

***Peer to Peer* – in the grip of a worldwide war machine**

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It's 2005 and have we in the West ever been more aware of our position as voyeurs of world politics, especially on these distant and peaceful Australian shores? Yet has the grip of World War ever felt more intense upon this accelerating networked global imagination? Have we ever been more deeply implicated in the intensifying manufacture of weapons of mass destruction? And has this apparency ever been so plain? *Peer to Peer* is not about the politics of representation, war and social issues, or even technologically assisted experiences of violence and surveillance. It is about the inability to speak / make art 'about' these things; it is about the grip of war itself on our consciousness and the conditions of paralysis and impotence which it engenders. *Peer to Peer* attempts to address the core of structural, social conflict – what Deleuze and Guattari have called the war machine.

In Fletcher's work XX, images are assembled into a computer database – hundreds of scans of abstract images are stored as relational fields within an information architecture. The original project of visual abstraction, core to twentieth century modernism, is bound within a new layer of abstraction – that of informatics. Fletcher links the project of abstraction, in both its aesthetic and its applied/organisational dimensions to the machine.

In this work there is the potential to grasp a machinic understanding of the image – of image production as work, a manual labour, but also the image as phylum, an archetype, like the tool or the weapon, which requires a certain social assemblage. The coupling of image-machine, through a machinic phylum, reaches back to the pre-modern (as weapon or tool), to the modern (as industrial output), and forward into the contemporary postmodern (as code, informatic). 'It is through the intermediary of assemblages that the phylum selects, qualifies, and even invents the technical elements.' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p.398)

Deleuze and Guattari discuss the relationship between weapon and tool and the machinic phylum which informs the manifestation of both. What is it to bring the image into this equation? Certainly the image bears no use-relationship to the body – it is neither projective/exteriorising weapon nor introceptive/introjective tool. The image stands apart from the body – it presents as a transfer, an output, a transmission (of both work and war, of affect). The image is the affective output – a relational device through which we can measure displacement, an expenditure of force, or even resistance.

Fletcher's XX machinically produces and reproduces iterations of abstract sequences as image-outputs. This condensation of the image, its simultaneous reduction and multiplication as mass-produced pattern, expressed in Deleuze and Guattari's terms, can be perceived as an appropriation of the machinic phylum by the State. Exhibited here as art, we can feel the 'cleavage' point of technology – its rhizomatic connective potential (a nomadic function) and its State-produced function of assimilation.

In Fletcher's second work *tex_assault*, a 3D gaming environment is altered, an engine given a new skin, for artistic ends. Here Fletcher lays bare the war machine for our inspection. This is the battlefield, where (usually) 'players' are given clear directional goals to arm themselves and kill the enemy. However Fletcher has removed the arms and the enemies, leaving the viewer with only an ability to navigate the terrain. Patterns embedded within the virtual surface textures emerge through the viewer's exploration – they hover as artefact and archetype within a territorial maze. Stripped of resources (human/soldier and metal/weapon), the project of war is separated from the war machine.

When participating in virtual war or war games, we become a total subject of the State at the very moment at which the State appropriates the war machine – for we occupy the point at which the State

can assimilate the education of the citizen to the training of the worker to the apprenticeship of the soldier. Alone in the empty architecture, alive to the secret signs of an embedded iconography, the viewer/navigator of *tex_assault* cannot take war as an object (subordinated to the State). Rather, through the reading of an image-map, the subject must invent a relational field of interaction. Sponsored by the 'smooth' space of the machinic phylum, the nomadic viewer rhizomatically pursues gaps, detours, stems, openings, traits, holes, etc. The object then is no longer war as primary goal (the pursuer), but war as secondary effect (the pursued). And this is the staving off of the State, of the State's ability to appropriate the war machine.

The exhibition *Peer to Peer* draws its name from a file-sharing network system. It also describes an essential aspect of the Internet and the networked computer machine where, for the first time, production, distribution and reception can occur in a single environment.

'A peer-to-peer (or P2P) computer network is a network that relies on computing power at the edges (ends) of a connection rather than in the network itself. P2P networks are used for sharing content like audio, video, data or anything in digital format. ... A pure peer-to-peer file transfer network does not have the notion of clients or servers, but only equal peer nodes that simultaneously function as both "clients" and "servers" to the other nodes on the network. This model of network arrangement differs from the client-server model where communication is usually to and from a central server. Peer-to-peer architecture embodies one of the key technical concepts of the internet, described in the first internet RFC, "RFC 1, Host Software" (<http://www.ietf.org/rfc/rfc1.txt>) dated 7 April 1969.' (Wikipedia 2005)

Napster was the first mainstream P2P software that enabled large-scale file sharing. Of course, its usage was not acceptable to capitalist economics nor the State apparatus, and in the massive corporate and governmental pressures brought to bear upon this technology to commercialise and legalise the activities it enabled ('free' music), we can again see the machinic phylum in both its exterior and interior relationship to the State. Logged on to a file sharing network, users, with their files specified for sharing and delivery, effect transfers at the boundaries of what is assimilable, appropriable, valuable. And while seeming to act in resistance to the State, this zone also marks the beginning of the manufacture of the State, of an internalising logic.

In Tim Plaisted's three *Progress* works, a software 'patch' is used to effect an ultimately disabling transfer of information. The program runs a simple 'find and replace' procedure through a series of files in a seemingly endless and totalising surveillance. The evidence of its running is the progress bar which any computer-user finds an all too familiar visual. The progress bar is that visual symbol for computer paralysis, or for the user's impotent state of waiting – for a task to be executed, for a file to download, for a program to install, for an image to render, etc. For the user/worker, other 'real world' tasks must be organised around these periods of waiting. And as anyone familiar with computers knows only too well, it is quite difficult to estimate when any task will be completed despite the oodles of information given (data speed rates, number of files remaining, percentage of task completed, etc). Invariably the computer will stall mysteriously (usually around the 90% mark) at least one if not several times, the install may even fail, or the download be interrupted. And of course the ubiquity of these experiences fuels the push for greater computing power, higher rates of data transfer, fatter pipes.

Progress is also of course the maxim of the State, the organisational drive of the modern nation to which we, as its citizens, are called upon to contribute. Plaisted, in these deeply ironic works, gives the viewer/user the task of estimating when the computer's task will be completed (ie when the progress bar will be full). He makes us address this banal condition of paralysed deferral, and to recognise it as 'real' action. More than playing ironically upon the notion of progress, in these works Plaisted exposes progress as not a force driving or even building the State (making it necessary), but a form of the State itself, a defining condition. Progress is not some 'thing' which we work collectively to achieve, but

rather progress is the appropriation of collective work. As we uniformly adopt the position of subject (viewer of artwork, user of computer interface, worker/assessor of data transfer, occupant of workstation), turning collective attention to the system network, the State holds its populations to ransom. Through controlling / regulating the flows of information, time and space are both distorted and conformed. The *Progress* works generate assimilation and its underlying chaos.

In *Progress (Unilateral Patch)* the files being patched are those of the computer's own system software. The program runs until the computer is simply too corrupted to continue and it crashes. Again, the ironic metaphor for State corruption and the fall of regimes of power is clear. The State, as an apparatus, has always existed, and it has always 'been in a relation with an outside and is inconceivable independent of that relationship.' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p.360) Within the State's intensification of power, its multiplication of information flows and directional movements, vectors of deterritorialisation open up, pockets of smooth space folding together.

'As converter and capturer, the State does not just relativise movement, it re-imparts absolute movement. It does not just go from the smooth to the striated, it reconstitutes smooth space; it reimparts smooth in the wake of the striated. It is true that this new nomadism accompanies a worldwide war machine whose organisation exceeds the State apparatuses and passes into energy, military-industrial, and multinational complexes.' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p.387)

In the contemporary war on terror, the worldwide war machine becomes the affective exteriority of the State. It becomes the constitutive set of relations among States (far beyond anything that may be called 'foreign policy'). The war on terror can be equated with the war machine proper like no other modern conflict, as it declares an enemy of the State which is at once internal and external. Like *Unilateral Patch*, the State systematically appropriates the total, where citizen becomes hostage becomes freedom fighter becomes liberator becomes terrorist becomes civilian becomes prisoner and prison guard in a seamless and logical chain of totalising equivalence. As voyeurs in the informational network of this war, we are held to ransom by, we are the hostages of, not the nomad/terrorist but the State, blindfolded in its bidding to appropriate the next metamorphosis. In Plaisted's works, the State's appropriation of the war machine is complete.

'...when total war becomes the object of the appropriated war machine, then at this level in the set of all possible conditions, the object and aim enter into new relations that can reach the point of contradiction ... We could say that the appropriation has changed direction, or rather that States tend to unleash, reconstitute, an immense war machine of which they are no longer anything more than the opposable or apposed parts. This worldwide war machine, which in a way "reissues" from the States, displays two successive figures: first, that of fascism, which makes war an unlimited movement with no other aim than itself; ... and the second, postfascist, figure is that of a war machine that takes peace as its object directly, as the peace of Terror or Survival. The war machine reforms a smooth space that now claims to control, to surround the entire earth. Total war itself is surpassed, toward a form of peace more terrifying still.' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p.421)

In *Progress (Terra)* the patching process is applied to satellite map images tracing the US-led war in Iraq. During the period of the exhibition, the map images are downloaded from the Internet, beginning with the campaign's first point of incursion to its current location. As the image files are systematically acquired, examined/processed, and re-issued as 'marked' objects, a smooth space flows from this pattern of penetration. Plaisted mimics the act of war – appropriating territory, dismantling social structure, annexing resources, and re-issuing colonised fragments. In the cumulative affectivity of the worldwide war machine, what arises is not only an ever-expanding capacity for (mass) destruction, but

also an ability to institute 'an entire economy of violence, in other words, a way of making violence durable, even unlimited.' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p.396)

In *Progress (Civilisation)*, as also with the extendable versions of the *Progress* software available on-line for downloading by a remote audience, additional layers of surveillance are created through the monitoring of the other works in the exhibition or other data-files. Plaisted effects a totalising field of multiplying relations. The project of the State, the progress of its formation, whether it be Iraq post-Saddam Hussein, or the US and its oil-based economy, is no longer a 'political' aim, but rather the necessary condition for a worldwide war machine. In this final appropriation where peace itself becomes an object, globalised socio-political relations may only be described as post-democratic, where we can see the death of democracy, its theatre, reflection or simulacrum.

In the work *Presence*, a film of a cloudy sky is projected onto moving and actual clouds of water vapour. Here the projected digital image becomes (partially) apparent through the constantly shifting swirls of water vapour. Unlike the systematic format of the *Progress* works, here Plaisted offers another metaphor for the flows of information through the channels of the Real as hardware. Data transferred across global communication networks gathers, hovers and disperses like clouds in atmospheric layers (share prices on a stock-exchange, waves of human migration, photographs from a prison, oil from underground). The fine sea of water particles cannot be segmented and its intangible form shape-shifts unpredictably. As with the *Progress* works we are unable to 'see anything' but are nevertheless held in place, visually arrested, or in this case mesmerised. Rather than pinpoint the 'now' of task completion, *Presence* generates an eternal sense of time, a macro and micro picture of time and space folding together. While Plaisted's networked field of relations is totalising, he offers this zone as yet another dimension of the 'outside', reserving a final blow for metamorphosis and change.

Peer to Peer reveals the computer as tool, as weapon, as image-making device, and as node in global communications networks – in short, a complexity arising from the continuum of the machinic phylum. It addresses the banal experiences of everyday computer-based interaction (gaming and workstation platforms and environments) while linking these daily 'disciplines' to the logic of the State, and the apparatus of the war machine. In peer to peer, the human-computer interface although banal and assimilative, can also be felt as a stranglehold (the sensory translation of the blindfold?), producing not only conditions of the ineffective, but also of the disaffective – an inability to express emotion or even to 'feel' anything. In *Peer to Peer* the final thing we experience is Art. The technology of art and art's production and reproduction through technology is reissued in the wake of a blind paralysis.

References

Deleuze, G. & Guattari, F. (1987) *A thousand plateaus: capitalism and schizophrenia*. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis.

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