

## **Critical Form; or The Gothic Stone, a New-Materialist Perspective**

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Critique, or destruction, takes place where there is something (to paraphrase Derrida), whereas thought, any thought whatsoever, is the fruit of this contradiction, Malabou would add (see 2008; 82). Critique then does not find its origin in language or in thought but rather in how matter happens; in plasticity, in matter-being-formed. In this position paper I propose to have a short look at the naturalist complexity of the Gothic, the Barbaric as Ruskin and Worringer refer to it, which is endless. The "love of *fact*", as Ruskin calls it (1963: 192), which is so central to the Gothic builder, and by means of which his stones critique the Classisist or Roman teachers from which he received the models and the designs, makes the Gothic builder create roundness instead of a circle and alignments instead of a straight line. Even the simplest Gothic linings, as Cimabue for instance drew them, find their way into infinity. His body of Christ, through the cross (the doubled Gothic line) make "the fluctuations of the flesh become a play of dermic forces" (Cache 1995:75).

The Gothic, Spuybroek claims, is "more radical than any other architectural style up to the present day" (2011: 26) because of its immanent variation. Even its most elementary form –the flexible rib– is both ornament and structure, and easily turns into a fan vault, a colonnet, a chevet and rose window. The Gothic destroys everything.

Malabou's plasticity is translated by Spuybroek with "sympathy", a great romantic concept that the Gothic is not to be reduced to the stones, the colors and the sounds produced: the thoughts produced and fed back into it, necessarily belong to it. This is what Malabou means when she concludes: "To exist is to be able to change difference while respecting the difference of change..." (79). This "really togetherness" (Whitehead) that makes up the event in which the Gothic stone *and* Gothic sound *and* Gothic thought takes place, we call the Gothic. The Gothic individual that thus includes the entirety we just discussed, happens "with a language that speaks before words, with gestures which develop before organized bodies, with masks before faces, with specters and phantoms before characters..." (Deleuze 1994: 10). Gothic creativity happens before cognition, before language. The Gothic thus installs a collectivity that, with Simondon's words, in self-generating ways, desires "action and emotion to be in resonance with each other" (Simondon 1992: 108). This includes the critique it generates.

Then when Deleuze notes that "Bach's [...] music is an act of resistance, an active struggle against the separation of the profane and the sacred" (2006: 323/4), this is by all means the Gothic at work refusing Roman or Classical Rule. The variability and changefulness that directs our actions and emotions when we feel or even prehend the tenderness in Bach's music (melody transforms into harmony transforms into dissonant transforms into counterpoint), critiques the Roman or Classist Rule that cuts, the straight lines that organize, oppose and need to rule not only the built environment, but everywhere. With its processes of variation, with the ever changing diffractions

caused by the moving of matters and the spatialities thus realized, an *infinite* idea is liberated. The rediscovery of the sacred is crucial to the Gothic spirit.

Deleuze's words tell us that Bach's music offers us a spirituality that has nothing to do with the Church as an institute (the true incarnation of the Roman Empire). Ruskin already ensured us that the Gothic did not so much happen in "those glorious cathedrals", who, on the contrary *corrupted* Gothic architecture. Ruskin fiercely argues: "By the monk it was used as an instrument for the aid of his superstition; when that superstition became a beautiful madness, and the best hearts of Europe vainly dreamed and pinned in the cloister, and vainly raged and perished in the crusade – through that fury of perverted faith and wasted war, the Gothic rose also to its loveliest, most fantastic, and, finally, most foolish dreams; and, in those dreams, was lost (Ruskin and Rosenberg 1980: 61)".

Bach also shows us that this Gothic spirituality has nothing to do with the highest of tones (although with Gothic compositions from Allegri's *Miserere* to Prince's *Purple Rain*, the heights definitely cause a general ascension). That deep spirituality that necessarily resonates with Bach's compositions cannot be pinned down anywhere. It happens in the Gothic *as a whole* which keeps on installing this new spirituality, this unbound spirituality that is not transcendental but that happens in *all* the actions and emotions that make up its intensity. Thus the Gothic presents us a deeply religious otherness, one that immanently destroys the dominant (Roman/Classicist) form of Christianity. This immanent thought of the Gothic, these spiritual resonances that create the flattest of serpentine surfaces and the highest of nonorganic structures created by its pure material variation and elasticity... comes with a radically new "God".

This *another God* of the Gothic is then the morphogenetic real that we feel or sympathize with in Bach's music, in the Gothic stone, in Cimabues cross, as well as in the resonances that fill up our body when included by it. Analyzing the *The Burial of the Count of Orgaz* by El Greco, Deleuze shows this Gothic God and its wholly other actions and emotions noting that,

"With God – but also with Christ, the Virgin, and even Hell – lines, colors and movements are freed from the demands of representation. The Figures are lifted up, or doubled over, or contorted, freed from all figuration. They no longer have anything to represent or narrate, since in this domain they are content to refer to the existing code of the Church. Thus, in themselves, they no longer have to do with anything but "sensations" – celestial, infernal, or terrestrial sensations. Everything is made to pass through the code; the religious sentiment is painted in all the colors of the world. One must not say, "If God does not exist, everything is permitted." It is just the opposite. For with God, everything is permitted." (Deleuze 2002: 9/10)

God, as produced by the Gothic, has the material variations discussed above as its object.; it is the lived abstraction set free by the Gothic. It is no different from this object (they are "the same"). Its ideas are not limited (by its individuality) but are determined rather by its movements, by the resonances that pattern it. This time it is not the Roman Julius/Jesus, the God that *only* gives us Rules of Language and that Nietzsche and Klossowski (and Artaud) so

much detested. The Gothic God is of a wholly other alternative nature. Through architecture, the first of the arts, through the resonances between the clay, the lime and the flint, the ascent of the Gothic stone shows us materialist critique at its best.

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