

The rhizome as a mode of existence for things

The tree is a filiation, but the rhizome is alliance, uniquely alliance. The tree imposes the verb “to be”, but the fabric of the rhizome is the conjunction “and... and... and...”. This conjunction carries enough force to shake and uproot the verb “to be”.¹

In the most recent evolution of Evelyne de Behr’s practice, we are probably witnessing this quite particular moment which is tending towards the full force of her work. Protean—on the frontiers of drawing, painting, photography, video, etc.—it now (sur)renders, with an increasing freedom, its full creative energy. This energy arises from movement, be it displacement, shift or even drift, the various mediums joining and contaminating one another on the surface of the exhibition, out to conquer a mental space which remains to be defined. From mediums which draw an intimate geography to those which weave the fabric of reality.

From the point of view of the operation of thought, the distinction identified by Deleuze and Guattari in the introduction to *A Thousand Plateaus* between the notion of a single root and the rhizome establishes the concept of root thinking and rhizome thinking. The single root is the one which kills everything around it, whereas the rhizome is the root which extends to meet other roots. Envisaged as “*a large body composed of autonomous, interconnected cells,*” for Evelyne de Behr the exhibition is where her work is placed in a network. The mobile works are like nomadic elements, the tools of a language or snatches of phrases which interrelate to create new connections. The exhibition itself constitutes the space for the arrangement of these multiplicities and the tightening of its vocabulary. The wealth of an object is sometimes its ambiguity, especially when it is stabilised by past experience. Found objects and raw materials complement her rigorously arranged visual production in a sensible and sensual order, in which the apparent simplicity is based as much on intuition as intention. Like the artist’s own productions, they constitute a vocabulary of forms which accompany the works, without it being possible to predetermine their influence any more than their usage. Sustained by an eminently poetic buoyancy, a dense network thus unfurls of furtive, potential meanings and successive strata, surrendered to the visitor’s sensitive sagacity. “*My work has a ‘dissipative structure’*”, the artist tells us. She is referring here to the term coined in 1969 by Ilya Prigogine², who discovered that when far from thermodynamic equilibrium, a “bifurcation” may occur, whereby a system leaves its trajectory to jump onto a new, totally different branch from the first. We thus find ourselves transported into another world, far removed from the initial equilibrium, such

that the system could become completely chaotic. But sometimes it can unexpectedly regain a new order, stabilised by the dissipative flow of energy. Amplified by their inclusion in a network of mental, semantic chains, the works thus displayed by the artist weave significant sequences, suggest associations and induce questioning.

“In the substance of the body and in its strata, I absorb and recreate my sensations. I seek the truth, how it is related to fiction, and reality unfolds in multiplicities. Each day my work reveals to me a knowledge that eludes me in its relativity. I seek with my fingertips, blindly. From my eyes and my body, I articulate a thought which is expressed as it appears materially. Thought is embodied in the gesture and the action. Between chance and necessity, the work organises itself randomly, in a constructive temporality.” Evelyne de Behr

Brought together within the exhibition therefore, we find painted forms suggesting an intimacy that is sometimes glanced over, sometimes suggested lasciviously in pencil, pastel or wash drawing, all materials that offer a sensitive acuteness in the visual artist’s hands. Then there are dense, exploded cosmogonies, in which powerful black backgrounds host constellations. Their projections in the sky, we might imagine, would be sufficiently close for us, the viewers, to be able to connect them with imaginary lines, like the powerful, mysterious threads woven by the artist in preparation for these exhibitions. *“Everything is a point,”* she tells us, summoning the terrestrial world after the celestial one, by means of her burned maps that chart as many new territories and potentially, by extension, as many new identities. Until the 19th century, as Marie-Ange Brayer describes in the revue *Exposé*, the geographical map was seen as a parable of painting, which was likewise reduced to transposing the world onto a flat surface³. By extension of this, Evelyne de Behr also uses maps as a means of proposing how reality relates to what is imaginary. *But the brain itself is much more a grass than a tree* (2015)—a large charcoal drawing on tracing paper—features an emblematic image of the visual artist’s constructive, combinatory dynamic. A profusion of branches spreads across the sheet, onto which images taken from a visual archive have been placed in order to reveal their latencies, to reinterpret them or even to bring back these forgotten ghosts once again into circuit of visibility. By using these existing images, the artist offers the possibility to reinterpret society and the history of forms and practices. These images are both revisited for what they are in themselves, but also for their resonance with other heterogeneous elements, like her imprints of objects from the exhibition which are drawn in the “Blanc de Meudon” whiting chalk on the ground. They speak to us of both the presence and absence of the referent, of contact as much as loss and the loss of contact. As Georges Didi-Huberman⁴ explains, the imprint is not an image, which is one of the reasons why it was disregarded by official art history. How is it possible to envisage a resemblance which is not specular? It emerges from contact and matter, which make it more akin to the shell and procreation. It disorients vision, as it does not require the distance necessary for observation. The imprint is beneath and beyond the image; it is a die of the image. It obliges us to think of the incipience of representations, before words, before images even. We shall leave the discovery of her various other plastic, photographic and video propositions to the visitor, for above all the material has to be experienced freely. Evelyne de Behr’s exhibitions also incorporate an aspect of interiority, of merging the studio space with her mental space. As the exhibition space is transitory, or even transitional, isn’t the effective space in which this work exists also that of the eye and the mind?

Pascale Viscardy

1 Deleuze, G. & Guattari, F., *A Thousand Plateaus* (transl. Brian Massumi), New York, Continuum, 2004, p. 25

2 Ilya Prigogine received the Nobel Prize for his contribution to nonequilibrium thermodynamics in 1977.

3 Marie-Ange Brayer, "*Mesures d'une fiction picturale : la carte de géographie*", in *Exposé magazine n°2, Perte d'inscription, Orléans, Editions Hyx, 1995, pp. 6-23*

4 Georges Didi-Huberman, "La ressemblance par contact. Archéologie, anachronisme et modernité de l'empreinte", in G. Didi-Huberman (ed.), *L'Empreinte*, Paris, Centre Georges Pompidou, 1997, pp. 15-192