

## **Working to Design: The Self-Perpetuating Ideology of Rock or ... ‘The New Bob Dylan’**

**John Scannell, Macquarie University**

*To write is certainly not to impose a form (of expression) on the matter of lived experience ... Writing is a question of becoming, always incomplete, always in the midst of being formed, and goes beyond the matter of any liveable or lived experience. It is a process, that is, a passage of Life that traverses both liveable and lived. Writing is inseparable from becoming: in writing, one becomes-woman, becomes-animal or vegetable, becomes-molecule to the point of becoming-imperceptible. (Deleuze 1998: 1)*

In an article written for *The Guardian* newspaper, ‘Don’t Look Back’ (2009), music writer and journalist, John Harris, attempts to assess the place of his craft today, making plain his concern that it would compare rather unfavourably to the work of his esteemed antecedents. His charge, that contemporary rock writing does not reach the lofty standards set by writers such as Lester Bangs, Greil Marcus and Nick Kent, is predicated on the limits of the current technological zeitgeist, where a digital world of convenience and mouse-clicks continues to assert its authority over a declining print media, and which has had, in turn, an impact on the long form ‘rhapsodies or forensic critiques’ (para. 32) indulged in by his 1970s and 1980s analogue counterparts. Harris argues that the problem is not that there isn’t a lot of quality music writing around these days—if anything, the proliferation of media has ensured a surfeit of quality writing, and more consistently than ever before. Rather, he says that the novelty of the best writers of the previous generation has grown into self-reflexive trope and staple, in a

form unduly hampered by overt self-awareness of the style and substance of its forebears:

Rock's once-frantic pace of development has long since slowed, partly thanks to the second-hand nostalgia that Bangs predicted: it's now an old and self-referential form, seemingly fated to repeat itself ... The breed of neurotic loudmouth that gave us not just Lennon, Bowie, Rotten et al, but notable writers at Creem and the NME, seems to be pretty much extinct. (para. 34)

This is not simply knee-jerk romanticism on the part of Harris, but something more deeply epistemological in nature. Nor is it unprecedented, at least not in the broader world of music writing: discussion on the 'decline of art music journalism' preoccupied the world of classical music criticism as far back as the 1980s (Sandow 2007).

To my mind, the Harris article is an admission to the effects of escalating speed. The digital world increasingly demands a digital pace, suffering the subsequent demands of turnover. As traditional print media forms now fight for survival, they are no longer able to sustain articles by the prosaic musical fringe-dweller, given that accommodating the niche might come at the expense of the publication's very existence. This is a situation of which the record industry is more than familiar. The digital age has been used as the culprit for the music industry's ongoing decline in sales revenues, and in response, cash-strapped music companies continue to mine the back catalogues of unreleased music from recognised, and mostly dead, musical artists, to keep a seemingly terminal industry afloat in treacherous times. The circumstances of today's rock industry—generally multinational rather than cottage; the music of the hegemony rather than the rebel—means that the industry has attained a state of respectability through critical mass, which is reflected in the types of contemporary publications that it duly inspires:

Whereas music writing was once the province of a few hundred thousand fans and a handful of writers, usually in specialised magazines, it's now in the bookshop, the red-top and "quality" press, the blogosphere and beyond. The result too often suggests a very modern combination of abundance and short weight. To put it another way: how is it that writing about music now is everywhere, and yet seems to be nowhere at all? (Harris 2009: para. 5)

The concerns about the decline of quality contemporary music writing seem to be increasingly vociferous, and Harris is not the only one who is worried. In fact, the popular *Drowned in Sound* website has seen fit to host an ongoing and protracted dialogue around the subject, 'Music Journalism R.I.P?' (Adams 2009), which emerged

from a series of articles on the topic, guest-edited by the now Brisbane-based stalwart of the genre, Everett True. Whilst the *Drowned in Sound* debate provides no definitive answer to the question as such, one of the more salient grievances to emerge from the fracas is a problem afflicting 'journalism' in general: music criticism is increasingly concerned with regurgitating a press release and simply tacking an opinion onto it.<sup>1</sup>

Whilst further prognostication about the demise of music journalism is not the business of this paper, the inherent deficiencies of the contemporary situation are. My own criticism extends beyond the diminishing returns of the 'cut and paste' logic of the digital age, or the stultifying effects of the genre's own self-reflexive narcissism, to the very problem of *opinion* itself: a preponderance of generality, which by nature is more than likely built upon repetition and cliché, rather than on creative thought. That music writing and/or journalism is all too often consumed by its own stylistic codes, as Harris contends, means that it is condemned to repeat formulas, motifs and clichés, as the idea of 'music writing' takes precedence over the actual novelty of the artists themselves. As esteemed music journalist and writer Greil Marcus says, 'when you read about musicians, what's being reviewed is their career, not their work: how is this record going to contribute to the building of their audience, or their ability to reclaim an audience that's been lost?' (Marcus cited in Harris 2009)

Whilst ruminating on the reflections of Marcus, I want to address the likely objection that this redress of 'music writing,' which takes in both music journalist and writer alike, and aimed at nobody in particular, is an ill-informed conflation. For the sake of potentially opening up another meta-argument, I will conflate them anyway. I concede the apparent differences between the workaday music journalist of say, the weekly street press, whose six inches of proselytising will undoubtedly be binned within a week, and the merits of the long-form literary treatise. However, what is common to the writing of both worlds is the problem of *representationalism*. Both genres suffer from the misguided idea that the writer needs to redraw the exterior facade of the event, to signpost and situate so that the audience has an apparent fragment of reality to reference at all times.

In fact, we could go as far as to say that music and writing have no inherent kinship. In

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<sup>1</sup> The observation is drawn from the forum discussion at [drownedinsound.com](http://drownedinsound.com).

the music writing process, the power of music is subsumed into a foreign modality; it is captured and rendered into the printed word, made to signify, made to represent *something*, no matter how far from reality this representation may be. A more appropriate situation might be to respond in kind, or, as Deleuze and Guattari might say, that the music writing process should pursue a ‘becoming-music’ itself (Deleuze & Guattari 1988: 299-309). Rather than subjecting music to the realm of representation, the writer should instead be concerned with harnessing and re-channelling those forces of sensation or affect that gave rise to it in the first place, and which might inspire a similar literary creativity as part of this reflection.

This stance assumes the Deleuze-Guattarian position that the function of art is to facilitate the creation of affects and percepts. If these affects can be understood as the actual experiences of the body, percepts, then, are the mode of delivery: if my body is jumping to the beat of a drum sequence, then this affection is driven by a perception of sound. My opinion of this sound has no bearing on its actual effect; whether I judge it as good or bad sound, it affects me anyway, and that is the point. To do justice to the actual forces of affect and percept, requires that the power of their singularity must be extricated from the realm of generality, as Claire Colebrook explains:

Affects and percepts, in art, free these forces from the particular observers or bodies who experience them. At its simplest level imagine the presentation of “fear” in a novel, even though it is not we who are afraid. Affects are sensible experiences in their singularity, liberated from organising systems of representation. A poem might create the affect of fear without an object feared, a reason, or a person who is afraid ... Part of this is achieved not so much by referring to objects but through rhythms and pauses, so that it is the sense of absence, of halting, of hesitation or holding back that creates an affect of fear: a fear that is not located in a character nor directed to an object. (Colebrook 2002: 22)

One might agree that writing about music is akin to a ‘Terpsichorean architecture,’ if only because a lot of writing about music simply reduces its affective power into linguisticism; that is, a pursuit of representing experiences *of* the world through language, rather than allowing the language to express a musical world itself. From the work of Deleuze and Guattari we might understand that writing is not simply concerned with the process of recounting memories and experiences, but is instead concerned with the production of sensation equivalent to the affective power of the music that inspired it in the first place. This idea, of course, may be at odds with our received understanding of the writing process—that idea that language is meant to structure our perception of

the world, even if that language inordinately depends on the general, on the consensus, or is tempered by opinion.

As a Deleuze-Guattarian inspired response, this paper argues against the common assumption that music writing as a guide for the putative listener, or otherwise, should offer opinion. The problem with opinion, as proposed by Deleuze and Guattari, and succinctly recapitulated here by Claire Colebrook, is that ‘we move from a particular experience and use it to form some whole that reduces difference and complexity. Everyday opinions are bland and reductive generalisations ... Opinion moves from my specific likes and desires and homogenises desire, producing a general “subject”’ (2002: 16).

To curtail the reduction of music’s power into generality, the music writer should instead pursue an approach that might harness the very difference of life that inspired the artist in the first place. In this respect, the writer should attempt to convey a musically inspired sensation, rather than simply fold the power of life, the power of art and music back into language and representation. For instead of trying to represent the world, the writing process should be concerned with giving something back to the life from which language emerges, a process that will elicit change in the world itself, in turn. Whilst generally unsympathetic of Deleuzian philosophy, Peter Hallward gives a succinct assessment of this position: ‘appropriately used, language helps carry the world towards its “outside.” Reality is not outside of language, it is rather literature that expresses the moving-outside of both language and reality’ (Hallward 2006: 108). Writing, according to Deleuze and Guattari, provides us with this power to move beyond the representational, or what we simply know, and prompts us instead to think how experience itself might be extended. The power of writing lies in its capacity to ‘render visible’ the forces of life, and in the process, transform our very experience of that life:

Writing is an orientation; it is the skill that consists in developing a compass of the cognitive, affective and ethical kind. It is quite simply an apprenticeship the art of conceptual and perceptual colouring. A new image, or philosophical concept, is an affect that breaks through frames and representations. It illuminates a territory through the orientation of its coordinates; makes visible/thinkable/sayable/hearable forces, passions and affects that were previously unperceived. (Braidotti 2005: 307)

The writer, then, should be engaged in the very same business as the artist they are ‘writing about’; a renunciation of limitations rather than an adherence to them, an

emancipation of invisible/unthinkable/unsayable/unhearable forces that might effect real difference. This literary becoming, says Peter Hallward, is achieved through the ‘appropriate use of language’ that will directly convey the ‘vitality of sensation and experience ... [w]hat matters then is not what such a text might mean but what it can be made to produce or accomplish’ (Hallward 2006: 108). Hallward goes on to say that our ideas of conventional interpretation should instead ‘be replaced with an appreciation for the mechanical and diagnostic potential of literary texts’ (108). That writing might help us to explore how ‘we might stretch or overcome the limits of our experience ... and ultimately the limits of ourselves’ (108), in the pursuit of becoming-other, becoming-woman, animal, vegetable, or even imperceptible, as outlined by Deleuze in the quote cited at the beginning of this essay.

A specific example of writing as becoming will be addressed later in the essay, but for present purposes I will present a simple cinematically derived example that might illustrate the limitations of representation, the problem of the contemporary ‘bio-pic.’ Nothing is more infuriating than the filmmaker who tries to capture their version of history, for no matter how apparently faithful the depiction, representation only captures a chronology of events, and does nothing in terms of capturing the vitality of the artist it is supposed to be concerned with. The only way to capture the vitality and the becoming-other of the artistic experience is to try and convey art’s power to make the world strange, and an appropriate example of such a non-representational, affectively inspired work might be found in Todd Haynes’s *I’m Not There* (2007), a film inspired by, rather than representative of, the life of Bob Dylan. By dispensing with literal representation, the film instead attempts to capture the forces of difference that drove Dylan’s artistic trajectory, its infidelity to the ‘truth’ inspired perhaps by Dylan’s own recently published tome of faulty memory, *Chronicles: Volume One* (2004).

These two Dylan-related examples present writing that is not concerned with depicting ‘history’ but instead, transformation and becoming through experimentation and of ...’ intensities that foster patterns of becoming. Experimentation expresses different topological modes; they enact a creative process that is not configured by unfolding a fixed essence or telos. Creativity is understood as a multiple and complex process of transformation, otherwise the flux of becoming. Put simply, creativity affirms the positive structure of difference’ (Braidotti in Parr 2005: 306-307). The truly creative

writer will dispense with similitude and instead give precedence to this pursuit of difference, a process of effecting no less than the becoming of the world itself.

### **The problem of ‘audience’**

Of course at this stage, one should indeed ask, who it is that the writer actually writes for. The simplest answer is never for an ‘audience,’ conventionally understood as a contemporaneous public sphere. In this respect, I agree with Deleuze and Guattari’s assertion that the work of art has its reception only by a ‘people to come’ and that art is made precisely because ‘the people are missing’ (Deleuze 1989: 216–217). As the philosophers discuss in *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (1986), the fact that the artist/writer, ‘lacks a people,’ requires a production of audience, even if this audience is to emerge, perhaps, within some unspecified future. Following this logic, we can see how having an idea of one’s audience can only be an imposition on the creative process, as it caters to presupposition and expectation rather than being properly concerned with the production of difference for itself.

One might think here, about the concept of a book proposal, where the publisher will ask the writer who they think their audience is. When the writer replies, ‘well, I do not have one as yet, and I’m not sure I will have,’ the publisher simply responds with a hypothetical demographic. The actual purpose of writing as the pursuit of difference, is given over to the process of working to design, a reiteration of protocols at the expense of actual novelty, in the service of an audience that may never exist anyway. Hence the idea of connecting with this potentially non-existent mass is a futile endeavour, and the best one can do is provide a net of catch-all generalities and clichés, in the hope of harvesting the most basic forms of ‘communication’ in the process.

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Indeed, the very concept of communication, which most would nominate as being central to the general function of writing, is also worth challenging. Deleuze and Guattari are renowned for having little time for ‘communication,’ which they actually place in opposition to the process of ‘creation’ (Deleuze & Guattari 1994: 108). As they contend in *What Is Philosophy?*, ‘we do not lack communication. On the contrary, we have too much of it. We lack creation’ (1994: 108).

The philosophers' argument revolves around the problem of communication's co-option by capitalism, which has commodified the process of concept creation where it is now more likely to be the domain of 'sales promotion' (1994: 10), such as those worlds of advertising, public relations, and even academia, for which communication is *a business*. As Deleuze and Guattari attest, 'philosophy has not remained unaffected by the general movement that replaced Critique with sales promotion' and that 'the simulacrum, the simulation of a packet of noodles, has become the true concept, and the one who packages the product, commodity, or work of art has become the philosopher, conceptual persona, or artist' (1994: 10). This is the world of capitalism forcing its 'communication' upon us everywhere we turn, giving us more 'concepts' than we have actual time to think with.

Contemporary popular music is no less affected, and it appears that the advertorial writing and marketing machine pervades its constitution more virulently than ever before; one only has to look at the recent spate of reality TV shows dedicated to pop star creation, and of the ready-made markets that these 'stars' are being cultivated for. Such a cynical exercise can only be the domain of those who think in terms of audience, and who create these archetypes of mass-marketability. In this environment that eschews creativity in the pursuit of reiteration and cliché, Deleuze and Guattari's opposition of communication and creation, becomes all the more apparent. For our general conception of communication is limited by the fact that it assumes a general understanding is its natural outcome. Creativity, on the other hand has no such aim, and as Vähämäki and Virtunen comment, 'Concepts, paradoxically, refer always to something outside history and beyond communication. The concept has nothing to do with a pre-set task or correct solution. The concept opens a break towards movement, time and change' (Vähämäki & Virtunen 2006: 222).

The concept is about the disruption of the world, rather than an adherence to common experience predicated on representation. Whilst this might be communication of some type, it is hardly creative. To further compound this problem, in their efforts to 'communicate,' a lot of music journalists and critics are inclined to draw from clichés, if only because it is the nature of the communications process itself to produce clichés. As Deleuze and Guattari proscribe in *What Is Philosophy?*, the writer does not simply, 'write on a blank page; but the page or canvas is already so covered with preexisting,

preestablished clichés that it is first necessary to erase, to clean, to flatten, even to shred, so as to let in a breath of air from the chaos that brings us the vision' (1994: 204).

This is not to say that music journalism is any more or less at fault here than any other genre of writing, but rather that the form itself is so effectively built on clichés, that it cannot escape from its self-imposed mode of constitution. Think, for example, of those banal and (ultimately fictional) lists of, 'the best album ever,' 'the greatest band ever,' 'the best performance ever' and so on. The problem remains that if we subject the vast world of musical difference to such simple examples of representation and cognition, then we impose all sorts of artificial strictures on how to think about music, which not only limits its creative capacity, but also imprisons thought in the process. For rather than helping the reader to make appropriate choices, the reduction of a vast and diverse musical landscape into a series of spurious generic distinctions simply culminates in a general limiting of the acceptance of difference in artistic expression.

### **The 'new' Bob Dylan**

To illustrate such banality at work, I nominate here, the terminally abused cliché of 'the new Bob Dylan.' Rock writers and critics have been promising audiences a new Bob Dylan for years, yet it is a promise that can only go unfulfilled, a problem that reduces the difference of an emerging artist down to the similitude of preconceived identity. Bruce Springsteen, David Bowie, John Prine, Kevin Coyne, Loudon Wainwright, Patti Smith, Jim Carroll, Elliott Murphy, Tom Waits, Billy Bragg, Eminem, Beck, Jakob Dylan, Edmund Enright, Ryan Adams, Alex Turner from the Arctic Monkeys, will.i.am from the Black Eyed Peas, Kanye West, Conor Oberst of Bright Eyes, Two Gallants and James Blunt: these are some of the many artists who have been referred to as the 'new Bob Dylan.' The cause is as objectionable as it is futile. It is not that these artists are not as good as Bob Dylan or unworthy necessarily; rather, the objection comes from the proclivity to keep reducing new artists to *a* Bob Dylan. Despite the fact that the 'old' Bob Dylan has no need of a successor is moot, and this quest for similitude is simply a redundant game, one that not only hampers the creative power of the artist in question, but also that of the author of the pronouncement as well. Indeed, such banal generalisations are just simply bad for thought as it inspires the generality: the pursuit of homogeneity over difference.

Of course, my choice of ‘the New Bob Dylan’ is a banal example, but it is exemplary of how, at worst, music writing is simply interminable discussion, a reiteration, a retread of tired mythologies, clichés and recapitulations. To find many other such examples of pointless music writing, one does not have to look much further than the countless biographies that clog the shelves of the local bookstore. Most music biographies constitute a mercenary act, where the title simply exploits the famous person as meme, and in the end, you might know some ‘facts’ about the artist in question, but you don’t really understand the creative process or how it works, and more importantly, how it actually affects. This criticism can be extended to the nostalgia of music magazines such as *Mojo* and *Uncut*, which will resort to the inevitable Beatles article as a means of boosting circulation. Even a more marginal music magazine, *The Wire*, for example, cannot extend its literary experiment to the same levels of creativity as the musicians it represents.

There is little reason to believe that anything will change, so long as the presupposition of ‘audience’ actually commits the writer to submit to communication. Until we overcome the presupposition of ‘audience,’ it will remain an impediment to the production of art and the functioning of the artist. The truly creative artist will flee the demands of audience, lest they be confined to the role of performing jukebox. This is precisely the scenario depicted by Bob Dylan in his book, *Chronicles*, an example of what I consider to be excellent music writing, even if it is not the work of a more traditionally recognised ‘music writer.’

Purportedly an autobiography, *Chronicles* is anything but. Rather than represent the ‘truth’ about the now mythical public concerns of his career, including his 1966 ‘motorcycle accident,’ and his undisclosed marital status, Dylan instead uses the book to fabricate further myths. In the process he deftly eludes the limits of the more banal forms of representationalism, and instead gives us the power of sensation in response, through the allusion, red herrings, and more often than not, downright bullshit that made him so captivating a performer in the first place.

Amid the historical fabulation, Dylan does provide certain glimpses of his inner life, if only as a rejoinder to the very types who are looking to him to be *their* Bob Dylan, with *their* idea of his story. For example, when describing his 1987 tour with Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers, Dylan writes, ‘Wherever I am, I’m a 60’s troubadour, a folk-rock

relic, a wordsmith from bygone days, a fictitious head of state from a place nobody knows' (Dylan 2004: 147). Of having to play and re-play his old songs he comments that, 'it was like carrying a package of heavy rotting meat' (2004: 148), and laments being beholden to audience expectations of what 'Bob Dylan' was to them, which simply refused Dylan his own vast and demonstrably remarkable powers of becoming. Yet this audience refused the new in place of refrains that might help them to reclaim *their* youth, *their* memories. As a result of this situation, Dylan would in the late 1980s embark on what has been subsequently described as the 'Never Ending Tour,' in which he contended (in a convoluted way) that he was after a new mode of delivery, a quest, that for all intents and purposes, resembled his own search for a 'people to come,' one that might cast aside the demands of the 'stadium rock' crowd. In fact, there is a Deleuzean resonance to be found in Dylan's explanation of why he would embark on this journey:

There was nothing evolutionary about what I was about to do, no one could have expected it. Without knowing as much, I had a gut feeling that I had created a new genre, a style that didn't exist as of yet and one that would be entirely my own. All the cylinders were working and the vehicle was for hire. I definitely needed a new audience because my audience at that time had more or less grown up on my records and was past its prime and its reflexes were shot. They came to stare and not participate. That was okay, but the kind of crowd that would have to find me would be the kind of crowd who didn't know what yesterday was. (Dylan 2004: 155)

Although I might correct this assessment to say that the audience did not suffer from poor reflexes at all, but were simply a reflexive action-reaction loop, not prone to thought about creativity at all. This going through the motions, is actually the bane of our collective existence, as potentially interesting set lists are instead subsumed by the more recognisable 'hits,' designed to assuage audience expectation (hence the safe Paul McCartney concerts of the last twenty years).

The agenda of the audience is hardly ever about the art; it is all about them. This is why the artist's work should be no different, and must always produce for 'a people to come.' The artistic gesture is always just a virtuality, not yet discernible, but awaiting actualisation in some unspecified future, by this 'people to come.' The artist speaks not of intent, but is only concerned with producing a work that might harness the open-ended nature of eternal difference. The artist's struggle, is, on the one hand, a commitment to her own becoming, a process that must necessarily take place in the midst of the audiences' own agenda of recapturing their pasts. To once again make use

of a Deleuze-Guattarian concept, if the refrain, a repetition that enables music to exist in the first place, is a great vehicle for reterritorialisation, then such reterritorialisation is also the domain of audience expectation. If this situation was not bad enough, the musical artist is just as beholden to the expectations of the music critic, who in the name of the audience/readership has told them what to expect in the first place. This cycle of giving the audience of what they *might* expect is responsible for the general redundancy of rock writing lamented by Harris at the outset.

A change to this state of affairs might be to dispense with the inherent reiteration of representation, and to allow music writing to instead, be about the ‘construction of maps’: ‘writing is not an end in itself for Deleuze but something which oversteps the mere repetition or copying of the already said. It organises maps and extends itself into its environment because its task is to free life from the site of its imprisonment’ (Vähämäki & Virtunen 2006: 222). An appropriate example of such a map might be found in Greil Marcus’s *Lipstick Traces* (1989), so highly regarded by Harris (2009). Whilst nominally about a history of Punk, the allure of this book is its scope and synthetic power, based upon its, ‘mapping out an untold “secret history” which connected the Sex Pistols, the Dadaists, the Parisian événements of 1968, that legendary subversive clique the Situationist International and an Anabaptist revolt in 16th-century Germany, led by a notorious libertine named John of Leyden’ (Harris 2009). Marcus’s success as a writer is due to this power to ‘construct maps’ that bring together previously unforeseen musical connections. Yet instead of constructing maps, the music writer, more often than not, simply follows well-worn paths of overly familiar territory.

With so much information floating about these days, and increasingly less time to process it, the audiences of a contemporary digital environment might be forgiven for seeking a sense of common ground, and of the music writer to give into such appeals for the familiar. Rather than rummage through dusty vinyl, or even dusty CDs, music consumers can now download an artists’ entire oeuvre, decades of work perhaps, in the space of minutes. In fact there seems to be so much music, whether free, illegal or otherwise that one needs some form of guidance. Is this how the *1001 Albums You Must Hear Before You Die* (Dimery 2005) phenomenon seems to be a direct consequence of the digital age?: ‘there is so much data, how will I know what matters?’ This surfeit of communication and opinion that Deleuze and Guattari found to be so objectionable was

undoubtedly prescient of these times of ubiquitous connectivity. Whilst egalitarian access to the public sphere might be considered a positive occurrence, the sheer proliferation of data that needs to be mined on a daily basis reminds us that such access has resulted in more ephemeral shit than ever before and it is probably doing us more harm than good in the process.

### **Order words**

That staple of music journalism, the canon, buffers information overload, and economically communicates what the reader should ‘know’ of those ideas apparently ‘common’ to all music fans. The continual creation and reiteration of popular music canons seem to be more concerned with supporting an imaginary cognoscenti of which the writer themselves secures a place after imparting and/or reiterating the appropriate passwords. This is why, in *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari argue that, ‘[l]anguage is neither informational nor communicational. It is not the communication of information but something else quite different: the transmission of order words, either from one statement to another or within each statement, insofar as each statement accomplishes an act and the act is accomplished in the statement’ (Deleuze & Guattari 1988: 79).

It is on this subject of the order word/password, that Deleuze and Guattari present us with one of the axioms of *A Thousand Plateaus*, that ‘[l]anguage is made not to be believed but to be obeyed, and to compel obedience’ (1988: 76). Much music writing seems inordinately concerned with cultivating the readers obedience, or to reward them for their compliance, and to make sure that after purchasing those thousand and one albums, the afterlife will be all the more enjoyable for it. The critic’s main concern then is to impart order-words that will order the musical landscape into manageable tracts of homogeneity. As Deleuze and Guattari go on to say, ‘[o]rder-words do not concern commands only, but every act that is linked to statements by a “social obligation”’ (79), and, as such, ‘[q]uestions, promises, are order-words’ (79). Every statement we make commits us to others in turn, to the rules of grammar, and ultimately to acts that we are forced to carry out if only to be able to function socially (79). Hence, the only possible definition of language is the set of all order-words, for ‘they tell us what we “must” think, expect’ (18).

Of course, creative artists do not concern themselves with the order words of audience and/or critic. In fact, the world of art is dedicated to overturning the status of the apparently fundamental tendencies of life, stability, regularity and control, and presents us instead with creation, change and disruption. This is why Deleuze and Guattari will say in *What is Philosophy?* that the role of the artist is to steer the path between chaos and opinion (Deleuze & Guattari 1994: 204). The artist is on the side of chaos, ‘confronts chaos’ and gets their weapons from chaos which is taken into the battle against opinion, or rather, the clichés of opinion (204). Thus creation should never have anything to do with the preconceptions of audience. Furthermore, the critic has no place in attempting to intervene in the relationship between artist and audience, despite what they might otherwise think.

The creative writer will instead attempt to inspire a creative chaos, to make the world strange, to address only a people that is lacking. For rather than being about the communication of generality, the writing process, like the musical one, is concerned with the production of affect and percept. Of course, there is the ‘problem’ that the audience ‘might not understand,’ is unprepared, or unaware of what they are trying to do. The production of sensation must always be an alienating gesture, or otherwise it is not a becoming. Again, Bob Dylan is exemplary: he has consistently alienated expectations with his myriad changes in artistic direction, throughout his long and esteemed career.

The creative music writer will operate in a similar manner, unconcerned with simply representing a career, or appraising a work in a given context, but rather, intending to use the world of music as a launch pad for the creation of new territories and new public spheres. The creation of concepts, of the new, comes from no existing public sphere, and it is this becoming-world of which the artist and the creative music writer are most properly concerned.

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