

The Swarm: A Provocation for Opening

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The question isn't so much of what delineates my body from yours, or any body from any other body, <that is a question of borders, of boundaries which are often first taught to be seen and later learnt to be felt, generally a process of learning to project one's awareness 'out' and then back 'in' and onto one's body> but rather what breaks down our own seemingly stable borders from within. The movement of conscious awareness, of sensation which fills the void of this question, tends to be quite robust.

Learning to be an individual who has a body with stable boundaries is the first type of work we do. This sort of radical atomisation of the (possible) collective into dis-embodied individuals is necessary for capitalism and the identities we develop therein. '[B]y alluding to a peculiar dialectic of atomization and collectivity' (Ross 1988: 100), Nietzsche, in his critique of the ideology of work, concludes:

In winter we shall travel in a little pink railway carriage
With blue cushions.
We'll be comfortable. A nest of mad kisses lies in wait
In each soft corner.

You will close your eyes so as not to see through the window
The evening shadows grimacing,
Those snarling monsters, a swarm
Of black devils and black wolves.

Then you will feel your cheek scratched ...
A little kiss, like a mad spider,
Will run about your neck ...

And you'll say to me "Find it!" bending your head,
—And we'll take a long time to find that creature
—Who travels far ...¹

Behind the glorification of "work" and this tireless talk of the "blessing of work" I find the same thought as behind the praise of impersonal activity for the public benefit: the fear of everything individual. At bottom, one now feels when confronted with work—and what is invariably meant is relentless industry, from early till late—that such work is the best police, that it keeps everybody in harness and powerfully obstructs the development of reason, of covetousness, of the desire for independence. For it uses up a tremendous amount of nervous energy and takes it away from reflection, brooding, dreaming, worry, love, and hatred; it always sets a small goal before one's eyes and permits easy and regular satisfaction (Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Dawn* (1881), quoted in Ross (1988: 100)).²

This sort of 'relentless industry, from early till late' can easily be located in each individual body that is legible, that we allow to pass us unremarkably in the street, that we call human. Shoring up the borders and boundaries of our bodies requires a huge amount of

¹ Arthur Rimbaud, 'A Dream for Winter' (1870), quoted in Ross (1988: 33–35). This translation of 'Rêvé pour l'hiver' is from *Arthur Rimbaud: Complete Works*, translated and edited by Paul Schmidt (New York: Harper & Row, 1976).

² The quotation from *Morgenröte* is from *The Portable Nietzsche*, translated and edited by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Viking, 1954).

work, a process of monitoring the fear, anxiety, shame and embarrassment which have somehow become the most ‘human’ traits, as they enable the over-rationalisation of everything. Sensation is only allowed in the prescribed ways. The individualism of capitalism is suffocating, dulling, disconnecting.

That which breaks down those imagined bodily borders <that we work so hard at maintaining so we can hold onto the privilege of continuing to do that work we believe makes us human>, like insects crawling within, spurring a horrifyingly beautiful, buzzing, vibrating de-territorialisation, is the potential for becoming-other; A liberation from ‘the individualism that animates capitalist society’ (Ross 1988: 101);

A move toward the swarm.

Bibliography

Ross, Kristin, *The Emergence of Social Space: Rimbaud and the Paris Commune* (London: Verso, 1988)