, becomings, survivals, communications, and resurrections between different periods within the history of art, art would appear not only as the creative domain of a set of techno-aesthetic operations, but also as the domain of a profound experimentation of thought itself.

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²⁸ This idea is further developed with respect to Bacon in Deleuze (2003a, pp. 122–134).

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