

Face and the City

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Abstract

This piece sets out an exploration of the relations between the city, the body and the face, seeking to understand in particular how the city and the face could be articulated with reference to an image of the body. It is suggested that the face and the city entertain a kind of privileged affinity. Just as the face unsettles the head and the bodily system to which it belongs, projecting the latter into an intersubjective social system of interaction and signification, so the city unsettles the land where it is located, projecting it into long-distance connections with similar entities scattered across the continent, and beyond. The piece evolves into the twin exploration of, on the one hand, ‘the city of the face’ and, on the other, ‘the face of the city’.

Keywords

city, Deleuze, face, head, identity, landscape, territorialology

Introduction

This piece sets out an exploration of the relations between the city, the body and the face, seeking in particular to understand how the city and the face could be articulated with reference to an image of the body. To begin with, an unusual similarity between the face and the city can be outlined thanks to Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophy. In a section of *A Thousand Plateaus*, titled *Visagéité* [*Faceness*], the French authors juxtapose the head and the face (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980: 208). The head, they argue, is part of the body, while the face is rather a deterritorialisation of the head. Using the classic research by Leroi-Gourhan (1964) in palaeontology, they suggest that the face is the quintessentially communicative organ. In the evolution of primates, the erected posture entails a first detachment

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of the face from the ground, followed by a second detachment of the mouth from food, to the extent that speaking is introduced. Thus, the organs of the head are, so to speak, duplicated, as a new layer of functions is applied. As a result, the face does not fully belong to the individual body but is already part of a larger system of communication – an intersubjective, or social, arrangement. The face can thus be imagined as the field where phenomena of signification and intersubjectivity appear. This idea also animates the philosophy of Levinas (1961), where the face precisely becomes the ethical imperative of dealing with an Other (*Autrui*) who faces the subject from a position of irreducible exteriority. Insofar as one can never occupy the place of the Other, the face of the Other is always in front of the subject and always transcends it. For their part, Deleuze and Guattari articulate these insights with the thesis that the face originates from a decoding of some parts of the body followed by a subsequent recoding: in a certain way, the body is partly *undone* by the face, which in turn then redoes it under different conditions (different ‘longitudes’ and ‘latitudes’).

Interestingly, in another section of *A Thousand Plateaus* titled *Appareil de capture* [*Capture Device*], and without making reference to the head/face binary, the city is discussed as a form of deterritorialisation vis-à-vis the hinterland (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980: 539). Here, the city is seen as interrupting the continuity of the land or region where it is located, insofar as cities are turned towards a higher-level network of cities. Such a network is defined as ‘trans-consistence threshold:’ in other words, a threshold is established past which a new qualitative level appears where city-to-city connections can be lodged as a distinct type of relations. City networks may be of commercial nature, but also of religious, political, cultural or even financial nature: examples include the Hanseatic League, the world cities of corporate capital, the Greek sanctuary cities and so on. Regardless of the nature of the specific assemblage, what is essential is the network connection itself: the city entertains a privileged relation with other cities, to the detriment of a relation of spatial continuity with its regional surroundings (the hinterland). In sum, one could say that the network appears as a type of hierarchically-arranged territory, where cities are also seen as working at two levels that are intrinsically different by nature and by operating principle.

Drawing on such a summary theoretical reconstruction of two sections of *A Thousand Plateaus*, it is possible to suggest that the face and the city entertain an elective if not structural affinity: both are parts of two systems simultaneously, both are apt to peculiarly set those systems in motion. The face unsettles the head and the bodily system to which it belongs by projecting it into an intersubjective social system of interaction and signification, no less than the city unsettles the land where it is located by projecting it into long-distance connections with similar entities scattered across the continent, and beyond. Borrowing a notion from Simondon (2013 [1964]), it is perhaps possible to say that the face and the city entail phenomena of *disparation*, that is, peculiar formations that exist simultaneously within two separate and ‘unmatchable’ regimes. While these phenomena span the two regimes, they also conduct a tensional existence, given that no direct one-to-one correspondence across those regimes exists, and integration can only take place at a different, higher level, that is, in a newly created dimension.¹

To a certain extent, then, the relation between the face and the city could thus be imagined as one of analogy: the face and the city carry out an analogous operation, albeit in unrelated domains. Yet what happens once the two notions become entangled? What happens, for instance, if one seeks to develop the notion of ‘the face of the city’? If the face deterritorialises the head, and the city deterritorialises the region, is ‘the face of the city’ going to produce a further type of deterritorialisation, a further detachment? Where would this double deterritorialisation land onto? Intuitively, the notion of the face of the city makes sense: we all remember the cities we have visited through a certain synthetic sense of their unity – an apprehension that is similar to the persistence of the face of a person we know. The idea of synthesis – and, precisely, a *synthesis of dispartes*² – is pivotal here: indeed, our remembrance of the face of a person or a city may not correspond to any precise, actual image we have ever perceived of that person, or city. Memory synthesises and reassembles, and the identity of a face is always the result of a complex, non-linear process.³ Similarly, while not clearly located in any single image, the face of the city might still be conceivable as strictly associated with its identity. This idea introduces us to a kind of non-localised identity of the local individual entity, perhaps not without analogy with quantum non-locality in physics.

The articulation of the city and the face also runs the other way around: ‘the city of the face’ may be an odd-sounding phrase, but it does not lack substantive ground. In fact, the face phenomenon always conveys strong moral-political components. This insight is clearly present in Levinas. In parallel, the city itself can be understood as a moral-political unit of coexistence, as for instance in Saint Augustine’s *De Civitate Dei*, where *civitas* stands for a way of life encapsulated in a series of urban values and feelings. If, as suggested above, the face looms large above the *individual* body, and even haunts the body as a force that is intrinsic to it and yet simultaneously carries it beyond itself, then something similar may be going on in relation to the *social* body: the face is never possessed by a single individual, rather, intrinsic to it is the social-political coexistence of a multiplicity of associated individuals (a polity, a *city*), whose beliefs and desires constantly push the patterns and the orders of their existence beyond the established formats inherited from the past. In this sense, for instance, Augustine asserts that the city of God and the city of humans are always mixed in concrete historical reality and that each individual lives in an ethical as well as soteriological open field where – so to speak – she can always decide to switch from the one to the other.

One may counter-argue that the face and the city are, at the ontological level, too distant entities to be meaningfully compared. The aim of this piece is to probe the intuitive affinity between the face and the city to check the extent to which the comparison can be substantiated. Admittedly, the nature of this text is more speculative than argumentative: in this sense, it may be interpreted as an experiment with the puzzle concerning the multiple relations between the face, the city, the body and social life. In this sense, it can be said to follow the lead of Elizabeth Grosz’s invitation to develop

a model of the relations between bodies and cities that sees them, not as megalithic total entities, but as assemblages or collections of parts, capable of crossing the thresholds between substances to form linkages, machines, provisional and often temporary sub- or micro-groupings. (Grosz, 1995: 385)

Yet while Grosz’s elaboration focuses on ‘the productivity of bodies and cities in defining and establishing each other’, a discussion of the face implies considering the non-individual, disembodied or

incorporeal results that are inherent in face-effects. Differently from the body–city connection, the face–city connection cannot be reduced to a fact of mutual constitution of the two terms. This article proceeds to unpack this insight through an articulation into three sections. The first section explores the emergence of the face as an ethical–moral–political exigency (‘the city of the face’), whereas the second reconstructs the promises of using the face to investigate urban life (‘the face of the city’). In the discussion, an attempt is made to reconnect the two notions in multiple, non-reductive ways so as to lay out some working hypotheses for urban theory and the studies of the body and the subject in social and urban environments.

The City of the Face

The city is a polity, as is made clear by the ancient Greek notion of *koinonía politikē* – for *politics* is, quite literally, what goes on in the *politeía*.⁴ One may say that, in their philosophical construction, Deleuze and Guattari interpret the face as precisely the point of inception of politics.⁵ Just like cities, and perhaps before them, faces have provided humans with a way of ‘being in common’ and regulating their relations. This is why face competence is so biologically crucial for human survival, as is also increasingly recognised by neuro-scientific research (for a review, see Little et al., 2011). The similarity between the face and the city is doubled in that both constructs are charged with articulating social coexistence *and* providing a workable measure to it. ‘The city of the face’ notion thus raises the question of the face as an always more-than-individual phenomenon – again, with Leroi-Gourhan and Deleuze, the face appears as the locus of the social-political domain.⁶ If the idea of a face that cannot be seen does not make any sense, it is because and insofar as the face is constitutively traced *in the visible*. A face is necessarily *there to be seen*: it is an ‘offer’ the body makes to a *viewing eye*.⁷ By no count, however, does visible equal simple or flat. In his two books on cinema, Deleuze (1983, 1985) returns to the topic of the face, especially in relation to the cinematic close-up. Following Bergson, he now conceptualises the face as a movement-image and distinguishes what happens when the face operates as, respectively, on the one hand, a perception-image, and, on the other, an affection-image. In the first case, there is dominance of sensibility and wonder, and the

‘expression of a quality that is shared by different things’ (as well as different subjects), whereas in the second case there is dominance of intensity and desire, and the ‘expression of a power that flows from one thing to another’ (as well as from one individual to another).

The face is the shibboleth of the human being, its shared, visible *secret*. The domain of the visible, in other words, supports the laying out of a multiplicity of heterogeneous, enlarging and shrinking circuits of meaning.⁸ The face thus entails a politics of surfaces – a *superficial politics*, if one wishes, whose association with mundaneness, frivolity, grotesque and excess is particularly evident in the mask, which we shall examine below. Simultaneously, the ‘secret’ of the face lies in the fact that, in it, the most superficial speaks of the most profound: the outermost of the very inmost.⁹ A complex topology ensues, which needs to be attended.

Which type of social coexistence does the face afford? The search for recognition from significant others contradistinguishes the face as a thymotic organ, if not *the* thymotic organ par excellence. As classically analysed by Goffman (1967), *facework* is micropolitics in action. Developing the Durkheimian approach, Goffman highlights that the face is one principal carrier of that modicum of sacredness each single individual can reclaim independently of, and yet derivatively from, the gathered group. In this specific sense, the face marks the inception, not only of ethics and politics but also and simultaneously of *morality*: as soon as one receives a face, one *must* protect it. In this sense, Goffman stresses that, if the face provides the individual with an image of oneself, it simultaneously engages the individual in serious and tiresome interaction work aimed at defending that peculiar ‘good’ from all sorts of threats. This includes in particular preventing face-damaging incidents, which could range from uncomfortable to devastating. In fact, losing one’s face quite simply equates to being ‘defaced’ and disgraced as a person.¹⁰

The connection between the face and ethical, moral and political existence radically interrogates how we understand the ethical-moral-political sphere itself. Certainly, it is moral feelings that make one blush; but one could also reverse the perspective and suggest that without the biological capacity of the face to blush, morality could hardly exist. The latter is, typically, a Nietzschean point. The facial surface may be said to co-articulate the biological and the ethical-moral-political domains via the face’s powerful regime of

expressiveness. In this vein, Black (2011) has written a stimulating essay on the richness of facial expression as a biosocial phenomenon. However, his treatment of Deleuze and Guattari reads at time selective and risks missing some of the most interesting insights in the theoretical construction offered by the French theorists. In essence, Black is concerned with the fact that an approach such as Deleuze and Guattari's one would oversimplify the nature of the face; he criticises them for providing a merely negative account of the face as a structure of power that fixates identities and entraps people's lives. In particular, he argues that Deleuze and Guattari have completely overlooked the complex biological phenomenon of the face, presenting it as if it were a merely simplified, abstract system – the famous 'white wall-black hole' machine which Deleuze has used at various points in his philosophy (including, for instance, in his theory of cinema).

Black's criticisms are useful in that they capture an ambivalence that is present in certain passages of the *Visagéité* section. However, they do not seem to do justice to the whole picture of the Deleuzian–Guattarian undertaking. In fact, one must start from highlighting that Deleuze and Guattari did not so much speak about the face per se. Rather, they employ the neologism *visagéité*, which might be rendered perhaps as *facialisation*, *faceness* or *face-effect*. Facialisation is the abstract – virtual, if one wishes – scheme accompanying the occurrence of actual faces. Facialisation, in other words, is 'face device', or 'face schema',¹¹ not any actual concrete face. Facialisation produces the face as its peculiar *effect*. In line with his previous exploration of Stoic philosophy (Deleuze, 1969), Deleuze seems to be interested in the face as an 'incorporeal effect' resultant from a material-semiotic operation.¹² Which sort of operation or procedure is called forth in the production of a face-effect? Such is the driving question in the first part of the *Visagéité* text. In their treatment of the question, Deleuze and Guattari examine the pure facial phenomenon, which for them is *face-making*. The existence of biosocial systems of *facing* follows from here, rather than being ruled out as held by Black. Indeed, Deleuze and Guattari are quite clear that all signifying processes are material-semiotic, that is, they concern the organisation and orchestration of *expressive materials*. The qualities of the materials *and* the ways of organising them are thus both essential in the picture drawn by the two French authors.

At a first stage, the notion of facialisation may help to explain the peculiar *animistic* efficacy of the face. When we see faces in trees, on rocks, in clouds, on other planet's surfaces and so on certainly, we are facialising objects that do not have the same biological substrate as the human face.¹³ Yet we should be careful not to ground animism in the presupposition of a fixed distinction between animate and inanimate beings, as classic anthropologists did. In the late 19th century, for instance, E.B. Tylor authored the classic view that animism is a categorical mistake committed by the primitive mind. In fact, as recently suggested by Ingold (2007), animism does not so much puts life in things, as much as sees things as being 'in life'. One could even suggest that animism is better understood not as a belief, or a representation, but as an actual, practical operation that consists in summoning and inviting a dialogue with 'counterparts' that cannot be deterministically controlled (Bird-David, 1999). Recognising that each actual face is produced by – or at any rate through – an 'abstract' machine explains, at least in part, why face-effects can be recorded in things that are not biological organisms. In fact, 'abstract' means that, from a graphic point of view, the 'white wall-black hole' system does not resemble a face at all. For instance, the DNA is the embodiment of one such biological 'abstractions'. Seen in this light, the discovery of social animals' genetic predisposition towards face sensitivity and face recognition seems to concur with the notion of abstract machine.

For Deleuze and Guattari, the problem is first of all to understand how the concrete organisation of facial *traits* comes about. As we have seen above, the biological notion of 'viewing eye' invites the consideration that, in social species, the individual's face is not an individual phenomenon, but already an aggregated (social) one. Again, the face *is* a city, a polity, a meeting point or even a medium of encounters. From this standpoint, facial traits may not be different from the physical elements of a city. If so, Deleuze and Guattari can hardly be accused, as Black (2011: 18–19) does, of 'privileging the rational, conscious and linguistic', or suggesting that the face is 'the mark of a restrictive identity which must be thrown off' – least, of arguing that the face descends from subjectivity. For his part, Deleuze has indeed always been the theorist of an externalist perspective on subjectivity: in opposition to existentialism and phenomenology, he has consistently approached the subject as the outcome

of a composition of forces (a ‘machine’) rather than as a natural pre-existing entity, or a primary experience. Contemporary evolutionary biology and the neurosciences appear to provide support to the idea that subjectivity is, in fact, a late addition to social life.¹⁴

The idea that the face is political, or ethical-moral-political, does not lead to any simplistic rejection of the face as such. True, in a specific passage, the French philosophers comment that a possible ‘destiny’ of mankind would consist in ‘fleeing from the face’ [*échapper au visage*] (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980: 209). But it would be wrong to assume that this implies that faces are just evil, authoritarian entities to be abolished. Rather, what Deleuze and Guattari suggest is that losing one’s face – literally, defacement – may not necessarily always be a negative experience, and may even encapsulate a persistent human longing. Indeed, if the face is a special attainment of social life, it does not come without its significant burdens, its ‘thorns’, its specific perversions: the face is an ambivalent production, compounding what is most human with something absolutely ‘inhuman’. Maybe, even, a passage through the inhuman is the only way to attain the social relation between humans. More generally, no social theory can be seriously developed without comprising and articulating the human and the inhuman as two persistent states or modes inherent in sociation. Social life is a manifestation of an intensity – where intensity also implies the possibility of destroying the human: that is why Deleuze writes that the face can always sink into a black hole or be effaced on a white wall. The abstract machine of facialisation is an autonomous, unconscious production, not a planned one submitted to a deliberate project, nor something that could be simply prevented from happening.¹⁵ We may gloss this point by saying that politics is unavoidable. On the other hand, one senses already that it is not the face per se that is oppressive. The problem lies in how faces are connected to each other and organised in social life. If ever, social oppression resides in a specific exploitation of facialisation where redundancy is brought to the maximum level of a paralysing and intoxicating white noise.

As recalled above, Deleuze and Guattari were interested in how the face emerges and detaches itself from the body to become an independent system. However, it is also clear that such independence from the substrate is necessarily relative.¹⁶ So for instance, a face seen in a tree can be strikingly expressive, but it lacks the finely tuned

modulations of a human face in an unfolding conversation. In this sense, Black is right in insisting on the fine muscular tissues that underpin the human face, and how these have purposefully evolved as biosocial structures. However, if Deleuze and Guattari insist perhaps too much on the 'redundant' aspect of the face (i.e. its stabilised and stabilising features), Black on the other hand puts too much emphasis on its constant transformation and its being 'in flux' (its instability). In fact, the face seem to *swing* between these two extremes, between a fixity that turns it into a rigid mask, and a fluidity that makes it completely disorganised and, ultimately, a vanishing object.¹⁷

Such a tension between fixation and transformation captures a major practical facial problem: the face is revealed as a *sensible* formation, susceptible to being spoiled by various sources of disturbance.¹⁸ This is quite true at the level of perception. Since human face processing is specialised for the upright position, vertical visual inversion of a face turns out to be perceptually disruptive (Little et al., 2011). If considered in its open bareness and the utter basicness of its expressive traits, the face always borders with 'a horror story' (Deleuze's phrase). In clinical body dysmorphic disorder, for instance, the slightest change in facial traits is perceived as an unbearable monstrous deformation. The grave problem for persons afflicted by this psychic disturbance is that there is basically no situation in which an absolute stable facial configuration can be secured (for the living thing, the highest stability can only be found in death).¹⁹

Because the face-effect, taken as an incorporeal reality, can be occasionally borrowed and lent, the face itself comprises a continuum of stabilisation and destabilisation. At one extreme, instability and flux menace the surface with chaos, formlessness and meaninglessness; at the other extreme, the face reduced to an 'icon' is flattened upon a fixed mask – the political leader, the pop singer and so on. From this perspective, the head and the mask might instantiate two extreme possibilities of the face, both of which emphasise our affective investment into faciality. The affective aspect of the face is quite striking, and affection has direct import on one's identity constitution. As suggested at the outset, in many cases, the face comes to stand metonymically for the unity of a *larger* entity – be it an individual person or a whole city.²⁰ Clearly, the face can be used as a

token of identity only to the extent that it leans on the fixation side; and it is with this aspect of fixation that Deleuze and Guattari were particularly concerned in their treatise. However, once we consider that a wholly fixed face is, in fact, nothing else but a mask, we can reread some of the claims made in *Visageité* as describing the functioning of mask-faces, rather than faces in general. It is *qua* mask that the face fixates a centre of power: for instance, the face of the leader is quite technically a 'mask of command' (Keegan, 1987). For Deleuze in particular, what the State does it put such mask-faces-qua-centres-of-power into a state of resonance: for the State structure to exist, the face of the father must resonate with the face of the colonel, the face of the technocrat, the face of the President and so on.

The mask thus seems to integrate both the opposite of the fluid face engaged in social interaction as well simultaneously (paradoxically) the face in its purest and barest efficacy (or, with Deleuze, its 'machine'). It is in this sense that the face can be associated with a triumph of the 'significant' over the 'signified:' precisely due to its *univocal poverty*, the mask appears as a hyper-expressive face. As a frozen face condensed in one endless, absolute expression, the mask embodies the loss of dynamic qualities inherent in facial life.²¹ The death mask is thus one extreme possibility of facial performance: we all recognise Agamemnon's death mask (dating from about 1,500 BC), although probably not many people would recognise Agamemnon were he be able to come back in person from the dead and waive at us in the street.²² All iconic faces seem to be bounded to a similar situation – one is reminded, typically, of the posterised face of Che Guevara that once featured on teenager T-shirts. The icon is, in this sense, a visibility crystal, a token of crystallised visibility. In the masks of the Barbagia Carnival in Sardinia, the hyperbolic expressions of the mask shield individual identity (crimes committed by masked individuals are hard to attribute), but at the same time, they also operate a radical transformation of the individual itself. The continuity of the 'unmasked regime' is suspended by the wearing of a mask, and a new uncharted interaction space is laid out.²³ Unsurprisingly, simultaneous relief and disquiet are associated with masks and mask-wearing.

Considered from the point of view of identity, the political aspect of the face raises practical problems of governmental type. How to 'stabilise' a face, how to hamper its fluctuations, in order to turn it into the

stable carrier of an individual identity? At the end of the 19th century, photography was loaded with the task of extracting the individual from the crowd, especially through the capturing of its face. Incidentally, one notices here how the crowd itself was interpreted as a kind of mask that could shield the individual criminal, preventing the attribution of legal responsibility to anybody. The Italian pathologist and anthropologist Paolo Mantegazza, for instance, subscribing to the Lombrosian belief that dangerous individuals could be flagged by their facial features, was interested in the power of photography to make the political agitator recognisable by its facial features (but, are we not dreaming today to do the same with terrorists?). Umberto Ellero, a follower of Mantegazza, was among the pioneers of ID photography, as revealed by his treatise on *Photography in Police and Court Functions* dating from 1908. While Mantegazza had enthusiastically declared his faith in photography's capturing power, Ellero more humbly noticed that, practically, when it came to pinning down the *natural* facial traits of alleged criminals against their will, the latter contorted their traits to the point of becoming unrecognisable, proving to be veritable facial 'escape artists'.²⁴

Which visual traits are actually necessary to recognise a face remains open to debate. An artist like Alberto Giacometti, for instance, sought to render a face by conducting a rigorous research into some minute and apparently uninfluential details (such as a point located between the eyes and the nose, or similar 'singularities') and giving back the rest of the face with quick rough strokes. The contrast between starkly differing levels of detail can prove quite effective for evocation purposes. In real life, however, the situations where one has to recognise a person by her or his face only are rare: sharing an environment and composing an encounter with someone are multi-sensorial undertakings – and incidentally, this is what prosopagnosics do, too: They rely on the flanking clues that surround the face. When we remember or evoke a person, it is often through a typical (or atypical) situation, a gesture, a laughter, a way of occupying space, a mode of joking or blushing or arguing, an attire and so on. Are all these aspects of someone's *presence* and *style* to be considered as part of her or his face? For Deleuze and Guattari, the same 'machine' or configuration that produces faces also produces *landscapes* – an idea that hints at a dynamic vision of the face as an ongoing, plural exploration, in opposition to its fixation qualities.

A much more subtle appreciation of the nuances of the face can thus be outlined:

All faces envelop an unknown, unexplored landscape; all landscapes are populated by a loved or dreamed-of face, develop a face to come or already past. What face has not called upon the landscapes it amalgamated, sea and hill; what landscape has not evoked the face that would have completed it, providing an unexpected complement for its lines and traits? (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 172–173)

The face-effect, we may gloss, *travels the land*. We return here to the idea of the face as, not a mask or an object, but an event – and, precisely, an event capable of initiating intersubjectivity. In this process, the landscape tends to become populated with faces that, so to speak, animate it. Put differently, the face could be said to bring *animism on land*. If so, which sort of animation does the face confer to the city? This is the question tackled in the remaining part of the piece.

The Face of the City

Having analysed ‘the city of the face’, and in view of turning now towards ‘the face of the city’, it may be helpful to transit through a third image or configuration that could be perhaps called ‘the city of faces’. As one inspects one’s urban experience, the blank face of urbanites in the public spaces of everyday urban life comes powerfully to mind. Urban commuting is punctuated by a crowd of inexpressive faces-in-transit. These are sleeping or half-asleep faces pasted on self-absorbed or absent-minded individuals. In this context, one almost comes to palpably feel that the face is the mute carrier of a secret message: one senses that a kind of message is being issued, although one ignores the sender, and is not able to specify the message.²⁵ Cities are so filled with faces that they perhaps could even said to consist of populations of faces. In his Marseille diary, Walter Benjamin (1932) famously describes how, during hashish intoxication, he remained for hours hypnotised by the sinister expressions of the faces he walked by in La Canebière, the popular harbour neighbourhood of the city, becoming a somehow shameless, compulsive ‘contemplator of physiognomies’.

If the city of faces seems to be made mostly of transient faces scattered across a stable built environment, then this fact may help to emphasise, *a converso*, the operation carried by an artist such as JR, the French photographer-turned-global-street-artist. At bottom, the operation carried out by JR – and which certainly other artists in the muralist tradition have anticipated with different media – consists of pasting giant posters of faces on buildings. In this way, the resident, or the passer-by, comes to be physically projected onto the visible texture of the built city and its infrastructure, including walls, bridges, riverbanks and so on.²⁶ As the individual face of an a priori unknown inhabitant is brought to such new scalar proportion vis-à-vis the built environment, the city of faces evoked by JR purports to be a democratic city that celebrates the manifold expressions of dwellers and their feelings: indeed, the act of visual magnification is discursively proposed by the artist as a way of dignifying the selected faces, making a statement about their right to the city. This seems to be, in other words, a visibility procedure intended to facilitate social and moral recognition. But the city of faces may end up obscuring more than clarifying what the face of the city is about. One even wonders if, ultimately, the connection between the two elements present in the expression ‘the city of faces’ is spurious. If it exists, the face of the city cannot be reduced to a selection of some of its dwellers’ faces. An intrinsic problem of amplification techniques, such as the one deployed by JR, is that the larger the number of items at stake, the smaller the scalar uplift they can attain. This problem is often resolved through selection: one face from the neighbourhood. However, selection is arbitrary and meaningless unless a criterion can be specified (so, often, JR’s faces seem to be selected especially for being ‘picturesque’ – an attitude, one will notice, that is not very ethical in Levinas’ sense). The ‘criterion’, or coordination principle, is precisely what is at stake in the definition of the face of the city. The problem lies in the sheer fact that multiplication struggles with synthesis: large cities are often said to possess ‘a thousand faces’ – yet, such a powerless phrase only reveals that our desire to capture synthetically the face of the city is matched by our inability to actually do so.

The first thing we learn about a city is its name. If just the face of the city could reside in its proper name! It would be easy: for the name is a synthetic entity that can be handled conveniently in many – although certainly not all – cases. In fact, however, the official

insigna of the city – its name, its flag, its totemic animal and so on – may not match its face at all. The face of the city, in other words, is not a coat of arms. One should even be prepared to admit that, in a sense, the city's face is *anonymous*: literally, without a name. This may sound paradoxical at first, because we are so used to almost instantly attach names to faces. Upon second thought, though, it could be more fruitful to see the face as a place where names can be fixated or territorialised to some extent and for certain purposes; and one should then acknowledge that the place is not so much the name as the facilitating condition for naming. If so, the face of the city is heralded by a kind of *seal*. A seal, as known, is a piece of wax with a peculiar design stamped into it that is attached to a travelling document. The seal itself does not resemble the content of the document; rather, it guarantees the authenticity and saves the integrity of what is sealed. But, what is the content of the document?

Our longing for faces is not restricted to human bodies only, but extends to the landscape we inhabit. The inborn human tendency to look for faces – even, as we know, where none are to be found – pushes explorers, artists, writers, tourists and inhabitants to feel a similar urge to capture their most intimate encounter with a city in the form of a unique ‘face’.²⁷ In the course of their research, they may experience a momentary revelation of the coherence of such a complex and multifarious entity that is the city. Twentieth-century literature has amply explored similar epiphanies, where the protagonist of the novel instantly gains access to ‘the soul of the city’ with same the fluent immediacy that characterises face-to-face experience. One only wishes to have such a close dialogue with the city. For his part, Walter Benjamin called similar revelations, ‘profane illuminations’. Equipped with profane illuminations and mundane epiphanies, urban explorers often evoke their unique *face of the city* in an attempt to tame the plurality and complexity of the urban phenomenon. In these cases, the face is conveyed through one *elective image*. Paradoxically, in doing so, the most courageous discoverers are not different from the average tourist, except for the fact that they adopt a different criterion of selection for their elective image. In tourist information brochures, a famous building, or a famous square, or a scenic view is often taken to signify the whole city by synecdoche (*pars pro toto*): the city is signified by one of its iconic monuments, one of its celebrated squares, a typical *scorcio* and so on.

Similarly, under today's global capitalist urban regime, there is a tendency towards describing major urban development and redevelopment projects as attempts to *remake* the face of a city – or, a district, a neighbourhood and so on. Such expressions betray a double failure: first, the bias of looking towards landmark buildings and iconic places only (parts mistaken for the whole); second, the relentless thrust towards localising and embodying faceness into a salient picture that can be conveniently bundled, named and circulated. As excavated in the previous section, one must admit that, by contrast, the face is not a 'part' to be appreciated through relations of inclusion in a set. Besides, the disembodied aspect of face machines, produced by an abstract machine of faceness, is completely missed in the elective-image operation (again, the face of the city is not a human face writ large on a building). If we contemplate the hypothesis that the identity of a face may be of non-local nature, it may become less surprising to notice the impossibility of encapsulating the face of the city in a postcard depicting either iconic places and landmarks or some human faces scaled up onto the built environment.

As one proceeds towards a specification of the face of the city notion using the philosophy of Deleuze, two opposite models are therefore revealed as insufficient. If the face of the city is not a conventional grand vista or synoptic panorama, as in De Certeau's (1984) beautiful take on Manhattan Island from atop of the World Trade Center Towers, it likewise does not coincide with what Hermant and Latour (1998) have proposed to substitute to that image, namely, a series of overlapping functional networks. The anti-visual, iconoclastic attitude of Latour, in other words, does not produce a better understanding of the face of the city than its merely pictorial understanding. One way to unpack the condition of a face that cannot be assigned to any single image is through cinematic perception: even when the close-up of the face looks almost like a still frame, what the viewing eye perceives in fact is not the still frame itself, but an average movement-image, characterised, as Deleuze suggests, by a network of expressive micro-movements spreading on a sensible, receptive plate. Movement is embedded *statu nascendi* in this type of images – they are natural movement-images. So, if the face is traced *in the visible*, if it is there-to-be-seen, it simultaneously also envelops unexplored landscapes yet to be visited. A dimension of virtuality needs to be coupled with the visual register of the face, in a way that

resists the reduction of the face to a picture. The city one encounters is not the city one remembers; and the face as a reservoir for territorial exploration cannot be measured adequately by a solitary, if sublime, observer engaged with one elective perspectival take on the whole.

In a classic study into urban perception, the urban planner Kevin Lynch (1960) grounded the notion of 'the image of the city' in individual psychology. For Lynch, each inhabitant develops a psychological image of the city through a series of mental maps. In case the images elaborated by different inhabitants overlap, then the city itself possesses a 'legible' (i.e. clear and coherent) image. Here, the *image* of the city can be clearly contrasted with the *face* of the city: as seen above, the face belongs in an interaction system that cannot be entirely grounded in the individual body (the person's head). In parallel, the face of the city cannot be framed as an individual psychological production (the individual brain). If ever, one would better speak of an *inter-psychological* level *à la* Gabriel Tarde. In other words, the way towards encountering the face of the city may not ensue from overlapping multiple individual faces, but with laying out a new conceptual space. With the terminology introduced above, the synthetic moment of the face is always of 'disparate' nature – it is a *synthesis of divergent nature*. In an essay on tourist sexuality and meditation practices in Bangkok, for instance, McGrath (2006: 239) has advanced the notion of 'face city'. Building on Deleuze's analysis of the close-up in cinema, as well as on the Buddhist ideal of 'calm face', McGrath writes that 'face city' functions as 'a singular expressive entity that communicates a feeling outside of specific time and place and gives an affective reading of any moment – in space or a film – as a whole'.²⁸

To move one step further, we could use the face of the city as a notion that refrains from seeking for a deeper truth in some alleged *essence* of the city to be revealed: as recalled above, the face is not what is deep and profound, but rather what is apparent and yet, for some reasons, remains secret. If, following Simondon, each individual is but an attempted, partial solution to a series of tensions and systemic energies that are inherent in pre-individual states, then the face of the city could be regarded as one such instances of individuation – an individual who never exhausts that pre-individual energy continuously working through it, actually bringing her beyond

herself. The present analysis started from the following formula for the face of the city:

$$F(C) = \text{DET}(\text{head}) \times \text{DET}(\text{land})$$

The formula stresses that, just as the face unsettles the head, and the city unsettles the land, so the face of the city results in a double unsettling that may enable new experiences. It is perhaps still difficult to unpack all the implications of this idea and to detail the exact nature of these new experiences. Once the city is taken as the entity that is going to be decoded and recoded, the body (head) and the land (landscape) can be joined in a novel understanding, via the incorporeal effects (the event) of facialisation. At bottom, from the face of the city notion a new environmental perception may arise: by probing the city, the body transforms the urban land into a whole landscape and a conversational-intersubjective formation. The urban space then comes to host a landscape where the face (as face-of-the-Other) can be encountered ‘ethically-politically’. The temporal horizon of this operation also proves essential: The body encounters the land in a rich temporality, full of memories, anticipations, projections and visions.²⁹ As noticed above, facialising the city entails a sort of animism. The apparition of a face makes us recognise in the city something that is *like* us, despite the fact that the city is certainly *unlike* us. On this account, animism could be said to consist, not so much of a general belief about beings and spirits, but first of all of a *perceptual attitude* towards the environment. Just as the face is not always animated, but *becomes* animated – in a conversation, and more generally, in the social intercourse – so the city encompasses different modes of existence – including perhaps, a mineral, a vegetal, a fungal one and so on.

A sort of facial temporality animates the urban state – where ‘temporality’ means that facialisation only occurs in peculiar, qualitatively distinct *moments*. In this sense, the face of the city notion establishes a relation where certain city qualities may be perceived and felt anew. Core to this insight is the fact that the face is inherently a relational production, that is, something produced *for* the other and thus necessarily also *with* the other. The image of the city does not have to be comprehensive, or ‘true’, to be meaningful and pregnant. Just as the face is intentionally produced to serve a biological viewing eye, and therefore, it represents a biosocial event, the face of the

city is similarly an expression of the city intended to be visible to a social eye. As Aldo Rossi (1995 [1966]: 10) put it – with a good deal of animistic sensibility – ‘with time, the city grows upon itself; it acquires conscience and memory of itself’. In this case, to successfully activate a city-face, an urban explorer should prove able to occupy the special place of that social ‘viewing eye’ representing the invisible correlate of the city-face itself. The face is formed, not in the element of truth, but in that of visibility and pregnancy. Pregnancy, in turn, can be described as the quality that welds the tension between fixation and transformation within any given structure. Notably, Simondon (2013 [1964]: 550) has defined the pregnancy of a form as ‘the capacity [of that form] to cross, animate and structure a varied domain, including increasingly varied and heterogeneous domains’. Following this insight, it is possible to suggest that the face-effect travels the city and, by travelling city-wide, exhibits the feature of non-locality. The face of the city is then necessarily a tense production that results from corporeal encounters with the land in an environment where the old codes are being undone, where new codes are elaborated and new incorporeal effects surface.

Conclusions

In this piece, the biosocial-biopolitical system of *facing*, understood as the production of face effects and face events, has been explored in an attempt to advance a conceptualisation of the phenomenon of ‘the face of the city’. Both the face and the city, it has been shown, are inherently *creative* processes: through their territorial manoeuvres (deterritorialisations and reterritorialisations) and through their coding practices (decoding and recoding), new organs and new functions are constantly being produced. As such, both the face and the city can be described as peculiar interventions into individual and social bodies: just as the face enacts a disparate synthesis of the individual body and the social body, so the city enacts a disparate synthesis of the land-region and the network.

Disparation, it has been noticed, contradistinguishes a situation that is always tensional, or pregnant, located in the proximity of a threshold between *less than* one and *more than* one – a threshold of individuation. Accordingly, both face and city can be said to be more than individual and less than collective. The synthetic perception of

the face of the city – which may come about either as sudden revelation, or through painstaking inquiry – does not exclude disparation, rather, it includes it in the form of a ‘disparate synthesis’. In other words, the face of the city corresponds to a travelling singularity capable of punctually and temporarily enveloping regions not presently at hand: that is, of activating a special circuit between the actual and the virtual.

However, what is at stake in this operation is not only a functional analogy between the face and the city. Their coming together, their encounter and the qualitative space generated by such special experience are what has been excavated here. In this piece, the face has been initially regarded as an extrusion of the body and the head (following Deleuze and Guattari). Subsequently, it has also been suggested that while the face entails a deterritorialisation of the body capable of producing incorporeal effects, it can never thoroughly leave the body behind, if it wants to save its own dynamism. Indeed, a completely disembodied face amounts to a fixed mask, whose rigidity prevents it from entering the fine-tuned modulations of a conversation (where ‘conversation’ here stands for the complex, short-term and long-term becoming of a social encounter). The face is one such conversation – to the point that experiences with it represent explorations of a homeostatic surface whose property is to articulate, receive and emit signs, exerting affections upon the subjects engaged in that same conversation.

The city, it was argued, embodies the coming together of semiotic and material forces capable of expressing face effects and, more particularly, a face that *animates* the urban domain. If the face has no name and yet is a most convenient receptacle for names – if, in other words, it is a ‘visible secret’ – then the animistic moments of facialisation can perhaps be understood as local productions capable of manifesting certain non-local states that affect the city at multiple levels and across various regimes of existence – that is, ranging from a mineral city, through a vegetal, to an animal city – and beyond.

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have been incorporated in this version of the article. Limitations are my own.

Notes

1. Simondon takes the notion of disparation from optics, where the phenomenon concerns for instance the two human eyes as they create a single field of vision: ‘Disparation occurs when two not entirely-superimposable twin sets, such as the left retinal image and the right retinal image, are taken together as a system, enabling the formation of a single higher-degree set, where all the elements are integrated in a new dimension’. (Simondon 2013 [1964]: 205; my translation). It is known that Deleuze was influenced by this notion, which he took note of in his early review of Simondon’s work (Deleuze, 2001 [1966]).
2. This expression clearly echoes the Deleuzian notion of ‘disjunctive synthesis’ (Deleuze, 1969: 204). Deleuze also elaborates the notion of *dispars* and ‘difference in itself’ in *Difference and Repetition* (Deleuze, 1968: 157).
3. On the active power of memory, which also means its objective ‘fallibility’ see, for instance, Sacks (2017).
4. Notably, this view of politics is distinct from the body politic imaginary that asserts itself in the lower Middle Ages and underpins the social contract theory of the state shared by both absolutist and liberal authors. As reconstructed by Hannah Arendt, the contract notion precludes to the inception of ‘the social’ as a distinct domain of action and knowledge. Following Arendt, a whole thread in contemporary political philosophy has reclaimed a radical theory of politics that retrieves the ancient Greek notion of *koinonía politikè*.
5. Perhaps, this Deleuzian move can be regarded as an elaboration and a variation on Levinas who described the face as the point of inception of ethics. Levinas (1961: 211) famously claimed that ‘le visage est présent dans son refus d’être contenu [the face is present in its refusal to be contained]’, meaning that the face of the Other can never be appropriated, and stands in a ‘transcendent’ and ‘infinite’ relation to the subject. In a way, Deleuze adapts this point to an immanentist philosophical horizon.
6. One may also add the affective domain. Indeed, the face seems to be a prominent evidence of what remains of the individual after it dies. Of course, however, different acquaintances of the departed will have different faces in mind while remembering the same individual: Some will remember a young face, others an old one, some will remember a happy face, some an unhappy one and so on. In this sense, the art of the

- portrait could be said to consist in synthesising into a single focus, or a single ‘presence’, the multiplicity – if one wants, the city, the polity, the ‘republic’ – of one face.
7. The notion of ‘viewing eye’ has been elaborated in biology by Adolf Portmann (1990). I have expanded on the importance of this notion for social theory in Brighenti (2017).
 8. This is the topic of a different commentary on Bergson by Deleuze, focused on the continuity and the difference between perception (movement-image) and memory (time-image) (Deleuze, 1985: §III; Bergson, 1993 [1896]: 115).
 9. A vivid illustration of the literal truth of the idea that the most superficial is entwined with the most deep is given by medicine: face transplant requires a change of the blood of the whole body, a complex process that spans over months. See, for instance, the troubled case of a man who underwent face transplant twice and lived – or perhaps, survived – in a hospital for 2 months without a face: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/apr/17/face-transplants-jerome-hamon-first-french-man-two> (accessed 18 April 2018).
 10. Understood as a moral career, the face entails judgment and directly connects to reputation, distinction and honour. The face reveals how the subject is considered by others. To anticipate, then, the face of a city could be said to consist not only in what makes it recognisably distinctive and unique, but also in what makes certain spaces in this city earn reputation for originating a ‘thriving scene’ or, alternatively, degenerating into a ‘dangerous place’ – in other words, taking on visible moral features.
 11. Schema is understood here in its Kantian meaning, in particular as reconstructed by Deleuze (1963). Famously, in *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant juxtaposes schemata to images and concepts, arguing that the former are needed to guide imagination, bridging concepts to objects.
 12. Deleuze (1969) developed the idea that the effect is not materially produced by the causes but is, rather, an incorporeal entity – a ‘pure event’. An event is not to be confused with the state of things it brings about. On the other hand, Deleuze also stressed that materials are always entailed in all acts of effectuation.
 13. As John Levi Martin made me notice in a conversation, in many cases, animism entails a perception of forces that are and remain faceless. In this case, however, and as suggested in the following, we should distinguish the individual from the face, and we could reconnect the idea of a ‘faceless individual’ to what Deleuze called a ‘singularity’.
 14. Interestingly, it seems that the neurosciences are currently drawing some insights from social theory. For instance, Crivelli and Fridlund

(2018) have recently proposed an externalist take on face expressions. They suggest to consider faces as tools to operate in the social world: facial expressions do not so much mirror inner states (as, for instance, Darwin classically held) as they elicit behaviour in others. This perspective highlights the inherently relational working of the face. However, the neurosciences often tend to produce over-functionalist explanations. Clearly, not all facial expressions are consciously intended, despite the fact that they are always communicative – and thus social. At least, conflating the social and the ‘consciously intended’ is a mistake no sociologist could make.

15. Here, one should be particularly careful not to conflate intention and consciousness. In fact, intention can be an unconscious and quite objective phenomenon: nature is perfectly intentional even when no individual consciousness is attached to it.
16. The problem of the substrate recalls René Thom’s morphogenetic approach. In his catastrophe theory, Thom was interested in forms that appear independently from the material substrate where they have developed; but, in his later semiophysical theory, he recognised that taking the substrate into account is necessary to fully appreciate the functioning of ‘pregnances’. ‘Pregnances’ are the informal counterpart of forms (or ‘salience’) that ceaselessly traverse them (Thom, 1988). This latter approach also recalls Gilbert Simondon’s (2013 [1964]) ‘human energetics’: in particular, Simondon argued that forms cannot be explained apart from the whole system where they are generated, with consideration of the potential energy and its ways of actualisation. These are all conditions of extreme importance in the analysis of the face.
17. The latter possibility coincides with the pole Deleuze and Guattari refer to in their evocation of the ‘flight from the face’ as a possible ‘destiny’ of mankind. In clinics, prosopagnosia, the inability to recognise faces, is considered a serious cognitive disorder, one that may be more widespread than usually believed (Sacks, 2010). To prosopagnosics, faces do appear as perpetually in flux, as disorganised traits not coalescing into any stable configuration. Interestingly, Sacks recounts that his own personal difficulty with recognising faces was paired with a difficulty in recognising places. This insight invites the inauguration of a ‘facial territorialology’, to which Deleuze and Guattari could also give valuable contribution (in this case, reference is to section ‘Of refrain’). At the polar opposite of prosopagnosia, persons who have been called ‘super-recognisers’ have a gift for memorising and recalling hundreds of faces after even cursory exposure to them (Russell et al., 2009). Since the 1970s, the range of face perception ability has been increasingly recognised as much wider than previously thought.

18. For his part, Darwin (2009 [1890]: 23) remarked the difficulty in the study of bodily expressions in animals and humans, 'owing to the movement being often extremely slight, and of a fleeting nature'. He continued: 'A difference may be clearly perceived, and yet it maybe impossible, at least I have found it so, to state in what the difference consists'. These remarks are extremely important in that they recall how subtle and fleeting can be the line between organisation and disorganisation of facial traits and facial configurations. In this sense, Deleuze (1983) would later speak of the face as characterised by 'expressive micro-movements' propagating on a 'nerve board'.
19. 'Body dysmorphic disorder (BDD) is defined by DSM-IV-TR as a condition marked by excessive preoccupation with an imaginary or minor defect in a facial feature or localized part of the body'. DSM-IV-TR stands for '*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition, Text Revision*', and is the standard manual published by the American Psychiatric Association (now in its fifth edition). It is estimated that almost one-third of patients suffering from BDD attempt to commit suicide (*Source: <https://medical-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/>*). Reconstructing a notion first introduced by the 19th century psychiatrist Enrico Morselli, Jerome (in the work of Morselli, 2001 [1981]: 106) characterises BDD as 'an obsessional rumination with associated compulsive mirror-gazing by the patient'.
20. According to some theories, the word 'person' is derived from the ancient Etruscan language, Phersu, meaning 'the mask' – or, as one could say, the face-as-mask. Other scholars, by contrast, have interpreted Phersu as the personal name of a god of the dead, similar to the Greek Hades, which takes possession of the head of the dying ones. Images of Phersu are featured for instance at the Tomba degli Auguri in Tarquinia dating from about 530 BC.
21. This is, arguably, why seeing faces is not always pleasant. In intoxicated states, one's capacity to see faces on objects may easily escalate and become obsessional. For instance, in his experience with hashish, Walter Benjamin found himself before an uncontrollable proliferation of faces – an uncanny situation where all objects surrounding him wore 'faces, or rather masks' (See Eiland and Jennings, 2014: 298).
22. Unless, of course, Agamemnon's mask is itself a fake – something which is still debated, especially in connection to the deeds of its discoverer, the notoriously unreliable Heinrich Schliemann.
23. 'Le maschere barbaricine' also reveal the extent to which the mask performs what Deleuze and Guattari call 'animal-becoming'. Indeed, the masks from Barbagia amplify and distort facial traits hybridising

- them with ape-like or goat-like resemblances. One should even interrogate whether anything like a ‘human’ face ever pre-existed these animal forms through which the face always transits.
24. To cope with this phenomenon, Ellero recommended forensic photographers to treat the suspect with ‘benevolence’ and ‘encouragement’, avoiding authoritarianism, rigour and menaces. Indeed, he argued, menacing only increase distress in the suspect, pushing him to become a ‘chameleon of his physiognomic traits’ (‘lo improvvisano un vero trasformista della sua mimica fisionomica’, quoted in the work of Gilardi, 2003: 57).
 25. In a sense, perhaps, such a muteness could be said to constitute the animal-becoming of the mask-face.
 26. One should not overlook, however, that these projects are temporary, using posters made of paper that are ephemeral by nature. The big question mark concerning these projects is what remains when the project is over – except, of course, in the artist’s portfolio.
 27. To be clear, the point here is not that a natural human attraction to faces would motivate people to investigate cities, but rather that, when experiencing cities we are naturally lead to facialise them. At least, the paraphernalia of urban touristification – ranging from gadgets to brochures and guided tours – seem to attest this.
 28. As McGrath (2006: 237) also explains, ‘the Thai social practice of “face” focuses an attentive mind and graceful body away from vulgar and impulsive reactions to outside stimuli but instead dictates the maintenance of calm poise, polite deference, and outward serenity in all public situations’. Such a countenance in public may somehow recall Sennett’s (1978) notion of ‘public man’.
 29. In this respect, the architect and author Aldo Rossi (1995 [1966]: 60) once observed: ‘The shape of the city is always the shape of a time of the city; and there are many times enclosed in the shape itself. During the course of a man’s life, the city changes its face around him, and references are no longer the same’. Rossi then goes on to quote a verse by Baudelaire on the astonishing speed at which the city transforms and suggests that a transformed built environment in turn also affects our spatial memories.

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