“Where Angels Fear to Tread” in Deleuze and Bateson: On a New Baroque of Plateaus and the Ecology of Non-Human Ecstasy*

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Abstract
This article attempts to offer a new mode of the baroque by juxtaposing Bateson’s notion of plateaus and ecology with the Deleuzian neo-baroque. Inspired by Bateson’s plateaus, this paper defines the Deleuzian baroque as the baroque of plateaus and examines how Deleuze grounds the possibility of non-human ecstasy in the sacredness of immanence at the heart of the seventeenth-century Christian baroque. Drawing on Naess’s ecological reading of Spinoza’s Ethics in the context of Bateson’s immanence, “plateaus” can be defined as an ecological assemblage of the non-human ecstasy of immanence. The philosophy of plateaus features the profound art of avoiding the obsessive and excessive fixation on the orgasmic climax and “the exterior and transcendent ends” in Occidental thought. Informed by the logic of plateaus, this paper then examines how Deleuze converts Leibnizian baroque folds and harmony into the ecological cosmology of immanence, which features the magnificent and smooth waves of plateaus orchestrated by the graceful concertation of an infinite number of monads. In this cosmological space of immanence, this paper explores how Deleuze excavates the non-human ecstasy that dynamically flows into the texture of Bernini’s The Ecstasy of St. Teresa by concentrating on the process of defacializing the facialized human-based Christian ecstasy.

Keywords
Baroque, plateaus, immanence, ecology, non-human ecstasy, faciality, close-up

* This work was supported by the National Research Foundation of Korea Grant funded by the Korean Government (NRF-2013S1A2A1A01034443).
I. Introduction: A New Baroque on the Interface of Deleuze and Bateson

Gregory Bateson, one of the most innovative interdisciplinary thinkers of the twentieth century, produced pioneering scholarly work in anthropology, cybernetics, biology, psychology, epistemology, and communication theory. As the title of his posthumous work, *Angels Fear: Towards an Epistemology of the Sacred*, implies, his adventure of thought found creative expression in diverse fields, dynamically traversing the borderlines “where angels fear to tread.”

Gilles Deleuze, showing the array of creative practices of Bateson’s notion of “plateaus” in *A Thousand Plateaus*, was also an original thinker of our time who recalls the aura of Bateson’s *Angels Fear*. Being worthy of his own definition of the philosopher as the “inventor of concepts,” he invented several philosophical concepts to construct a new cartography of thought and practice. Even in his faithful annotations on Spinoza, Nietzsche, and Bergson, he ultimately transformed those philosophers through his novel “repetitions” of their ideas.

It is in the context of the baroque that the figure of Deleuze as the thinker who never feared to tread unexplored strange territories of thought and sensibility is most conspicuous. Since the publication of *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, Deleuze has become a major voice in the discourse of the (neo-) baroque and other relevant fields. Based on his Spinozan and Nietzschean reading of Leibniz’s notion of fold and new harmony, Deleuze conceived a new concept of the baroque of immanence, which provides different modes of ecstasy and affect from the origin of

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1 The literary reference in this expression, from which the title of Bateson’s *Angels Fear* originates, is “For fools rush in where angels fear to tread” (line 625) in Alexander Pope’s *An Essay on Criticism* (1711). By wittily comparing them with reckless fools, Pope satirizes the stupidity and arrogance of incompetent literary critics who judge carelessly the value of literary works. By this title and its literary reference, we can infer that Bateson is strongly self-conscious of the originality (almost verging on foolhardiness) of his interdisciplinary projects, which attempt to challenge the pre-existing configuration of scholarly discourses.

2 Félix Guattari, the co-author of *A Thousand Plateaus*, also contributes a lot to the invention of the concepts, (e.g., plateaus, faciality, and ecology) in the book. However, as the main topic of this paper is the Deleuzian baroque, we will not discuss Guattari, in order to avoid unnecessary theoretical complexity in our discussion. From now on, citations of Deleuze’s works will be abbreviated as follows: *A Thousand Plateaus* = TP, *The Fold* = F, *Negotiations* = N, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza* = EPS, *Two Regimes of Madness* = TRM, *Cinema 1: The Movement Image* = C1. Bateson’s *Angels Fear* and *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* will be abbreviated as *AF* and *SEM* respectively.
the baroque, that is, the seventeenth century Christian baroque. The originality of Deleuzian baroque in *The Fold* has not only spawned a plethora of journal papers and several illuminating research books on the baroque but has also become an inspirational voice for diverse aesthetic practices in the neo-baroque style of architecture, paintings, digital arts and contemporary amusement and theme parks.³

The Deleuzian baroque forms a singular inflection in the history of baroque ideas in the sense that it provides the modes of non-Christian mysticism and ecstasy. Deleuze achieved this by defining the trope as the infinite movement of the folds, which dynamically operates as artistic affects and philosophical spirit—examples of the folds range from the ocean waves to pleats in clothing and spiritual traits—beyond the seventeenth-century Christian baroque art. In this sense, his baroque cannot be categorized as a conventional art history trope on the baroque but as a new philosophical concept on the infinity expressed by the vital movement of the fold transcending temporal (historical) and spatial distances.

However, it is undeniable that Christian mysticism and ecstasy prevails at the core of the baroque. Jacques Lacan, for one, discerns the Christian traits of the baroque. By defining the baroque as “the regulating of the soul by the corporal radioscopy” (116) in the context of the “little tale of Christ” (107), Lacan insists that the origin of the baroque is grounded in the theological, philosophical, and artistic jouissance expressed by the modern subject’s encounter with the Christian infinity in the chapters entitled “God, Woman, and Jouissance” and “On the Baroque” in his *Seminar XX*.

Conversely, despite his daring reading of the baroque, Deleuze does not give a sufficiently direct demonstration in *The Fold* as to how he appropriates the Christian features of the baroque and transforms them into the baroque of immanence. Furthermore the existing sustained research on the Deleuzian baroque, in spite of its faithful and precise explication of *The Fold*, has a tendency to miss the crucial gap that needs to be fully explicated between the baroque of Christian transcendence and that of Deleuzian immanence in the context of theological art and thought. For instance, in the case of Gregg Lambert’s *The Non-Philosophy of Gilles Deleuze*, one of the first and masterful explications of *The Fold* itself, and Mieke Bal’s *Quoting Caravaggio*, which impressively displays the applicability of the Deleuzian baroque onto the seventeenth-century baroque and contemporary neo-baroque art works, neither of them substantially delves into the way in which

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³ For more on this, see Mieke Bal’s *Quoting Caravaggio*, Timothy Murray’s *Digital Baroque: New Media Art and Cinematic Folds* and Angela Ndalianis’s *Neo-Baroque Aesthetics and Contemporary Entertainment*. 
Deleuze appropriates and transforms transcendent Christian spiritual experience and sensation into his new version of the baroque, in spite of their essential references to Deleuzian baroque scholarship.⁴

Moreover, the notion of the baroque, which can be a catalyst for the productive connection between Deleuze and theology, is never mentioned in the recently published Theology after Deleuze and Deleuze and Theology. Both of these books attempt to shed new light on the theological features of immanence and becoming in Deleuzian paradigms in order to grasp creative possibilities for theology in the future, highlighting the way in which Deleuze tried to overcome the logic of transcendence in Western metaphysics and theology. However, the books fail to capture the conceptual richness of the Deleuzian baroque that can yield the creative and seemingly unlikely pairing of Deleuze and theology.

At the intersection of the achievement and the blind spot of the existing research on Deleuze and the baroque, this paper, by defining Deleuzian baroque as the baroque of plateaus, aims to examine how Deleuze finds the possibility of non-human ecstasy grounded in the sacred of immanence and becoming in the baroque, which is in opposition to the human-based Christian ecstasy. Additionally, using this definition of the baroque of the plateaus, this article investigates how Deleuze beautifully actualizes its affect in his reading of Leibniz’s notion of fold and monadology and Bernini’s The Ecstasy of St. Teresa.⁵

For this project, Bateson’s notion of plateaus and Deleuze’s concept of “faciality” and “close up” in A Thousand Plateaus and Cinema I will be employed to reveal the core of the Deleuzian baroque. Bateson never explicitly theorizes the concept of “plateaus” but it can be considered as the main image that crystalizes the core of his thought on the sacred of immanence, the ecology of desire, and non-human joy. This notion of plateaus is intriguingly opposed to that of the climax,

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⁴ In addition to these two books, for diverse and substantial discussions of the baroque as a philosophical and cultural concept, see Christine Buci-Glucksmann’s The Baroque Reason: The Aesthetics of Modernity, Gregg Lambert’s On the (New) Baroque, and William Egginton’s The Theater of Truth: The Ideology of (Neo) Baroque Aesthetics. For a rigorous reading of the Deleuzian “new harmony” in the context of Leibnizian monadology in The Fold, see Ronald Bogue’s “The New Harmony,” 57-67.

⁵ This article partially takes up the main topics of my paper published in Korea, entitled, 〈 들뢰즈 혹은 암호 해독가: 바로크와 《 성 테레사의 희열 》 〉 (“Deleuze, or the Cryptographer: The Baroque and The Ecstasy of St. Teresa,” 2005), which investigates the core of the Deleuzian baroque of immanence by focusing on faciality, close-up, and texture. In addition to developing those theoretical topics in my former paper, the present article attempts to offer a new mode of the baroque, that is, the baroque of plateaus, which has never been explored before, by juxtaposing Bateson’s notion of plateaus and ecology and Arne Naess’s ecological reading of Spinoza with the Deleuzian neo-baroque.
which incarnates the orgasmic culmination toward an excessively idealized apex, fierce competition, and purpose-driven desire steeped in the heart of the Occidental thought of which Bateson is so critical. Bateson carried out his project through the reinterpretation of Christian terms such as “sacred,” “grace,” and “biblical maxims” in the context of immanence and ecology in order to produce a new mode of thought defying the dichotomous confrontation between the matter (body) and the soul (mind and spirit).

Along with Bateson’s notion of plateaus, the notions of “faciality” and “close-up” will be employed to explicate the theoretical process whereby de-facialized ecstasy arises from the dissolution (explosion) of the face in The Ecstasy of St. Teresa, which is beautifully manifested through the vertiginous forms of folds. With these in mind, let us first delve into the philosophical and aesthetic implications of the plateaus as the sign of the spiritual and sacred. To begin, let us focus on Bateson’s notions of the sacred, mind, ecology, grace, and immanence.

II. The Sacred of Immanence in Bateson: Plateaus as the Habitat of the Ecological Mind

As evidenced in the subtitle of his book Angels Fear: Towards an Epistemology of the Sacred, one of Bateson’s main projects in his later writings is to systematically clarify the significance of the sacred as a key concept that can enrich contemporary trans-disciplinary discourses. However, his notion of the sacred has been employed in very diverse and scattered ways without a precise definition of the term ever having been provided. At the risk of oversimplifying its meaning, let us nevertheless define the Batesonian sacred as the spiritual event arising from the integration of an individual mind to a larger mind in ecological relations (AF 200). For a clearer understanding of Bateson’s sacred, the notions of the ecological, the mind, and immanence should be investigated first.

Bateson explicates the characteristics of the mind in three dimensions: “The mind is immanent in those circuits of the brain,” in “brain plus body,” and “in the larger system—man plus environment” (SEM 317-18). Based on his explanation, the mind can be defined as an active relational and embodied process, triggered by “news of a difference” (460, 490), which regulates the dynamic flow of energy (capacity to do something), ideas and units of information (a difference which makes difference). In doing so, it produces a new series of meaning, affect, ideas,
and so on. In this paradigm, the mind is “no longer bounded by the individual body, becoming a conjunction of self and world” (Kaizen 87). Thus, it becomes the foundation of the non-human self, which can be defined as “an expanded mental field in which the subject and its objects are no longer separable” (87).

Bateson locates this type of mind at the heart of his ecology. The notion of the ecological here does not simply refer to physical nature, e.g., mountains, forests, seas and animals. It is “the integrated fabric of mental process that envelopes all our lives” (AF 200), which is composed of intricate relational webs of infinite differences such as energy, ideas, and information. It belongs neither to the realm of abstract idealism nor to that of crude materialism. The voice of the ecological in Bateson is dramatically expressed in the mystic interspace in which the dualistic confrontation between mind and nature (body) is dissolved through the vertiginous connection between and transformation of the differences in life.

Bateson’s notion of immanence, which does not posit the exceptional being that exists beyond the web of infinite differences in life, lays the foundation for the ecology of the mind. It is safe to say that the epistemology of the sacred in Bateson’s paradigm is none other than the sacred of immanence against Occidental transcendence. Bateson is immensely critical of the logic of transcendence that supposes the absolute personified being outside nature, which is free from the dynamic interaction of nature. This is precisely because such a logic can justify the way in which humans privilege themselves as higher beings with the natural right to dominate nature (SEM 472-73). For this reason, Bateson insists that if you “separate mind from the structure in which it is immanent, such as human relationship, the human society, or the ecosystem, you thereby embark, I believe, on fundamental error, which in the end will surely hurt you” (493).

Indeed, the kernel of Batesonian immanence is an ontological habitat of thought and life in which the ecological mind can fully unfold its potential power through integration with the larger mind without losing its own singularity. In contrast to the logic of transcendence which privileges substance/subject-centered assemblage thought, Bateson’s immanence valorizes the logic of ecological relation in the web of infinite differences in life by insisting that the larger mind, which could be compared to God in a sense, “is still immanent in the total interconnected defines ecology as “the study of the interaction and survival of ideas and programs (i.e., differences, complexes of differences, etc.) in circuits” (491). As one can easily confirm in his definition of information and ecology, Bateson takes “difference in itself” as the main axis of his thought. Thus, it is no wonder that there is a very productive affinity between the thought of Bateson and Deleuze.
social system and planetary ecology” (467) and that “we are not outside the ecology for which we plan—we are always and inevitably a part of it” (512).

Bateson calls this sacred event of integration “grace,” which “man has lost” (128) but “which animals still have” (128) and first of all, “God has” (129). For him, one of the main tasks in art, especially poetry, is to pursue and express this spark of grace in its own aesthetic forms and logic. The great ecological joy can occur from the concrete process of giving beauty to its art forms. What is crucial to note here is that such an experience of joy arising from the ecological communication and integration cannot be confined by the dimension of consciousness. Joy is a mystic felicity that can be felt at the intersection of consciousness and the unconscious (129). It can dismantle the fixated frame of self-centered ego or human-based self through the vertiginous interconnection with a larger mind—the mode of a larger mind is an open whole that entails its ongoing inner transformation (129). In this sense, joy can be categorized as non-human ecstasy sprouting from the opening of the self-centered ego onto the larger mind and the event beyond the narrow realm of the human in ecological integration with other beings in nature.

Plateaus can be suggested as an exemplary assemblage of the ecstasy of immanence in Bateson’s ecological ontology and aesthetics. In the process of delving into art forms, economy, mother-child relationships, and “definite techniques for dealing with quarrels” (113) in the Balinese everyday life and ethos, Bateson offers some representative examples of plateaus as follows: First, music. Balinese music features a singular formal progression “derived from . . . the modifications of intensity determined by duration” (113), which does not have “the sort of rising intensity and climax of modern Occidental music” (113). Second, economy. Balinese do not privilege “the individual’s attempt to maximize value” (116) or “the idea of steadily maximizing their wealth or property” (116) through fierce competition and “cumulative interaction” (127). Third, the diverse interpersonal activities between mother and child. For instance, the mother’s ritualized sexual flirtation with her child involving sophisticated art regulates the flow of pleasure without fixation between them. That is, “mother-child sexual games” (TP 22) in Balinese culture “[train] the child away from seeking climax in personal interaction” (SEM 127).

Based on the above cases, Deleuze defines Bateson’s plateaus as an assemblage of desire and multiplicity, or “a continuous, self-vibrating region of intensities whose development avoids any orientation toward a culmination point or external end” (TP 22). In short, plateaus are an ecological assemblage of mind, which can actualize the creativity of dynamic flow and flux of intensities (defined
as difference in itself) in the field of immanence. They achieve this through the careful avoidance of obsessive and excessive fixation on the orgasmic climax and “exterior and transcendent ends” (22), which Bateson would call “the regrettable characteristics of the Western mind” (22). Indeed, one of Bateson’s lifelong projects is to realize “the substitution of a plateau for a climax” (SEM 113) in the transdisciplinary fields of our culture.

At issue here is that this ecological assemblage of plateaus has nothing to do with a simple defense of the failure to reach the summit of a mountain or the pinnacle of social status. Let us take a look at the example of the mountain and the common human perception of it. In a culture that idealizes the top position acquired by extremely fierce competition and purpose-driven desire, the thought that the summit of the mountain is the whole of the mountain itself is deeply rooted in the unconsciousness of people. However, the notion of plateaus requires a change in this conventional perspective. The summit of the mountain is not the most important or valuable place but one of the important parts of the mountain, which itself comprises numerous rises/hills, curves, and ridges. Furthermore, a mountain always exists as an ecological multiplicity beyond each individual peak or climax. In the paradigm of plateaus, each peak of the mountain is ontologically preconditioned to be connected with the peaks and ranges of other mountains and other ecological surroundings. Such an assemblage of plateaus, composed by sacred ecological integration, produces a fundamentally new mode of sustaining and strengthening the energy, joy, and especially “trance” (113) in which heightened intensity is not “automatically dissipated in a climax” (Massumi, TP xiv).

The philosophical implication of the critique of climax theory7 in Bateson’s plateaus can be enriched by the study of Arne Naess, an innovative philosopher of deep ecology, and his insightful reading of Spinoza’s Ethics in the context of the

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7 As regards Bateson’s and Deleuze’s critique of climax, an anonymous reviewer, referring to Gary Snyder’s interpretation of climax (Snyder 173), insisted that for the ecosystem, climax can be healthy and energy-efficient, and that therefore Bateson and Deleuze ignore its ecological implications. However, the mode of climax that Bateson and Deleuze criticize in their theorization of “plateaus” is the orgasmic climax steeped in Occidental thought, which features the idealized exceptional point that homogenizes and sectionalizes the free flow of desire in a dogmatic and despotic way. In a word, this type of climax would impair the ground of genuine diversity. In this sense, despite the terminological difference, Snyder’s notion of the ecological climax, which features “an optimum condition of diversity” (116), has a strong affinity with the logic of plateaus (especially its Spinozan “cheerfulness”) that embodies ecological multiplicity. A rigorous analysis of this intriguing affinity and a productive conceptual connection between the two notions are beyond the scope of this paper, and could be explored elsewhere.
ecology of an “integrated person” (“Friendship” 119). Naess reveals the philosophical significance of “the ecological concept of symbiosis as opposed to cutthroat competition” (122), recalling the confrontation between the logic of plateaus and that of a climax in Bateson. He reveals a significant difference between hilaritas (cheerful) and titillatio (pleasure/pleasurable excitement), two subcategories of laetitia (joy) in Spinoza, by focusing on “how the part/whole distinction works” (119) in the context of ecology. For Spinoza, laetitia (joy) is defined as “the passion by which the mind passes to a greater perfection” and tristitia (sorrow) as “the passion by which the mind passes to a lesser perfection” (Ethics 173). Tristitia is subcategorized by dolor (pain) and melancholia (melancholy). According to Spinoza, hilaritas is joy “which, in so far as it is related to the body, consists in the fact that all parts of the body are equally affected” (257) in a positive way; it increases or helps “the body’s power of acting” (257), so it “is

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8 According to the editor of The Trumpeter, this paper, which was republished in The Trumpeter (2006), was “originally published in Spinoza Herdact: 1677-21 Feb 1977” (“Friendship” 112).

9 As we have seen, Naess’s ecological reading of Spinoza’s Ethics plays a key role in expatiating the main features of Batesonian plateaus in the context of Spinoza’s laetitia (joy), hilaritas (cheerfulness), titillatio (pleasure/pleasurable excitement), and dolor (pain). His reading further offers a crucial clue to the concept of plateaus in the interspace between Bateson and Deleuze through the ecological spirit (ecological symbiosis vs. cutting edge competition). Meanwhile, as to the discussion on Bateson’s plateaus in Spinozan ethics, see 이찬웅 (Lee, Chan-Woong)’s short essays entitled 〈발리, 고원, 광활함 1 (“Bali, Plateaus, and Cheerfulness 1,” 2009)〉 and 〈발리, 고원, 광활함 2 (“Bali, Plateaus, and Cheerfulness 2,” 2009)〉, which were published in the academic section of a newsweekly magazine. These two essays, despite their short length and lack of rigorous academic reference and citation to support the author’s argument, are insightful in theorizing Bateson’s plateaus in the Spinozan sense of “cheerful.” Interestingly, his reading of Spinozan “cheerful” and “pain” and his translation of those terms in Korean (and English) are closely parallel to Naess’s reading of Spinoza although he does not mention Naess at all nor employ any ecological terms as Naess does. Those two short essays, which are intended for general readers in a newsweekly magazine, are not scholastic journal papers with a full documentation and citation, but it is worth noting them as an important reference that can yield theoretical discussion of Bateson’s plateaus. Regarding the provocative reading of the Deleuzian notion of plateaus in the context of desire and pleasure, see Frida Beckman’s Between Desire and Pleasure 1-15. She objects to Deleuze’s strong critique of the logic of pleasure and orgasm; however, a detailed analysis of her controversial criticism is beyond the scope of this paper, so it will be examined elsewhere.

10 My citation of Spinoza’s Ethics is from the version published by Oxford University Press with modifications of certain translated terms such as laetitia, titillatio, and hilaritas. While the Oxford version translates these terms as “pleasure,” “titillation,” and “joy” respectively, Naess renders them “joy,” “pleasurable excitement,” and “cheerfulness.” We will follow Naess’s rendering of these terms for theoretical consistency. For Naess’s more detailed analysis of these terms, see his Freedom, Emotion and Self-subsistence 99-105.
always good” (258). On the other hand, titillatio is one kind of joy, but it “consists in the fact that one or several of the body’s parts are affected more than others” (258); thus, it “surpasses all other emotions of the body and adheres stubbornly to it, so hinders the body from being capable of being affected in very many other ways, and so it can be bad” (258). Based on the Spinozan distinction between hilaritas and titillatio, Naess incisively pinpoints the limitation of the latter as follows: “[A]n intense titillatio may completely block any major increase in freedom and hold its level back at a very low state. Comparing this level with the vast possibilities of human freedom, increased ‘slavery’ under titillatio might be said to involve a decrease in freedom” (Freedom 101).

Naess’s critique of the Spinozan titillatio can be linked to Bateson’s critique of the logic of climax steeped in Occidental thinking. Just as Spinozan titillatio can occupy dual valences by being a part of joy while containing the potential to be bad, the overly idealized climax in the Occidental notion of transcendence can be categorized as good in so far as it produces a hugely intensified pleasure; however, it can also ultimately deteriorate into something negative because it can turn into a negative force that restrains the free flow of other desires that are different from the excessive desire toward the orgasmic pinnacle. In this context, Naess underscores the importance of hilaritas as “cheerfulness” or “an active joy” (“Friendship” 122) by differentiating it from titillatio in the Spinozan paradigm. Furthermore, for Spinoza, dolor (pain) can become good. Although pain, a subcategory of sorrow, is “directly bad” (Ethics 257), Spinoza insists that pain can be also “good” in so far as it can play the role of restraining excess pleasure from becoming into negative fixation.11

By linking Naess’s ecological reading of Spinoza with Bateson’s thoughts, one can conclude that the primary mode of joy in the paradigm of plateaus is “an active joy,”12 (“Friendship” 122), which includes the pain that can restrain the

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11 Naess responds to this point as follows:

Pain may, under certain circumstances, be a good, and pleasure an evil, according to Spinoza. If pleasure affects too narrow a range of “parts” too intensely, the adverse effects on other parts increases (geometrically?). . . . As regards pain, it may have a beneficial function in that in a more comprehensively conceived situation it represents an increase in power. Just as a partial joy (a pleasurable excitement) may indirectly be an obstacle to increased freedom, pain may be a positive stimulant. (Freedom 105)

12 See Naess’s explanation. “Joy in the sense of laetitia is not always something wholly good; it is not always an active affect. In the passage quoted we must think of an active joy. Or else, we
pleasure that is fixated on specific “body parts” (Ethics 258) or ideas. This type of joy in plateaus can be directly connected to the soul of the Deleuzian baroque of immanence, which dismantles the relational web operated by a transcendent signifier or figure by taking up a vital connection, distribution, and transformation of infinite differences as its foundation.

Based on Bateson’s notion of plateau we have discussed so far, let us examine the mode of non-human ecstasy in the Deleuzian baroque of plateaus, focusing on his reading of Leibniz’s monadology and Bernini’s The Ecstasy of St. Teresa.

III. Deleuze’s Baroque of Plateaus: Faciality, Close-up and the Ecology of Non-Human Ecstasy

One of Deleuze’s main tasks in The Fold can be described as constructing an ecological cosmology based on the principle of the baroque of immanence, which features the concertation of the infinite monads orchestrated by the vital movements of the folds. The Leibnizian monad, the most basic and minimal metaphysical component of the world, is “a simple substance that enters into composites” (Monadology #1), which cannot be divided into other parts, and is “made up of smaller and smaller folds” (N 158). Monads envelope “an entire world that does not exist outside of them” (F 137) and “illuminat[e] some little portion of that world” (N 157) based on their own perspective and capacity;¹³ the world expresses itself through the vital movements of an infinite number of monads. Using Leibniz’s monadology, Deleuze offers a unique and elaborate model of the baroque montage, which is made up of a two-story building of the baroque musical salon in the cone or cupola style. On the one hand, the upper floor of the building is “an essentially interior space” (Bogue 53) like a dark and closed private chamber having “no windows” (F 4) decorated with a drapery “diversified by folds” (4). The upper floor, which recalls the image of “a monastic cell” (Bogue 53), corresponds to the soul—the spiritual and metaphysical realm of the monad. On the other hand, the lower floor is the corporeal field of matter, as a common room with several openings that enable connection with other matters and an outer world (F 5).

What we need to pay attention to here is the mode of conjunction between the two floors of the house and that of communication between the house and the outside. As already mentioned, the second floor of the house, the realm of the

¹³ As to this, see Leibniz’s Monadology #57, #60.
monad, has no windows or doors. Thus, it cannot directly communicate with other monads or the outer world. However, the first floor, the realm of matter, has many openings, which can be vitally interrelated to other matters. This animated connection triggers deep “vibrations or oscillations,” (4) and those resonances are spiraling toward the upper floor, spiritual monads. In the structure of the baroque house, the two floors are not directly connected or communicated as a fixed substance; rather they are intercommunicated through the movement of the folds, which act as “a ‘differentiator’” (N 156). The fold is operating like a magical “vinculum” to link the lower corporeality and the “upper monadic spirituality” (Bogue 54). It becomes the essence of the main platform, stimulating the dynamic harmony of infinite monads through vibrant resonances.

Such conjunction between the higher closed interiority of the spiritual monad and the base of corporeal matter composed by the dynamic resonance spiraling toward a summit takes “[t]he law of the cupola, a Baroque figure par excellence” (F 124). Deleuze emphasizes that the apex, the “luminous origin” of the cupola, is not the sharpest point but “a round point that inserts a concave surface in the place of an acute angle,” which “must still be in an infinitely folded form, bent over a concavity” (124). In this Leibnizian baroque montage, this world can be compared to a magnificent baroque church choir in which an infinite number of monads “sing their part without either knowing or hearing” those of others, yet “‘in perfect accord’” (133).

The harmony Leibniz depicts through the image of the baroque church choir is a “pre-established” (134) harmony, which is composed by God’s highly sophisticated calculation and selection. As was emphasized earlier, Leibniz’s monads do not have windows or doors to directly communicate with other monads. Thus it is God who selects the best possible mode of interconnection between and among the closed infinite number of monads and creates the best possible world through the selection. In this paradigm, the Leibnizian baroque follows the lineage of transcendence, which presupposes the existence of a transcendent being who “brings the world” (EPS 334) outside the world.

Herein, Deleuze chooses a different path from Leibniz’s transcendence by incorporating the Spinozan-Nietzschean logic of immanence into his baroque. This is precisely because if one follows the Leibnizian transcendent God to its logical end, the various and vibrant movements of differences could be homogeneously organized and furthermore become ontologically hierarchized “according to their distance from, or proximity to the transcendent principle” (TRM 261). In the matrix

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14 For more on this, see Monadology #90.
of his neo-baroque, Deleuze ultimately dismisses the existence of Leibniz’s God, who is supposed to create the stable closure by selecting the best combination of monads in the chaotic universe. Bogue explains the significance of the Deleuzian dismissal by accentuating the dramatic transition from Leibnizian pre-established “harmonic closure to an opening onto a polytonality” (*F* 82): “. . . the principle of selection no longer holds. Multiple possible worlds coexist, worlds that are incompossible and yet co-present. . . . Hence, with the demise of the principle of selection, the principle of closure also falls away, as the monad opens onto the various divergent, incompossible worlds with which it is attuned” (Bogue 65).15

In the Leibnizian universe, divergence and incompossibilities are considered the essentially negative phenomena that God would eradicate for the creation of the best possible world. By contrast, in Deleuzian neo-Leibnizism, divergence and incompossibilities are affirmed as cases of the vital movements of differences. That is, they are not considered as part of the pathological delirium but as creative elements that can enrich the universe of multiplicities in the spirit of immanence. Through this affirmation of divergence and incompossibilities, Deleuze offers a new mode of harmony in the baroque, which is not mediated or governed by the principle of transcendence in Leibniz’s pre-established harmony.

The mode of harmony that Deleuze vividly unfolds in his baroque of immanence can be envisioned as the ecological waves of the plateaus, which arise from the dynamic interconnection of an infinite number of cupola-style baroque monads and matter. In the process of transforming Leibniz’s monadology into his nomadology, the cosmological image that Deleuze produces through the great baroque montage has some profound affinities with the height and waves of plateaus in the Batesonian sense. This is precisely because the apex of the Deleuzian neo-baroque house is not an excessively idealized pinnacle toward which an intensified energy drives; furthermore, the apex of the neo-baroque house is not a “solitary” (*F* 132) or exceptional point but a rounded summit which is ontologically “solidary” (132) with other summits of the monads. The figure of its

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15 See Deleuze’s explanation:

If harmonics lose all privilege of rank (or relations, all privilege of order), not only dissonances excused from being “resolved,” divergences can be affirmed, in series that escape the diatonic scale where all tonality dissolves. But when the monad is in tune with divergent series that belong to incompossible monads, then the other condition is what disappears; . . . the monad is now unable to contain the entire world as if in a closed circle that can be modified by projection. It now opens on a trajectory or a spiral in expansion that moves further and further away from a center. (*F* 137)
connection, which recalls the big waves of the infinite plateaus, forms splendid waves operated by the sacred rhythm of immanence in the Batesonian sense. Thus, it is safe to say that the “felicity” (131) of the baroque in Leibniz can be converted into the ecstatic of immanence in the neo-baroque. Such an ecstatic flows into all things in the universe: from baroque music and architecture to physical nature such as plants, animals, fish, and so on.

Herein, Deleuze intriguingly reveals the mode of the ecstasy of the immanence, especially that of non-human ecstasy at the heart of The Ecstasy of St. Teresa, by transforming the orgasmic climax of facial ecstasy into a defacialized free flow of intensities. The Ecstasy of St. Teresa is well known as the culmination of the Christian baroque spirit and ecstasy, which occurs from the mystic and erotic experience of the religious subject who has an encounter with the Christian infinity. It recounts the ecstatic moment when St. Teresa loses herself and becomes a part of the larger Christian spirit. Considering the conventional notion of this ecstasy “as either an abstracted sexual union with God, or as a deferred or allusive metaphor for orgasm” (MacCormack 202), the rapturous face of St. Teresa, which has been the main focus of scholastic writings on the work, is the quintessence of ecstasy par excellence in the history of Western art. The mystic facial expression mesmerizes the viewer through the incredible mixture of the hallowed and the erotic, even obscene. At the heart of this religious spectacle, the unexpected obscenity furtively shines forth; thus, it stimulates the guilty pleasure in the consciousness of its viewers, and in doing so, it pushes them into the ecstatic stage in the vertiginous mixture of purity and the obscene.

As opposed to the conventional focus on the moment of “coming (jouissance)” (Lacan 76) and guilty pleasure on the face of St. Teresa, Deleuze focuses on another mode of ecstasy—one that can sever itself from guilty pleasure and orgasmic pleasure fixated on a specific part of the body: the face. Deleuze concentrates on the vertiginously vibrant movement of the folds into infinity, which beautifully captures the spiritual intensity penetrating from St. Teresa’s face into the whole of her body, into the marvelously elevating clouds beneath her, and into the space beyond the work of art. The following analysis by Deleuze on The Ecstasy of St. Teresa defines the art work as a “spiritual adventure” toward infinity.

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16 As to the analysis of Deleuze’s reading of The Ecstasy of St. Teresa based on the Deleuzian notion of face, close-up, and texture in conjunction with baroque and neo-baroque art works, see my paper published in Korea, entitled,〈들뢰즈 혹은 암호 해독가: 바로크와 《성 테레사의 희열》〉 (“Deleuze, or the Cryptographer: The Baroque and The Ecstasy of St. Teresa,” 2005) 108-12.
And when the folds of clothing spill out of painting, it is Bernini who endows them with sublime form in sculpture, when marble seizes and bears to infinity folds that cannot be explained by the body, but by a spiritual adventure that can set the body ablaze. His is not an art of structures but of textures, as seen in the twenty marble forms he fashions. (122)

This spiritual adventure is beyond the human-based world and facialized ecstasy through the sacred folds. Such a Deleuzian reading posits the dramatic moment of dismantling the face by which “the traits of a face enter a real multiplicity” (*TP* 190) with “a freed trait of landscapity, picturality, or musicality” (190). It implies that Deleuze immerses himself in excavating another mode of ecstasy that cannot be subsumed by the rapturous face of St. Teresa, whose symbolic meaning can be expanded to the faciality that privileges the face of Christ as the absolutely idealized transcendent signifier.

Here, we need to briefly mention the theoretical implication of faciality in the thought of Deleuze. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze advances his critique of faciality in Western thought, religion, and art in the sense that faciality can operate as a despotic machine which imposes subjectivity onto the individual or the group based on the face of Christ, which is privileged as an absolute standard of social status and power. For instance, in accordance with the extent to which the face is “Christianized” and “facIALIZED” (178), the racial hierarchy is determined by proximity to “Christ as the European central point” (301).17 Faciality can operate as a coercive and dogmatic sign that restrains the vital flow of singularities in the individual or social community. In this regard, it is no wonder that he endeavors to embody the spiritual intensity that can cause the face to explode through the pulsating figuration of the folds.

In the context of face, faciality, and the technique of close-up, one can find a fascinating structural homology between the way Deleuze envisages another ecstasy in *The Ecstasy of St. Teresa* and his reading of religious films such as Carl Dreyer’s *The Passion of Joan of Arc* and Robert Bresson’s profound Catholic films. Although Deleuze never mentions the notion of the close-up in his analysis of *The Ecstasy of St. Teresa*, close-up can be considered an important aesthetic technique to reveal the core of his neo-baroque project. It is not only a crucial cinematic

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17 See Deleuze’s statements: “If the face is in fact Christ, in other words, your average ordinary White Man, then the first deviances, the first divergencetypes [sic], are racial: yellow man, black man, men in the second or third category” (*TP* 178).
technique but also a very profound spiritual art to extract the singularity (properness) of the object by activating the power of the virtual in the object and then transforming it into a driving force to create a new landscape which can be creatively connected with the outer infinity. In this sense, the close-up of a face is neither a simple “enlargement” (C1 96) nor an emphasis of the face; it opens up a totally new dimension filled with pure affect by “tear[ing] the image away from spatio-temporal coordinates,” (96) that is, dismantling the faciality. In this sense, the facial close-up in Deleuze can be defined as a cinematic technique to liberate non-personal virtual power trapped by the closed frame of a face and express it in the open spiritual landscape.

The technique of close-up is essential in vividly envisioning the way in which Deleuze magnifies “the intensity of the spiritual force” (F 122) penetrating from the whole body of the sculpture to the ethereal air through the process of defacialization. Here, it is crucial to recognize that infinite fragments, which can be visualized through close-up, are generated from the dissolution of the face. These fragments are like sparkling crystals, recalling the image of the infinite spiritual monads in the Deleuzian baroque. These monadic crystals vitally unfold onto the outside gracefully attuned with Bresson’s “principle of ‘fragmentation’: we pass from a closed set that is fragmented to an open spiritual whole that is created or recreated” (C1 117).

Deleuze calls the newly created open spiritual space manifested by close-up “any-space-whatever” (109). He describes any-space-whatever as “a perfectly singular space, which has merely lost its homogeneity” (109) and “a space of the virtual conjunction” whose “linkages can be made in an infinite number of ways” (109). Deleuze argues that “the any-space-whatever which is identical to the power of the spirit, to the perpetually renewed spiritual decision” (117) dismantles and displaces “the narration of actions and perception of determinate places” (122). Based on the discussion of the Deleuzian close-up and any-space-whatever, we can see that the spiritual realm expressed in the Deleuzian reading of The Ecstasy of St. Teresa can initiate a new narrative of the sacred, which is different from—or to put it more exactly, cannot be subsumed by—the conventional representative narratives of the baroque, that is, the narrative of Jesus Christ. What Deleuze exhumes in the newly invented narratives is a non-personal mode of ecstasy, which can transform the spatio-temporal coordinates of the ecstatic human face into another matrix of new spiritual dimensions, especially the dimension of immanence. This non-personal or non-human feature is not directly opposite to our conventional notion of person or human. Rather, it is a trope that is not restricted by the logic of dichotomy.
This non-human or impersonal trope precisely refers to a fundamental realm that is prior to the dichotomous opposition of “human vs. not human.” In a word, the notion of non-human is prior to and beyond the realm of human that is rooted in faciality.

Intriguingly, this non-human ecstasy has a structural affinity with Spinozan hilaritas (cheerfulness/an active joy). Both of them, activated by the ecological spirit of immanence in the Batesonian sense, defy any despotic faciality, which could dominate and subdue the free flow of joy and desire by fixating them on the excessively idealized and privileged body organs, existence (especially human), and ideas. In this regard, it is fair to say that Deleuzian non-human ecstasy can offer a profound critique of Spinozan titillatio (pleasure), which thwarts us from experiencing the diverse affects in our life and decreases our power and freedom by dominating all other emotions and forcing them to excessively adhere to a specific mode of pleasure, although it is a part of joy. This non-human ecstasy is not simply composed of active joy. It also entails the trait of a specific mode of Spinozan “pain” because pain can operate as “a positive stimulant” (*Freedom* 105), which can obstruct excess pleasure from deteriorating into destructive obsession and fixation. By operating as a positive stimulant, pain melts into the core of non-human ecstasy, which can stimulate and intensify the dynamic flow of active joy.

Another important feature of Deleuzian non-human ecstasy is that it is erotic. But this sense of “erotic” has nothing to do with voyeuristic and sexual organ-centered pleasure. Let us refer to Alhadeff’s brilliant reading of Deleuzian eroticism and erotic politics, which offers a clue to approaching the erotic in the ecological sense. She argues that “eroticism offers an intensely satisfying sensation of connectedness to oneself, to others and to one’s environment in which creativity and work enhance our own and others’ sense of vitality” (108; emphasis in original). Furthermore, this type of eroticism can play the role of offering a new mode of politics that “reorients our cultural concepts of pleasure” (108) and transforms the art of governing our bodies and society “by interweaving the very interactions that are often prohibited or suppressed under social norms” (108).

Let us sum up our discussion of the Deleuzian reading of *The Ecstasy of St. Teresa* by explicating the philosophical implication in Deleuze’s incisive definition of the masterpiece: it is “not an art of structures but of textures” (*F* 122). Here, “structure” can be interpreted as the structure that is organized and governed by the logic of faciality. Instead, Deleuze defines this art work as the great art of the (neo-) baroque texture comprised of infinite folds. These folds are not simply exuberant and flamboyant ornamentation but profound concrete and physical images that
beautifully embody the spiritual intensity. In this sense, texture can be called the metaphysical surface that expresses the infinity of immanence in and beyond the Christian faciality. In this cosmological space of the Deleuzian neo-baroque, this surface of texture is, furthermore, expanded to the cosmological plane of immanence, which features the magnificent and smooth waves of plateaus orchestrated by the graceful concertation of an infinite number of monads.

**IV. Conclusion: Ecological Becoming in “Where Angels Fear to Tread”**

Under the rubric of the baroque of plateaus, the thought of Deleuze and Bateson, relentlessly striving to overcome the limitations of “Occidental” thinking in their inventive appropriation of Biblical terms and images, is exquisitely folded on the texture of *The Ecstasy of St. Teresa*. The creative intermixture of their thought provides ecological infinity and joy by replacing the facialized Christian baroque with the grace of immanence. In the process of replacement, one could confirm that the spirit of immanence is a more fundamental foreground to the organization of the seventeenth-century Christian baroque. That is, the baroque of plateaus, which embodies the new mode of infinity and ecstasy of immanence, is not simply anti- or opposite to the transcendence of the Christian baroque; rather, it can operate as a positive force preventing the Christian baroque from deteriorating into the dogmatic and despotic facialized baroque. The notion of plateaus exquisitely grafted onto discourses of the baroque incisively reveals that the orgasmic pinnacle of the seventeenth-century baroque is not the only absolute mode of spirituality and ecstasy but one of the sacred (including Christian) multiplicities in the history of spirituality.

The significance of the natural images that often appear in *The Fold* can be well understood in the context of the plateaus, which feature an ecological sacred multiplicity. Those natural images in the book—such as fishes, plants, a pond, a lake, and so on—are, in fact, considerably unfamiliar objects (or images) that can bewilder readers who are accustomed to the traditional representations of the baroque, such as the exuberant and sublime images of Christian figures and events. In contrast to Christian excess and ecstasy, Deleuze endeavors to embody his vision of the baroque of immanence in the universe Leibniz envisions as “a pond of matter in which there exist different flows and waves” (5). In the neo-Leibnizian cosmological universe, resonating through the symphony of the symbiosis with “a
polytonality” (82), the ecological non-human ecstasy is flowing into the texture of rocks, fish, bees, animals, mountains, and human beings themselves.

The refrain of the great ecological symphony in the neo-baroque is none other than the rhythm of becoming. In the Deleuzian paradigm, becoming is the principle of symbiosis, which features the “rhizomatic” (TP 8) connectivity and transformation of each heterogeneous being and term; each being is connected not as a stable and fixed identity or substance but as “a field of intensities or a wave of vibrations” (305). Becoming is “not the privilege of human beings” (309) in the sense that its cheerful rhythm disorganizes the “facialization of the entire body” (301). Becoming produces non-facialized ecstasy, which penetrates into nature in the cosmological space of immanence by creating a spiritual bloc of musical sensation in which “all of Nature becomes an immense melody and flow of bodies” (F 135). It is such a joyful rhythm of becoming that puts in motion the magnificent waves of the plateaus on the interface of the ecological thought of Deleuze and Bateson.

In conclusion, the baroque of plateaus, the product of the creative encounter between Deleuze and Bateson, “casts us as visionaries” (N 160) by transporting us to “a no-man’s-island” (TP 293)—the uncanny but highly productive realm of the un-thought, located at the core of the Christian (transcendent) baroque. This concept substantiates Deleuze’s and Bateson’s pioneering journey into places “where angels fears to tread” wherein a new way of thought on infinity and ecstasy in the spirit of immanence are presented. In this sense, the baroque of plateaus is not simply a term relating to trends of art history but an ontological concept that provides us with a new perspective of the world through the ecological vision of immanence. Through the notion of plateaus and the ecology of non-human ecstasy, the baroque is reborn as a fascinating concept which can inspire further theoretical discourse and diverse aesthetic practices.

Works Cited


About the Author

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[Received 1 September 2014; accepted 29 April 2015]