
Even in an age in which representation is supposedly dead, the dominant moulds into which artistic forms are cast predominantly remain transcendent, which is to say that they contain an internal coherence that simultaneously justifies their existence as autonomous entities in the world and divorces them from the world. In such artistic expressions, the transcendent goal is most often one of representation—providing a pseudo-reflection of an external and infinite realm within an enclosed and internal work—, illustration—explicating external phenomena according to the internal axiomatics of an art form—, or narration—recounting a self-sufficient narrative that contains an order not present in the chaotic outside. The ways to go beyond such transcendent models in the Twentieth Century are numerous: we have only to think of Joyce’s *Finnegan’s Wake*, Francis Bacon’s aesthetic of sensation, Antonin Artaud’s theatre of cruelty, Marcel Duchamp’s decontextualisations or Damien Hirst’s acts of provocation to understand how such non-representational aesthetics differ in their affect from more conventional and normalized modes of aesthetic transmission. Even in much late twentieth-century philosophy and Theory that uses such works as examples to explicate its own thought, the very *démarche* of philosophers such as Deleuze and Derrida practices the very non-containment and anti-reductionism that they find in other works, be it in Derrida’s semantic slippages or Deleuze’s fleeting amorphous concepts which are traversed by lines of flight.

For Deleuze, in *Difference and Repetition*, the escape from representational forms, or forms premised upon an originary identity, often takes place through
processes of difference and repetition. Repetition, he writes, ‘is by nature transgression or exception, always revealing a singularity opposed to the generalities which give rise to laws’ (Deleuze 1994: 5). Similarly, difference, that principle which governs intensive movements—which is to say movements that are not transcendent but created only through a dynamic interaction—is likewise removed from representation. Deleuze states:

Representation fails to capture the affirmed world of difference.

Representation has only a single centre, a unique and receding perspective, and in consequence a false depth. It mediates everything, but mobilises and moves nothing. Movement, for its part, implies a plurality of centres, a superposition of perspectives, a tangle of points of view, a coexistence of movements which essentially distort representation. (Deleuze 1994: 55-56)

Precisely how these processes of difference and repetition might work in practice can be seen in Deleuze’s analysis of the work of Raymond Roussel. Deleuze finds in Roussel’s work verbal series whose precursors are provided by nouns, homonyms or quasi-homonyms—such as the pairing of billard – pillard. In between these various series, Roussel inserts ‘strange stories […] in such a manner as to induce an effect of resemblance and external identity’. By doing this, for Deleuze, the nouns and homonyms used as precursors do not refer to an originary identity but rather deploy a differential relation across their series that causes the series to resonate together (Deleuze 1994: 121).

In Deleuze’s analysis of Roussel, it is in part due to a level of self-reflective awareness of the very matter of which all written art forms are composed that intensive
(as opposed to extensive and representational) movements are deployed in the work since it is the divergence between two plosives that provides the key to interpretation. Indeed, the material self-reflexivity of Roussel’s work is made all the more manifest in Deleuze’s analysis thanks to the latter’s reliance on the differential relation between two plosives ($b - p$), the plosive being (in auditory phonetics) perhaps the most deeply textured of phonemes, forming a strong element at the beginning of words and requiring a more tactile physiological process for its formation than other sounds. To sum up, then, the disruption of representation in Roussel’s work is played out firstly through the estranging of narrative (his ‘strange stories’), secondly through the movement between series effectuated by difference and repetition, and thirdly through a use of signifier as objet sonore, a textural element with its own singular ontology.

These very same movements can be observed in the work of Spanish composer Francisco López and in the Belgian film maker, Thierry Knauff’s 2000 production, *Wild Blue: notes à quelques voix* and it will be the task of this paper to trace these movements in their works, thereby producing analyses which may seem to be somewhat at odds with their manifest *modus operandi*. When one takes into consideration that fact that López obtained a PhD in entomology and that he is employed by the ecology department of the University of Madrid, it might be thought that he is interested in using sound as a means to document reality—documentation being, it hardly needs saying, the form in which the resemblance between original and copy should be most rigidly enforced—but this is not at all the case, even when he takes as his sound source the rainforest or other nature environments (as he does on many of his recordings). Indeed, in the liner notes to one such recording, *La Selva*, López is at great pains to stress his radical departure from bioacoustics which he sees as ‘a common reductive interpretation
of nature recordings. This discipline’, he goes on to explain, ‘focuses on capturing the
sounds produced by different animal species, mainly for identification purposes’ (López
1998)—thereby linking sonic signifier to signified in a rigid hierarchy of identity. For
López, this documentary use of sound relegates the very importance of that sound as
sound matter, for it concentrates on the referent which, as a biological entity, is divorced
from its sonic matter once enunciation has taken place. Rather, López is interested in
‘the transcendental dimension of the sound matter by itself’, which is to say that he is
interested not in the sound’s relation to an outside that it would represent but rather to
sound’s own inner world, its status as an objet sonore (López 1998).

Far from re-establishing a link between sound and source, then, López’s work is,
rather, as Philip Sherburne has written in his review of Untitled #104, ‘a radical
decontextualisation, stripping the sound of any association with its original production,
and resituating in a field of pure sonic material’ (Sherburne 2000: 51). Through this
absolute decontextualisation, López performs an estrangement of narrative,
referentiality and illustration, for the work no longer stands as either an ordered or
disordered reflection of an external reality, and it is only through his manipulation of
sonic material that López rips his work from these transcendent realms. More than this,
however, López’s conception of the entire artefact produced partakes in this divorce
from an external reality, for whilst his earlier works such as La Selva bear a descriptive
title or image which ties the work to its context, in recent times López has increasingly
favoured a minimalist approach to presentation and packaging, his works being released
in clear cases with no text other than their (a)moniker, Untitled #χ. As he explains in an
interview with Fear Drop magazine,
putting titles or images attached to the sound work has far-reaching consequences in terms of restricting [its] possibilities and confining the sound creation into specific intentions or meanings. [...]here’s a whole lot of misinterpretation in seeing my austere recording’s presentations (empty transparent cases, no titles, etc.) as a design issue. It has nothing to do with minimal design, but it’s rather a way to leave the sound content open and to emphasize the essential importance of pure, blind listening. (López 2000)

Like Roussel, then, López divorces his works from all external narratival, illustrational, representational and conceptual impositions which might render transcendent (in their relation to an originary identity) apprehension of his artefacts possible instead to force our attention in onto the very sonic matter that he is treating. Similarly, his treatment of that sonic matter uses repetition as a founding principle, even though he refutes this. Asked by an interviewer from Revue et Corrigée how his use of repetition and cloning of sound cells links up to the displacement of the Bejaminian notion of aura that this induces in an era of mass-duplication, López replies:

The repetition and slow modification of cell musical units was the historical path followed by most American minimalist composers (and their European counterparts), with a very peculiar and, in my opinion, poor way to parallel the achievements of their minimalist partners in sculpture or painting. I don’t work with such a structural conception and don’t consider my music to be repetitive at all. As I perceive them, both the sound environments that I create and those that I listen to with fascination (generated by others or by the world) are not repetitive; they have a solid, flowing, permanent presence. (López 1999)
López’s protestations at his work being analysed according to laws of repetition, however, no longer hold once we move away from the Platonic conception of repetition, in which ‘the model is supposed to enjoy an originary superior identity […] whereas the copy is judged in terms of a derived internal resemblance’ (Deleuze 1994: 126-127), and towards a Leibnizian or Deleuzean notion of repetition. To explain how this kind of repetition operates, Deleuze firstly asks us to consider an instance of what we might call banal (Platonic) repetition as produced by the repetition of a decorative motif in which ‘a figure is reproduced, while the concept remains absolutely identical’ (Deleuze 1994: 19). He continues, ‘This is not how artists proceed in reality. They do not juxtapose instances of the figure, but rather each time combine an element of one instance with another element of a following instance. They introduce a disequilibrium into the dynamic process of construction, an instability, dissymmetry or gap or some kind which disappears only in the overall effect’ (Deleuze 1994, 19). Repetition of this order, therefore, instigates difference in itself, which is to say that it produces an intensive energy. It is precisely according to such principles that López’s exploration of sound matter proceeds, for the repetition of seemingly identical sound cells creates difference in itself or an intensive energy that is the very solid, flowing, permanent presence that López sees in his own work.

This difference in López’s work makes itself manifest in a number of ways. On Untitled #90, for instance, the investigation through repetition of the environmental sound matter of the rainforest morphs almost imperceptibly into a consideration of the sea before moving back again to insects of many different varieties, to the rainforest as a whole, to rain, to a different rainforest and so on. In this way, the listener is forced to find in this apparent repetition of an originary identity a process of differentiation in
which each repeated cell is a discrete singularity in itself that does not refer back to an originary identity but is rather a simulacra. On *Untitled #104*, meanwhile, López, starting from absolute silence, gradually presents us with sections of the individual cell of sound matter to be explored—a blast of death metal guitars and drums. Stuttering into life, following no apparent rhythmic logic, *#104* eventually settles into what appears to be a pattern of banal repetition. Indeed, if one examines wav graphs of these cells at various points throughout the composition, there appears to be little difference between them (see figure 1).

[insert figure 1 about here. Caption:] (Figure 1: Wav graph of 9.08 seconds of Francisco López’s *Untitled #104* split into two 4.54 second portions.)

Listening to the piece, however, the impression one gets is most definitely not one of banal repetition. It changes, shifts, moves, displaces, all the while affirming its own primordial and complete ontology as a singularity, as absolute sound or sonic matter. As Philip Sherburne writes in *The Wire*, ‘Rather than growing louder, or faster, or harder, it expands within, like a sponge, absorbing every sound it touches, turning space into a solid’ (Sherburne 2000: 51).

As a last example of this process, let me briefly recount my own experience listening to López’s vinyl-only release on the Mego label, *Untitled #92*. Having placed the disc of virginal-white acetate on my turntable, and knowing only that all of the sonic material on this album was produced from the sounds of the interaction between a stylus and a vinyl run-out groove (a choice which imbues the piece with a high-level of self-reflexivity and an even greater textural potential due to the symbiosis of data and reader), I settled back in my armchair, eyes shut, and listened—López’s preferred mode of reception from his public. After about forty-five minutes, bemused at how López had
managed to cram so much material onto one side of a 33rpm 12” record, I wandered over to my turntable to discover that my stylus had only advanced about one centimetre and was bouncing back and forth in the first locked groove of the album. What I had not realized is that three-quarters of this release is made up entirely of locked grooves. Why I had not realized this for forty-five minutes is because the repeated locked groove to which I had been listening deployed not a passive repetition, but an active one that created difference in itself with the quite extraordinary effect that I had truly believed myself to be listening to one, continuous, evolving piece stretched out in a linear groove over the entire recording surface. López had succeeded, in other words, in employing repetition as an agent of difference, and through that process had turned signifier (for noise as extraneous information in the transfer of data, as is the case with vinyl hiss, can indeed be a signifier) into an objet sonore, a textural element with its own singular—which is to say capable of an infinite number of transformations—ontology.

Thierry Knauff, like Francisco López, has spent time in rainforests, Knauff visiting South Cameroon to shoot his 1995 film Baka which portrays the lives and struggles for survival of the Baka Pygmies as the hardwood trees amongst which they live are decimated for commercial gain. Baka, like other films of Knauff’s such as Anton Webern (1991) and Seuls (1989), is essentially a documentary, in spite of Knauff’s tendency to problematise and transgress the limits of that form, a trait remarked upon in Agence.court: Bulletin trimestriel d’informations sur les activités du court métrage (2). Baka, indeed, essentially conforms to the model of conventional documentary or ethnographic cinema outlined by D.N. Rodowick in his book Gilles Deleuze’s Time Machine (see 1997: 157).
The documentary form by its very nature forges an organic link between a supposed originary identity or reality and its representation, just as does the bioacoustic tradition that López is so eager to distance himself from, as we have seen. As much as Knauff’s *Wild Blue: notes à quelques voix*, his first feature-length film, might appear in sections essentially to conform to this conception of documentary cinema, this film, like López’s pseudo-bioacoustics, subverts the documentary form to create something much more powerful by concentrating on the singular ontology of his object and medium and deploying difference and repetition to estrange narrative, create series in movement and investigate the textures in and with which he works.

That *Wild Blue* superficially resembles a documentary is perhaps not surprising given the fact that it is partly assembled from fragments of other works far more firmly rooted within that genre shot during Knauff’s peregrinations around the world. The fragmentary, collage form that is born of this methodology is evident from the very beginning of *Wild Blue*. The film starts from black, the soundtrack revealing insects and birds and the sound of wood being chopped. When the black screen finally gives way to image, the scene is precisely as would be expected, showing the everyday scenes of an African village and a lone figure chopping wood shot from within a house. A young girl enters the frame to stand at the door through which this scene is shot and to contemplate this scene with us. We cut to a close-up shot of her hand resting on the doorway’s rough stone surface and linger on this shot. We then cut to a close-up of her face as she glances to the side and then into camera. We cut to black and the opening credits. The distant rumbling heard as the opening credits roll morphs into the sound of a plane which reveals, once more, exactly what is expected with the return of the image: a shot of a plane in the sky, except that, rather than presenting the clarity of 35mm stock, the
image is now highly pixelated, as though shot on a low-grade camcorder. The sound of
the plane continues, mixed with the sound of rustling leaves as we cut to a (non-
pixelated) close-up of trees. As the camera pans slowly down from the treetop to its
base, we hear humming and the sound of children playing, children that we see once we
reach the base of the tree.

In these opening minutes of the film, what quickly becomes apparent is that we
are not in the documentary realm, in spite of any initial red herrings: far from being
witness to the gradual accretion of a coherent, objectively observed portrait of a specific
reality, we are, rather, offered fragments, each of which will become interlinked
throughout the film only insofar as they each constitute a series or motif that enters into
harmony and resonance with other series. This is to say, then, that the link from frame
to frame is not narratival, does not follow the representational model outlined by
Deleuze in *Difference and Repetition*, nor the sensorimotor logic of classical cinema
that he outlines in the first volume of his work on cinema, *The Movement-Image*, and
which is summarized by D.N. Rodowick in the following manner:

The sensorimotor schema limits movement to a physical trajectory or
transformation in space, giving a restricted sense to the image and to the
narrative logic deriving from it. Affections must be translated into spatial
images constitutive of a mise-en-scène. These in turn create the possibility of
situations requiring series of actions and reactions, conflicts and resolutions.
The whole of the sensorimotor schema unfolds as organic composition where
commensurability is the rule: on the one hand, movement between the parts of
the whole; on the other, montage within which the web of actions and reactions
is woven. Each requires connection through rational intervals. In every case the
image has precise spatial and temporal coordinates, which map predictably its extensions into other images. The motivation and the vehicle of change is a certain motricity. (Rodowick 1997: 74)

In cinematic texts obeying a sensorimotor schema, then, the justification for every element of the *mise-en-scène* obeys a pragmatic imperative driven by concerns exterior to the text itself, alien to the specificities of the cinema, concerns which are known in advance and that deny the image the very possibility of real movement (Deleuze 1986: 7). Rather than present a cinema of this kind—which essentially differs from the documentary form only insofar as its content is deemed fictional—, Knauff, in these opening sections of *Wild Blue*, presents us rather with what Deleuze has termed heautonomous opsigns and sonsigns, pure optical and auditory images that stand in isolation from each other and enter into relation via movement across series. Knauff, like López, achieves this isolation of the image from a normalized conception of linear narrative and time through processes of difference and repetition. Whilst he often repeats a shot, for instance, lingering successively on a building, or a tree, or a drill, his use of different angles, close-ups, slow zooms and pans, rather than forming a banal pattern of repetition in which the concept remains identical—premised on an originary identity or reality as are all representations—creates the disequilibrium in the dynamic process of construction that Deleuze talks of (Deleuze 1994: 19). The movement emanating from this process, as has been seen, creates a plurality of centres that distorts representation (Deleuze 1994: 56) in much the same way that the movement-image (in Deleuze’s analysis of pre-World War II cinema) creates an indirect image of time by freeing perception from a fixed point of view, juxtaposing divergent and conflicting movements. More than this, however, by creating this movement in the very mechanics
of the shot as the camera lingers on essentially static subjects, Knauff further distances us from normalized representational and temporal schemata grounded in Newtonian physics’ universal laws of motion, providing us with an image of time in its pure state, time as a model for thought conceived of along Bergsonian lines as internal movement. Knauff presents us, then, with a time-image—insofar as this is an achievable objective—and he does so, firstly, through the use in cinema of the painterly or photographic conceit of still life. As Deleuze writes on this phenomenon:

There is becoming, change, passage. But the form of what changes does not itself change, does not pass on. This is time, time itself, ‘a little time in its pure state’: a direct time-image, which gives what changes the unchanging form in which the change is produced. [...] The still life is time, for everything that changes is in time, but time does not itself change, it could itself change only in another time, indefinitely. (Deleuze 1989: 17)

Turning our gaze inwards towards the singular, discreet images themselves and away from the external relation to an originary identity that representational forms impose upon us, the movement that takes place across the film as a whole is effectuated via series, via a movement effectuated between ‘any-moment-whatevers’ and which, then, necessarily produce ‘the new, that is [...] the remarkable and the singular’ (Deleuze 1986: 7). This new, or affect, arises in the in-between of series, the interval, and relates movement to a quality that passes into the subject (or centre of indetermination) not as an object of perception nor an act of the subject but as coincidence of subject and object as pure quality. Because it is precisely in the in-between that the new arises, the interstice, the gap between series, becomes of the
utmost importance in the time-image. As Deleuze writes of Godard, a director in whose work this gap plays a major role:

in Godard’s method, it is not a question of association. Given one image, another image has to be chosen which will induce an interstice between the two. This is not an operation of association, but of differentiation, as mathematicians say, or of disappearance, as physicists say: given one potential, another one has to be chosen, not any whatever, but in such a way that a difference of potential is established between the two, which will be productive of a third or of something new. [...T]he interstice is primary in relation to association, or irreducible difference allows resemblances to be graded. The fissure has become primary, and as such grows larger. It is not a matter of following a chain of images, even across voids, but of getting out of the chain or the association. Film ceases to be ‘images in a chain … an uninterrupted chain of images each one the slave of the next’, and whose slave we are (Ici et ailleurs). It is the method of BETWEEN, ‘between two images’, which does away with all cinema of the One. It is the method of AND, ‘this and then that’, which does away with all the cinema of Being = is. Between two actions, between two affections, between two perceptions, between two visual images, between two sound images, between the sound and the visual: make the indiscernible, that is the frontier, visible. (Deleuze 1989: 179-180)

Knauff, for his part, explicitly recognizes the importance of the interstice in the creation of the musical—which is to say built from motifs, refrains and variations—construction of his film. Indeed, one of the female voices that narrates his film, espousing a philosophy remarkably similar to that of López, says:
Without silence, there is no design, there is no figure, it’s just a line. We begin from silence, therefore the pause is essential, the silence is essential. Otherwise it’s a flat line if you don’t use the pause and music is like structure, it is cutting in time, if I may say so.

This philosophy resonates strongly with two vital aspects of Knauff’s démarche in *Wild Blue*: his use of silence and, especially, of the black screen which is an extremely frequent trope throughout the film that functions precisely in the interstitial manner that Deleuze identifies in much (non-classical) contemporary cinema and especially that of Garrel. Indeed, Deleuze suggests that “The absence of image”, the black screen or the white screen’ no longer merely functions as punctuation in much contemporary cinema, obeying only its pragmatic, visible function, but that it has a further legible, non-visible function, namely to instigate a relation between the image and its absence. No longer obeying merely a pragmatic function, this absence of image formed by a cut becomes irrational, ‘valid for itself’, and thereby takes on genetic powers (Deleuze 1989: 200).

As was the case with López, then, Knauff’s use of difference, repetition and the interstice allow movement between series as opposed to linear, narratival movement and strict correspondences. Similarly, this non-representational expression composed of opsigns and sonsigns converts the signifier from these two axes into the audiovisual equivalent of an *objet sonore* which is of interest primarily because of its textural or timbral qualities. The clue to this reading of the film lies firstly in the predominance of the sense of touch.
As Deleuze has suggested, in cinema constructed of opsigns and sonsigns, the tactile is often the dominant sense. He writes, ‘it is the tactile which can constitute a pure sensory image, on condition that the hand relinquishes its prehensile and motor function to content itself with a pure touching’ (Deleuze 1989: 12). Outside of the sensorimotor schema, in which relations between images follow a purely functional imperative as they drive plot and characterization forwards towards an inexorable end, we are then invited merely to hold each image, to caress it, to contemplate it in itself and for itself. Indeed, this notion of the tactile forms the first and primary recurrent motif of the film—as can be seen from the image chosen for the film’s poster which shows a sun-cracked clay wall covered in white paint handprints. This sense of the tactile is transmitted firstly in images such as this, in slow, lingering shots of hands or feet in isolation or coming into contact with objects—feet on parched earth, hands handling letters, a hand opening and closing on itself, dancers coming into contact with the floor and each other in an intimate choreography, hands clapping and rhythmically rubbing together, a praying mantis cleaning itself meticulously, a boy’s cupped hands under a tap collecting water to rub on his face, a child caressing the soft prickles of a seed pod—but also through a manipulation of the very medium in which these images are presented.

The shot of a plane in the sky, as we have noted, is a highly pixelated image, an effect achieved by filming the image from a video image and repeating this process several times in order to force a generational degradation of the image. This process is seen elsewhere in the film and is often imposed on the second recurrence of an image. For instance, the tactile shot of feet walking over parched earth appears as a crystal-clear image first, only to be repeated shortly after in a highly pixelated form. Whereas
this device would often serve as a means to cast a sense of reality on the image, imbuing it with a documentary aura, for Knauff, it is simply a matter of heightening the tactile quality of the image, of exploring more fully the texture of the image. When asked why he combines 35mm quality with video he replies:

For one thing, because it is partly in video that snatches of the world are captured for us.

But also, so that we are reminded by its texture that it is only an image.

And that the closer we get, the less we see. (Knauff)

Nowhere is this more apparent than in a section of the film where we are shown a series of ancient statues so weathered and time-worn that their faces are for the most part missing. Knauff chooses to present these images in pixelated form and to shoot them (or, rather, the video image of them) in an ever nearer succession of close-up shots. As we get closer, the number of pixels on the screen decreases with the obvious result that the clarity of the image recedes until we are left with a pure image, a textural surface which has lost its signifying capacity and which can only be apprehended in itself and in the gap created by the relation of the recorded image to its re-recorded manifestations (see Deleuze 1986: 85).

Whilst Knauff’s use of video renders explicit the dominance of the textural qualities of the image over its documentary, representational, narratival or signifying aspects, his attention to the interplay of light and its effects upon his chosen film stock and developmental process—which provides clarity in the image whilst retaining grainy textures—are of paramount importance throughout the film. When prompted to
comment on his attention to materials in the organic sense of the term in his photographic treatment, he states:

The light may linger on the grain of someone’s skin, or on the veins of a leaf. It may be blinding, or it may accentuate the curve of a shoulder. It emanates from the material, and makes it visible. (Knauff)

The soundtrack also participates in this reflection on texture. As Knauff notes, ‘[the sound] never simply reiterates what we see. It has its own input. Like the image, it is an active participant in the film. The sound is the flesh of the film. It is a conveyer of meaning, and, most importantly, of feeling’ (Knauff). Precisely how the soundtrack performs this function through its use of non-voiced sound is easy to hear, for the sounds accompanying the images augment them, rather than simply being an adjunct to them. Thus, as we watch the leaves of a tree rustling in the wind, we can also discern the sound of rainfall, even though the image shows no rain. As is the case in López’s #90 discussed earlier, however, all that matters in the interplay of these different sounds is that their proximity of timbral qualities brings difference in itself to life through repetition, allowing a sensorial shift to take place almost imperceptibly. The isolation of the soundtrack, rather than serving merely to accompany the image, augments the tactile qualities of the image—as in the shots of the maîtres tambourineurs de Burundi and female dancers whose movements are heard as much as they are seen—and also asserts its symbiosis with and autonomy from the image through its continuous movement across the visual series of the film. Visually constructed, as we have noted, of discrete images, often isolated from each other by a black screen and that do not follow a linear narrative but enter into resonance with each other in a totally non-linear and apunctual
fashion, the soundtrack, rather than follow the cuts and breaks of the visual montage, often continues from one frame to the next, even across a black screen. In this manner, the soundtrack, whilst augmenting the tactility of the images, also asserts its autonomy from them, and it is this dual interplay between the auditory and the visual that rips even its voice-over narratives from a representational or documentary sphere.

The voice-over narratives of the film recount stories of extreme violence and suffering: knee-capping in Northern Ireland; civil disturbance and massacres in Burundi; the history of anti-aircraft towers in Germany; the calculated precision and deceit used to dispatch letter bombs; a reflection on the atrocities of which even educators and medical practitioners are capable of in times of war; the story of the water of a fountain being dyed red with blood to render the symbolism of power even clearer; a description of a man who delights in play-acting with firearms and other symbols of death; a lament for the lack of silence in the modern world of speed and the lack of compassion of a sniper; a song of sorrow; tales of personal tragedy and, finally, the harrowing story of a nine-year old schoolgirl raped (for it is immoral to kill virgins) and then killed for protesting against her country’s rulers in her notebook. It would be tempting to see in these accounts a documentary catalogue of the evil of which man is capable. The interplay of the dialogue and image, however, renders such a simplistic function impossible, for the images—deploying difference in itself through repetition—disrupt the linear narratives of the voice-over. Whilst the images that accompany these (sometimes plurivocal) monologues do refer to them in an often direct manner, in moving according to intensive principles they do not, however, establish a commensurability between image and vocal narrative with the result that the latter is
subjected to the operations of the former and apprehended as an *objet sonore*. Let us examine an example from the film better to understand this.

The monologue explaining the mechanics of knee-capping is accompanied by a set of reiterated images of barbed wired embedded in fragments of concrete, power drills and a hammer blow. Rather than serve merely as a visual parallel to or representation of the actions recounted, then, these images function as opsigns which in themselves reveal an undeniable beauty (just as the objects of violence portrayed, when abstracted from their function, can be contemplated as things to be beheld), and in breaking the signifying link between the auditory and the visual, it subsequently becomes very hard to concentrate merely on the narrative unfolding in our ears. Rather, we drift in and out of the story as we question its relation to the images, yet always remain aware of the timbral qualities of the voice which becomes, then, a sonsign, a pure acoustic image.

Knauff has acknowledged that it was in large part due to the timbral qualities of these (exclusively) women’s voices that he selected them to narrate his film. When asked how he chose his speakers, he replies:

> Some women were directly affected by the issues touched on in the text. Others were selected for their voice quality: the way their timbre of voice complements or contrasts with other voices in the film.

(Knauff)

It is thanks to the timbral resonances between the voices of the film also that Knauff is able to achieve an organic totality in the film as a whole from within its plurivocality and multilingualism (elements which are sometimes deployed within a single
monologue), each voice constituting a repeated figure that creates disequilibrium and hence differential relations.

In suggesting that these stories serve primarily not to refer to a specific reality and that they are all figures of a repeated idea is not by any means, however, to rob them of their denunciatory power or political engagement. On the contrary, by rendering the very horror and violence denounced beautiful in itself, an unbearable tension between extremes is created (a tension which exists also, of course, between many of the film’s own series, such as violence and trees, adults and children, noise and silence) and an intensive movement instigated that produces a model of thought as that which cannot be thought. (We are here once more very close to Deleuze when he invokes Artaud and Blanchot (see Deleuze 1989: 167-168).) This is not a question of glamorising horror and violence (as is often the case in Hollywood product) but of forcing thought to be born from the impossibility of representing this violence—just as for Artaud thought is forced into life by ‘the inexistence of a whole which could be thought’ (Deleuze 1989: 168)—at the same time as this passage beyond narrative into a realm of affect (which might be described as a process of sublimation as we pass directly from a solid or human perception into a gaseous perception (see Deleuze 1986: 84)) awakes in us a sensation of the sublime.

To relegate these stories to a mere documentary function so that they could enter into a process of banal repetition, always referring back to an originary reality and never able fully to recuperate the horror of that reality would, for Knauff, be unforgivable. As one of the film’s voices asks, invoking the media’s reporting of atrocities, ‘Who benefits from the endless repetition of such news?’ To take each of these stories simply as statistical evidence of the evil that resides in human nature would be to pretend to
explain and encapsulate that which escapes comprehension. As the voices in one of the
film’s polyvocal and multilingual monologues remark:

Jour après jour, soir après soir, s’empilent sans cesse les nouvelles de ces vies
perdues [piling up endlessly]. Chaque corps est recouvert par un tas d’autres
corps. Il y en a encore eu [so many], tant et tant. Chaque corps ainsi dénombré
devient un chiffre qui s’ajoute au décompte de la veille. Chaque corps se perd
dans un nombre qui le recouvre, chaque vie pourtant unique et différente est
recouverte comme effacée par l’addition de tant de vies perdues. Empiler ces
chiffres c’est oublier chacune de ces vies, c’est perdre une vie, plus une vie,
plus une vie [plus one life, plus one life, plus one life].

[Day after day, night after night, news of these lost lives piles up endlessly
[piling up endlessly]. Each body is covered by a pile of other bodies. There
have been [so many] of them, so very many. Each body counted out like this
becomes a number which is added to the total of the day before. Each body is
lost in a number which covers it, each life, though unique and different, is
covered as though forgotten by the addition of so many lost lives. To pile up
these numbers is to forget each of these lives, it is to lose one life, plus one life,
plus one life [plus one life, plus one life, plus one life].

Knauff himself perhaps best sums up the serial logic and tension that drives his
film when he himself reflects on it, musing:

1 The square brackets give the English translation, provided by the subtitles, of the dialogue of the second
voice narrating this polyvocal monologue, a voice whose timbre is remarkably similar in spite of the
difference of language used.
When I look at the film today, it seems to me that there is a permanent tension between a world that we know to be rife with extremes of intolerance and violence; and at the same time, the profound beauty of this world, despite the prevailing horror.

I know this may seem a shocking thing to say, but this coexistence is one of life’s tensions. I don’t mean to imply that beauty is redeeming. I simply mean that it makes life more liveable.

It helps us to live in this world in spite of everything… there is the horror and yet this beauty.

This is not to suggest that we should dispense with revolt or compassion.

(Knauff)

Rejecting the simple binary of negative dialectics wherein contradictory elements deemed inadequate in themselves are resolved through the production of an underlying truth, the very conditions of possibility for living come, for Knauff, from the coexistence of contradictions held in tension—a superior dialectic—that affirms their difference and thus always produces thought out of irreconcilables that cannot be closed off in a tidy synthesis and that proffer no answer. It is not the aim of *Wild Blue*, then, to represent an exterior reality nor to provide solutions to the violence of the world, for it comes into being only in the in-between of violence and beauty (and the in-between of all of its other series) and can but assert those qualities. Its vision, then, is that of an innocent, that of a subject who has not yet been petrified by belief in an embodied self and who subjects all around it to its own perception. It is no doubt significant, then, that children form a part of this vision, for children (as Deleuze suggests in his paper ‘What
Children Say’ (Deleuze 1998: 61-67) and in his concept of becoming-child elaborated primarily in *A Thousand Plateaus* (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: especially 232-309) do not draw strict lines of equivalence and identification between objects but define the world around them through affects, drawing up a map of intensity as opposed to a map of co-ordinates.

This is not to say, however, that this vision is infantile or naïve, far from it; for its childlike qualities are merely one level of intensity of an infinite power to perceive differently through difference—just as a becoming-child is equivalent to a becoming-animal or a becoming-imperceptible at a different level of intensity (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 299). As Knauff says, thinking about the motif of childhood that traverses *Wild Blue*:

They are children. They represent nothing other than themselves. They don’t point to childhood or some notion of innocence. No. They are simply there. That’s all.

Naturally they have a certain grace. And their presence moves me. But not exclusively. Or at any rate, not more than other individuals in the film.

Nonetheless, these children are there, in the world; a world they didn’t choose, and that is as we know it to be.

How is one to live in it, all things considered?

It’s something I ask myself. Naturally I don’t know the answer.

(Knauff)

As for Francisco López, whilst he has not said so himself, it is entirely feasible that works such as his #90 can also be read not as documents recorded to archive the
dying cries of our environment—for such would be to admit defeat—, but as an embrace of those sounds that is born from the differential relation of the interaction of various intensities of the auditory content of our world, a relation whose immanent possibilities will be significantly reduced if man’s wholesale destruction of his own environment continues. Nonetheless, what is certain is that both of these artists in the final analysis discover in the estrangement of narrative, the deployment of difference arising from repetition and through an investigation of the very matter with which they work the means to break with the representational model long considered to be a limiting factor for artistic production. Rather than represent a known object or proffer the semblance of a documented reality, Knauff and López create, rather, a series of affects, images that reach us directly, outside of the sensorimotor schema and beyond linear time considered as a pre-constituted set, images that point towards a pre-personal politics in which the whole can be conceived of only as ‘the Open’, as a relation that necessarily transforms the whole (see Deleuze 1986: 8-11).²

² My thanks go out to Thierry Knauff for his film and his generosity to me during his visit to Australia and since, to Francisco López for the listening experiences he has given me, and to Culture, Theory and Critique’s peer reviewers.
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