

Festivals, Affect and Identity: A Deleuzian Apprenticeship in Central Italian Communities.

Lita Crociani-Windland 2011: London Anthem Press

Reviewed by Angie Voela¹

When I picked up **Festivals, Affect and Identity** I must confess I did not pay proper attention to the word ‘**apprenticeship**’ in the title. I took it as just another way of announcing the deleuzian framework of the project. Going through the book, however, I soon began to realise that there could not have been a more accurate description of the core of this project and the intellectual endeavour involved: the author’s (re)immersion in communities she prudently did not take for granted and the invitation to the reader to think, experience and feel the Siennese festivals in their (deleuzian) complexity.

The book explores the following community events in the region of Siena, Italy: the Palio of Siena, Montepulciano’s Bruscello Theatre and Barrel race (Bravio Delle Botti), and Monticchiello’s Theatre. The introductory chapter sets out the intellectual premises of the book and provides a solid conceptual framework for the remaining chapters, all of which can be read as independent case studies and fine illustrations of complex deleuzian concepts.

The case of the Siennese Palio horse race begins with an eye-witness account of the two day event. It is followed by a detailed historical account of the social dynamics of the region and the power struggles that led to the system of the *contrade*, the neighbourhoods-alliances represented in the race. The religious character of the festival is also explained, as are the use of animal emblems by the *contrade* and the precise route of the race around the perimeter of the central square. Through the deleuzian paradigm of the static ‘State’ and the mobile ‘War Machine’ the race is then seen as an attempt to balance opposing forces: an emerging but slow-moving State and the mobile *contrade* as representatives of the War Machine. However, it is shown that the event is more than a symbolic way of settling power struggles. It is also an opportunity of *becoming*, which in deleuzian terms is always multiple and anti-authoritarian. Thus, the highly charged and ‘manly’ race is shown to be a process of transformation: a *becoming-animal* evidence of which is still found in the *contrade* emblems, and a *becoming-child* which is celebrated with the winning *contrada* becoming the city’s beloved ‘child’.

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The discussion of the Bruscello theatre of Montepulciano is primarily built around the Deleuzian concept of the *refrain*. The gathering of different generations of amateur thespians for the annual theatrical event is documented in a delightful way, as are the choice of actors and repertoire, and the negotiations of style and the poetic devices which accommodate modern demands while maintaining links with tradition. At the same time, it is shown that the annual event operates as a coda (refrain) of the Montepulciano life, creating the necessary space for a creative interaction between individual and social identity, interiority and exteriority, the old and the new. Additionally, it is argued, the Bruscello theatre is an example of *arboreal versus rhizomatic becoming*: having roots but branching out; upholding tradition but maintaining fluidity; repeating but also departing.

The Bravio Delle Botti (Barrel Race) is a less 'traditional' festival but no less significant when it comes to shaping and being shaped by the local community. The researcher's reflexive account of her 'apprenticeship' in the local communal kitchens is both amusing and incisive, a brilliant account of feminine dynamics and joyous hybridity. The significance of the 'superficiality' and 'artificiality' of the event are explained with reference to Horkheimer, Adorno and Derrida. The event is therefore shown to be anything but superficial, a way of dealing with collective wounds of the recent past, as well as a process of individuation which draws on the founding myths of a community seeking to re-establish a rapport with its past and its (future) potential.

The final case, the Monticchiello theatre, documents the anxiety felt by a community in the face of erosion and postmodern fossilization. This apprenticeship takes us through ways of dealing with the paradoxes of modern identity. Substantial reference to the people's intimate association with the land and the landscape illustrate the fragility of the community and the urgency of the task. Excerpts from the field notes and the style of the narrative are perhaps the best testament to this crisis and the positive effects the theatrical practices have on a community that attempts to resist cultural ossification.

Festivals, Affect and Identity offers a true Deleuzian apprenticeship: it generates knowledge but neither certainty nor arrogance. It communicates affect and gives affect a voice. It grows in different directions and takes you to other places. For those who are unfamiliar with Deleuze's thought the book is a sophisticated but highly accessible introduction to key theoretical components via clearly presented case studies. At the same time, the book demonstrates how Deleuzian theory – without the exaggerated stylistic armour that usually surrounds its academic presentation – can be used in a psychosocial context. It is therefore a great educational, pedagogic and intellectual contribution in our field.