

## ■ Autopoiesis in P. K. Page's "Arras": The Peacock Image as a Vision Machine

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### Abstract

This essay explores Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's concept of autopoiesis, primarily focusing on its machinic aspect of self-positing creation, through a reading of Canadian modernist P. K. Page's early poem "Arras." The poem reveals itself as an artistic model for understanding visual imagery as it takes up the ecological theme of the transformative renewal of living elements. Rather than interpret Page's poetic imagery as allegories of the conceptual terms theorized by Deleuze and Guattari, this essay reads "Arras" as envisioning the process of imagerization in terms of the relationship between the new and the classical—a relationship embodied in its images of the habit and the peacock. The self-positing aspect of autopoiesis builds a machinic system in the habit-image, which unfolds across a passage between territorialization and deterritorialization and in all directions across ethico-political concerns. The poem illustrates what the plane of the virtual expresses, what the machine does, and specifically what the peacock becomes. The peacock image functions to expose the speaker's vision and transforms the poem's linguistic elements. Whereas this new but classical habit is read to indicate the function of the machinic, the peacock exposes the image quality that operates as the deterritorializing trajectory and so reveals an auto-generative relevance in artistic production.

**Keywords:** autopoiesis, machine, imagery, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, "Arras"

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“Arras” is one of the most complex poems in the artwork of Canadian modernist P(atricia) K(athleen) Page.<sup>1</sup> It involves the poet’s exploitation of an entangled relation between a poem as an object and a poet’s vision as represented in forms of subjectification. The poem exemplifies the innovative visual imagery that defines Page’s artistic perception, and for which she has been celebrated as a key figure in Canadian modernist poetry (Swann 181). Through its visual imagery, the poem illustrates the process through which the poet simultaneously writes and sees as a painter. Indeed, Page practiced both forms of artistry—poetry and painting—in the course of her long and prolific career. Writing as a painter, Page contests the conventional definition of vision in her early poetry while activating the sensory function of her own early artistic vision. However, seeing as sensory capability is more than a representational function but generates performativity “of the limitations and subjectivity of perception” (Swann 181) because the eye for Page is not only a visual organ but also an extracting device, which expresses the poet’s vision while concealing from sight what can be seen. Recognizing the challenges created by the organ of the eye—the demands on both visual capacity and its verbal representation—Page says of her intention in writing: “whether there is any advance over earlier work, I shall have to let others decide. For the time being my primary concern is to remove the filters” (“Questions” 21-22). What is emphasized here are the limitations and capacities of the sensory organ as it filters. The poet confesses that her vision has been harnessed by “the tyranny of subjectivity” because the filters determine what will be seen. Quoting two lines from her poem “Stories of Snow,” she eagerly invokes the hazardous image of her wish to remove the filters and claims that the image desires to penetrate “through to the area behind the eyes / where silent, unrefractive whiteness lies” (“Questions” 21). For Page, an image may be “half-glimpsed, enigmatic” (“Questions” 21), but it is created to take the place of filters so that what is originally extracted by the filter may emerge to make visible the invisible.

Asserting that Page contests standard modes of “seeing,” Jane Swann argues that an intuitive visual capacity presents an alternative form of expression for Page that endows her work with the power to defy “a pattern of static and passive viewing” (182). In Swann’s view, Page turns to dreaming and drawing in order to liberate her subjectivity from the filtering visual organ, as these aesthetic

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<sup>1</sup> “Arras” was written in April 1954 when Page was in Canberra, Australia. Included in the collection *The Metal and the Flower* for which Page won the 1954 Governor-General’s Literary Award for Poetry, the poem was credited as one of Page’s “longer fantasies,” dealing with “a somewhat elliptical treatment of the Alice-through-the-mirror theme” (Frye 40-41).

forms function as part of a larger search for transparency or purity in a poet's vision and serve to suggest the supremacy of subjective perception as discovered in "a sensory union through the portal of creativity in artwork" (Swann 191-92). What Swann recognizes here is the sensory dimension of Page's imagist techniques that in turn give rise to the very birth of the poem, while she sets for herself the task of generating a mode of poetic expression through which to compose subjective identity. In this respect "Arras" clearly demonstrates Page's mastery of visual imagery in the context of her representation of the process of creating an artwork. Here the poem is quoted in full.

Consider a new habit—classical,  
and trees espaliered on the wall like candelabra.  
How still upon that lawn our sandaled feet.

But a peacock rattling its rattan tail and screaming  
has found a point of entry. Through whose eye  
did it insinuate in furred disguise  
to shake its jewels and silk upon that grass?

The peaches hung like lanterns. No one joins  
those figures on the arras.

Who am I  
or who am I become that walking here  
I am observer, other, Gemini,  
starred for a green garden of cinema?

I ask, what did they deal me in this pack?  
The cards, all suits, are royal when I look.  
My fingers slipping on a monarch's face  
twitch and go slack.  
I want a hand to clutch, a heart to crack.

No one is moving now, the stillness is  
infinite. If I should make a break . . .  
take to my springy heels . . .? But nothing moves.  
The spinning world is stuck upon its poles,  
the stillness points a bone at me. I fear  
the future on this arras.

I confess:

It was my eyes.  
Voluptuous it came.  
Its head the ferrule and its lovely tail  
folded so sweetly; it was strangely slim  
to fit the retina. And then it shook  
and was a peacock—living patina,  
eye-bright—maculate!  
Does no one care?

I thought their hands might hold me if I spoke.  
 I dreamed the bite of fingers in my flesh,  
 their poke smashed by an image, but they stand  
 as if within a treacle, motionless,  
 folding slow eyes on nothing. While they stare  
 another line has trolled they encircling air,  
 another bird assumes its furred disguise.

“Arras” is typically identified as “an awesome visionary poem” (Rooke 136), and has frequently been attributed to Page’s treatment of aesthetic work as a life. As Sandra Djwa clearly states in her comprehensive study of Page’s work and life, *Journey with No Maps: A Life of P. K. Page*, “Arras” is a work by “a highly visual poet” as “it describes her sense of the poetry-making process, and . . . contains submerged traces of her own poetic and emotional situation” (143). Thus, criticism of the poem discusses it as the work through which Page develops her notions of visual sensation, the poet’s sense of self, and the image-making process. Page’s critics have often perceived only fusion and confusion in the abundant images that lie under the metaphorical surface of the early poem, with the various studies on the critical practice of reading Page’s poetry all aiming to locate a proper and reasonable approach to this perplexing work.<sup>2</sup> However, in its representational signification of Page’s perception, “Arras” is particularly sophisticated when compared to other poems from this period in her career. The poem’s imagery indeed transforms and evolves the reader’s understanding of poetic imagery to reveal the way that the image functions to create itself. Rosemary Sullivan offers an extended explanation of the image’s self-making capacity in Page’s poetry, claiming that “metaphor can be made to reverberate indefinitely, where everything can be seen in terms of everything else, . . . lead[ing] language away from insight and mak[ing] it an autonomous game, an evasion of clarity” (33). In registering the imagistic effects of Page’s poetic language, Sullivan and other critics may emphasize her poetic vision and creative sensibility so as to champion her unique perception of poetic writing. However, at the risk of favoring the unrefractive qualities of the non-representational force of Page’s vision-and-creation model, this essay attempts to explore the sensory

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<sup>2</sup> Barbara Godard, for example, claims that the poem’s symbolic meaning indicates something about “the nature and function of art” (Godard 65). Barbara Colebrook Peace and Kelly Parsons alternatively suggest that the poem’s dual imagery of the self creates “dimensions of eternity” that give the reader “the sense of a much larger world than the one we normally inhabit,” and so lead the reader into the poet’s world (Peace and Parsons 55). Perhaps not surprisingly, John Orange thus suggests that “Arras” is fairly representative of Page’s early poems, in that its imagery depicts “the process of heightening perception and altering consciousness” (Orange 12).

quality of imagery in the poem in order to argue that the imagistic field "behind the eyes" does not signify representational purity, but rather purity of poetic vision.

Crucially, then, the much-debated peacock is more than a literary image signifying the complexity of poetic creativity—it is the key creative machine performing the poem. The peacock as a machine that creates poetic meaning might be better understood with reference to Gilles Deleuze's theory, expounded in *Proust and Signs*, of the work of art as a machine. Deleuze states that the meaning of a machine "depends solely on its functioning" whereas "the work of art, so understood, is essentially productive—productive of certain truths" (146). Thus, the peacock as a saturated image is more than a bird, and more than an allegory of the poet's eye projecting itself on the tail's feather. It could be read literally as tracking the vicissitudes of imagery as a machine producing the "unrefractive whiteness" integral to the poet's perception or poetic identity. In "Arras" chaotic confusion has the power to transform itself into the visual organ and so be perceived by the sensory eye of the reader. Sullivan likens the image-making process to a poet's dexterity in language: "In [Page's] hands, images are self-generating, and multiply and reproduce in a kind of literary osmosis" (33). Sullivan thus privileges osmosis over analysis of the poem while conceptualizing Page's notion of "unrefractive whiteness behind the eye." However, while Sullivan claims that Page's poetry is intensely metaphorical for the reason that metaphor offers a dual vision or "way of seeing" (33), she also notes that Page's heightened sensitivity to visual imagery hinders her capacity to engage with more traditional aspects of poetic form. For Sullivan, while verbal manipulation is inevitable for poets, language for Page is more than technical control; it is also an experience of intuitive revelation and penetration to "another kind of consciousness, non-rational and potential" (39). This essay interprets the peacock as a non-representational manifestation of the sensory organ essential for creative selfhood, while responding to the critical habit of reading the peacock as the creator's eye in all its imagistic complexity. It reads the poem fully attentive to its nexus of image-making, arguing that its images envelop a complex and multiple self-positing through which the machinic implications of the peacock make each individuated interpretation possible. The shift from self-involvement to an alternative form of vision begins a new journey of poetic creativity and so a turn to a focus on the autopoietic machine in Page's poetry. My reading of "Arras" draws on Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's notion of the machine, arguing that machinic processes operate as the poem's deterritorializing force and so reveal an operational, living, and in this sense ecological dimension to the creation of art.

### The Self-Positing of an Image

But the concept is not given. . . . It is not formed but posits itself in itself—it is a self-positing. Creation and self-positing mutually imply each other because what is truly created, from the living being to the work of art, thereby enjoys a self-positing of itself, or an autopoietic characteristic by which it is created.

(Deleuze and Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?* [hereinafter, *WIP*] 11)

According to Diana M. A. Relke's investigation into Page's terrestrial vision, while a feminist ecological reading of "Arras" is associated with an entangled network of multiple, collective components, the networking assembles the multitudes to create the poem. Posited as a supplement to Relke's reading, the notion of autopoiesis adds an aesthetic paradigm to her approach that reveals Page's vision in interrogating "the erosion of humankind's sense of integrity and interconnectedness with nature" (Relke 254). "Arras" is one of several Page poems that Relke interprets as figuring an "intersubjective mode of spatial representation," a place "where all objects are subjects, where self and other meet in a flow of mutual recognition, where relationship is akin to *process* rather than *structure*" (Relke 240, emphasis original). Relke's privileging of the interactive mode might provide a starting point for interpreting her representation of visual sensibility in "Arras." But in interpreting the poem as an autopoietic entity, one needs to understand that "Arras"—both in the sense of the title of the poem and the meaning of the term—not merely represents but *is* a living, self-organizing system, which aims at laying bare the self-generating nature of the image-making process.

Bernd Herzogenrath's description of Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the machine may well help to explain the intricate relations between different categories such as "nature" and "man" (Herzogenrath 4), which are in turn developed as the creative process itself and relate to the expression of intersubjectivity. His introductory chapter to a collection of essays entitled *Deleuze/Guattari and Ecology* is therefore crucial to the development of my own interpretation. Herzogenrath asserts that Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the machine is consonant with ecological concerns "to tweak the common sense of questions that are of central relevance in ecology and environmental ethics," and that their model offers a means of conceptualizing "developmental, environmental, and evolutionary relations within ecological systems" (4). Relke's ecological, or intersubjective in her view, interpretation of Page's poetry comes together with Herzogenrath's appropriation of Deleuze and Guattari's ecological paradigm in ways that further our understanding of "Arras." At this point, it is important to explain the co-implicational relations of "nature" and "man" in terms of the machinic process

inherent in this paradigm: "There is no such thing as either man or nature now, only a process that produced the one within the other and couples the machines together" (*Anti-Oedipus* 2). While the present reading of the poem examines the linguistic characteristics inherent in the ecological paradigm, this machinic coupling is aligned with Guattari's *ecosophy*, which views ecological action as possible when "three ecological registers (the environment, social relations and human subjectivity)" work together as "an ethico-political articulation" (*Three Ecologies* 28). Human subjectivity engages with the ecological realm, creating a new nature that opens up ethico-political considerations. The signs, or the images in the poem, establish this new plane; as Guattari writes, "I am convinced that the question of subjective enunciation will pose itself ever more forcefully as machines producing signs, images, syntax and artificial intelligence continue to develop" (*Three Ecologies* 40-41). It is the ecological paradigm that creates the self-generating image-making process out of the linguistic elements of the poem. There is more than an environmental register to indicate the relations between nature and man, or between the tapestry and the poem, found in this reading of "Arras." The act of reading the ecological paradigm in "Arras" reveals explicit machinic forces while an ethico-political analysis of its metaphors wrestles with the meaning of the poem as the peacock arrives in the garden of the arras and in the poem "Arras."

To read a Canadian modernist poet's artwork through the eco-critical concept of the machine will inevitably revise the study of modernist poetry, of scholarship on Page's work, and most adventurously, of how the poem *produces* what is read, or of how the poem *creates* itself. Creativity is "a self-positing of itself" in Deleuze and Guattari's view. In terms of self-production, Guattari refers to Humberto R. Maturana and Francisco Varela's biological sense of the process of self-production and accordingly defines the in-itself-positing as a "living system" and "autopoietic machine" (*Chaosmosis* 93). The "autopoietic machine" is defined by Maturana and Varela thus: "*a machine organized (defined as a unity) as a network of processes of production (transformation and destruction) of components that produces the components*" (78-79, *emphases original*). Maturana and Varela's notion of the unitary individuation of "living" or organic bodies could be further enlarged by applying autopoiesis to the poetic realm so as to describe a self-generative and so creative mode of producing art. Guattari elaborates upon the aesthetic significance of the autopoietic machine in *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm*.

Autopoiesis deserves to be rethought in terms of evolutionary, collective entities, which maintain diverse types of relations to alterity, rather than being implacably closed in on themselves. . . . Thus we will view autopoiesis from the perspective of

the ontogenesis and [phyl]ogenesis proper to a mecosphere superposed on the biosphere. (Guattari, *Chaosmosis* 39-40)

The metaphor of biological self-creation is then extended to mean that art could be treated as a fusion-based form involving creation, making, or formation onto itself. Guattari enlarges Maturana and Varela's original concept of the autopoietic machine as "the auto-reproductive capacity of a structure or ecosystem," so that autopoiesis involves "social machines, economic machines and even the incorporeal machines of language, theory and aesthetic creation" (*Chaosmosis* 93).

The question of what "Arras" represents will remain less problematic than that of how the components of its imagery relate to one another to create sensation. The poetic mode in the poem is not possible without self-genesis given that autopoiesis is concerned with the way that a self-positing process functions to create sensation out of a poem, which would seem to represent an expression of a poet's subjective relation with the outside, objective world. However, in a seemingly paradoxical statement, Deleuze and Guattari assert the ruin of representation in autopoiesis: "What depends on a free creative activity is also that which, independently and necessarily, posits itself in itself: the most subjective will be the most objective" (*WIP* 11). "[T]he most subjective," of course, is admittedly crucial for creative activities; however, this genesis mode, "the most objective," is resolutely non-subjective, non-artistic, and impersonal. By positing the non-representational aspect of the "most objective" dimension of autopoiesis, Stephen Zepke invokes Guattari's "machinic components" (*Three Ecologies* 61) to speak of "an autopoietic and machinic process" in a free creative process of "neither subjective nor objective" subjectification (Zepke, *Art* 154). It is an affirmative space and a time-out break as well as newness in artwork, with Zepke coining the term "eco-aesthetics" to explore the condition in which artistic expression is exposed to an impersonal, non-subjective form of transformation akin to humans working with machines (Zepke, "Eco-Aesthetics" 209). While Zepke's eco-aesthetic paradigm is derived from Deleuze and Guattari's claim that "everything is a machine" (*Anti-Oedipus* 2) and that "Art [i]s [an] abstract machine" (*A Thousand Plateaus* [hereinafter, *ATP*] 496), and from Guattari's assertion of chaosmosis as an ethico-aesthetic paradigm, poetry as an artwork, Page's "Arras" specifically in this essay, is a machine that elaborates the machinic process of image-becoming.

In examining how poetic language functions as a machinic and ecological process of imagization—which in turn constitutes autopoiesis and creates subjectification—Jon Clay's Deleuzian study of contemporary innovative poetry is helpful. Clay theorizes the relationship of imagery to the production of imagerization, or sensation created by an image in poetry, thus providing an



experimental and groundbreaking approach to reading the sound and sense in poetry. Focusing on the Deleuzian-Guattarian concepts of affect, percept, and sensation, he grounds the theorists' concepts in practices of reading the poetic image. Clay points out that "there is no *necessary* correspondence between the force of an image and any meaning" (Clay 67, emphasis original), as the former creates sensation and the latter the significance of an image. The force of an image gives content or effect to the meaning of an image, intensifying it to transform its social and linguistic significations. In shifting the signification of an image to its force or intensity, Clay may help to fine-tune Relke's discussion of intersubjectivity. Clay privileges the philosophical aspect of the affect of an image, rather than its external references, shifting the burden of signification from representational meaning to deterritorializing forces. The meaning of intersubjectivity in "Arras" may be reached when Relke's perspective is generalized as a feminist ecological approach; however, the sensation or the affect of an image in this poem functions when the conventional aspect of an image signifies, though incompletely, and breaks down. Clay proceeds to consider language as sensation, rather than information, which transforms the significance of a poem (68). Sensation for Clay creates a poem; however, a poem consists of sensations that are also unavoidably made of language, part of the process of sense-making.

Deleuze and Guattari's notes on artwork may well add to our understanding of the machinic process of producing sensation out of the signification of poetic language:

Whether through words, colors, sounds, or stone, art is the language of sensations. Art undoes the triple organization of perceptions, affections, and opinions in order to substitute a monument composed of percepts, affects, and blocs of sensations that take the place of language. (*WIP* 176)

Their suggestion that the sense-making capacities of art reside in the excess of the interlocked relation between perceptions, affections and concepts throws light on how percepts and affects function together to gradually work up and tear down linguistic and social intersubjectivity. Before moving into a reading of "Arras," more reflection on the force of the percept is needed in order to unravel the poem's imagery of the peacock. For Deleuze and Guattari, "Percepts are no longer perceptions; they are independent of a state of those who experience them. Affects are no longer feelings or affections; they go beyond the strength of those who undergo them. Sensations, percepts, and affects are *beings* whose validity lies in themselves and exceeds [any lived]" (*WIP* 164, emphasis original). Percepts are sensations that transform words into art's work, while an arrived sensation may produce a perception. An artwork, or a poem here, is the space where the percept undergoes linguistic, social or even historical transfor-

mation through shifts in intensity and quality, so as to be perceived as perceptions. Percepts, unlike perceptions, are monumental and individualized forces to be experienced and actualized in a reading. Moreover, despite the confusion that may arise from their explanation, Deleuze and Guattari assimilate percepts with affects to suggest they share the nonhuman and the impersonal aspects of sensation:

It is not memory that is needed but a complex material that is found not in memory but in words and sounds. . . . We attain to the percept and the affect only as to autonomous and sufficient beings that no longer owe anything to those who experience them or have experienced them. (*WIP* 168)

As it finds a literary point to break into sensation and erase its appearance, its symbolic signification, the image is affected by its vital or generic quality; however, this vitality, which is not sensible in Page's words but in Clay's interpretation of Deleuze and Guattari's concept, is made possible when a reader performs the poem in an act of reading (69). Until this kind of sensational reading becomes available, I must speak of the quality of the peacock in "Arras" as a fascinating site of autopoiesis. But that should not be taken to mean that the peacock as image and Page's perception, imagerized as an arras, are insignificant. Rather, an intensifying aspect of an image becomes sensible, a process that Deleuze and Guattari see unfold in ordinary language: "The writer uses words, but by creating a syntax that makes them pass into sensation that makes the standard language stammer, tremble, cry or even sing . . ." (*WIP* 176). The image in poetry may represent the results of a poet's imagination and perception and so is closely associated with poetic identity; however, the individuated reading may be found in the twisted machine of perceptions whereas this reading may only show certain stitches weaving the texture of the arras.

Based on the notion that the virtual—the velocity of the peacock's break—produces a new mode of reading, I suggest that the imagerization of vision in "Arras" functions as poetic perception while the break signifies a lack of representational movement. Page conveys the visual imaginary through a reciprocal figure of speech, and so problematizes the model of poetic creativity that Patricia Young has positively identified as a process of changing human perception. The poem concerns "shifting and altered states of awareness," and, Young concludes, "the inherent loneliness of human consciousness" (31). Through images of light, dreams and beauty, Page explores the role of human perception in the creative process. It is the nexus of perception and creativity that makes "Arras" representative of Page's career-long endeavor to reveal the significance of the eye in conjunction with the mind and soul (Young 24). However, although Young does not overtly discuss the swiftness of the speaker's movement among the im-

ages in the poem, the intimate reciprocity between the poet's visual perception and her poetic sensitivity is the percept working with perception to imagerize the velocity of the speaker's eye and the peacock's movement as well.

The first two lines bring the reader from "trees espaliered on the wall like candelabra" to "that lawn" which the "sandalled" speaker stands on. And as soon as the reader is invited to enter the garden, the peacock is "rattling its rattan tail and screaming." On the one hand, the images in the passage suggest a sense of connection that flattens and so renders invisible the relationship between the speaker, the reader, the garden, and the peacock. On the other hand, the opening lines juxtapose the percept and the perception to compose the sensation of velocity. The breaking and its velocity form a two-in-one plane of aesthetic composition, "The clinch of forces as percepts and becomings as affects are completely complementary" (*WIP* 182). The percept makes possible the virtual plane of forces, "expanded to infinity" (*WIP* 188), which is where the affect is found and how the actual expresses itself as the plane. To better explain what the plane is, Deleuze and Guattari assert that it "is not abstractly preconceived but constructed as the work progresses" (*WIP* 188). The plane might be better termed a plane of composition, which serves as the interplay of percept and affect. In Page's poem, such a plane of velocity encompasses the breaking percept and its creation of affect, such that composition itself is aesthetic. As "what is not composed is not a work of art" (*WIP* 191), the image of the peacock as a metaphor revealing Page's poetic vision and creativity is what is dispersed or fragmented in the arras.

Thus in "Arras" the speaker positions the eye more as a visual sensory motor than a passive receptacle surveying the peacock on the arras. In other words, the eye as sensory motor serves as a poetic machine that couples Page's and the reader's visions in creating the poem through the patterns of the peacock feather. There is reciprocal sensibility, as the sensation of movement in the bodily parts of the peacock becomes entangled with "trees" and "feet." The deformation of the bird image (from the peacock to its parts) may lead to the conclusion that the motionless and "folded" expression of the peacock dominates the speaker's retina at the moment it is perceived by the reader's eye. In this respect, other parts of the natural world, including the "trees" and "feet," insist upon being viewed as more than the scenic background of the peacock's appearance. However, more compelling than the mere statement of poetic imagination, the peacock unfolds as if constantly drawing attention to the effects of its "disguise," its deformation. It is as if the peacock itself possesses its own meaning, gesturing to its unarticulated and perhaps unarticulatable identity. Metaphors of pride, aristocracy, and splendor are scattered throughout the poem. The peacock "shake[s]

its jewels and silk upon that grass,” implying a blurred division of its natural being and aristocratic aura. The speaker’s vision is only registered when the peacock passes through her retina: “Through whose eye / did it insinuate in furred disguise.” The retina is a minimalist metaphor that functions as an evolving expression of the speaker’s attempt to visualize what poetry is, as the tapestry itself serves as a vital machine of its own. While the eyes on the peacock’s feathered-tail are indexed, the fabricated peacock becomes an assembling force that breaks new ground within the arras. What identifies the peacock as a vital machine is the chaotic process through which its vitality feeds upon a figurative reinterpretation of the peacock as the mind’s eye. This metaphorical reading of the eyes on the peacock’s tail and in the poem recalls Constance Rooke’s observation of the dual function of the visual organ. A linear needle’s “eye” metaphorically pierces the fabric as the poet’s vision imagines the peacock finding “a point of entry” into the garden (Rooke 137). The point of entry demonstrates a threshold across which the peacock-as-fabric transforms into the peacock-as-poem, and in so doing opens up a complex and Gemini-like relationship between arras the material object and “Arras” the poem.

### The Newness in Chaos

Art is not chaos but a composition of chaos that yields the vision or sensation, so that it constitutes . . . a chaosmos, a composed chaos—neither foreseen nor preconceived.

(Deleuze and Guattari, *WIP* 204)

The immanence of infinite interplay between percepts and perceptions emerges and is expressed in the peacock. It is vital, then, to investigate more closely what the purely sensual image in this poem does before moving on to consider the ways in which an autopoietic non-representation has machinic significance. Enigmatically in the face of this, the poem begins with an imperative command that deliberately demands attention: “Consider a new habit—classical.” The new habit here is to be defined in part in relation to affect, a machinic expression of perception with the peacock-image as a percept, and sketched in classical, not romantic, aesthetic terms. In Deleuze and Guattari’s examination of the three “assemblages” (Classicism, Romanticism and Modernism) that envelop different relations of the art Machine (*ATP* 346), chaos is described as “the forces of a raw and untamed matter upon which Forms must be imposed in order to make substances” (*ATP* 338). The classical feature of the habit, may it be new, gives birth and order to the habit. When the speaker requires the reader to focus on the image, the reader’s consideration functions to subject a new-born, unidentifiable matter or fabric to the absolute glamor of an

ancient, authoritative arras. In this habit—now new and/but classical—there is the affect of renewal that is the condition of dissonance, chaos, and a kind of abstract plane for the creation of art as such in poetry as well as painting (and in both, the images involved in a non-signifying expression mark their sensation in Page's work).

Although her name does not necessarily leap to the lips of those most engaged in Canadian eco-criticism or Deleuzian readings of modernist poetry, Page's artistic power in "Arras" is evident in her ability to find poetic axes of autopoiesis heavily inscribed with a seemingly unfathomable complexity. Through Page's creative agency, the poem posits the speaker in the peacock, and the peacock in the speaker, so as to render the aesthetic paradigm neither subjective nor objective. Deleuze and Guattari make this "self-positing" clear: "What depends on a free creative activity is also that which, independently and necessarily, posits itself in itself: the most subjective will be the most objective" (*WIP* 11). This nonhuman poem, in which the arras makes subjectification impossible, leaves the speaker speaking in an impersonal voice to position itself inside the tapestry *and* looking at the peacock. It is my argument that while "Arras" the poem may be treated as an imagistic one portraying the arras, or the peacock inside the arras—as modernist poets would treat it (Hulan 342)—the co-implication of the impersonal speaker and the arras opens up the composition to expression and chaos.

With the two-fold dynamics of the machinic process in mind, then, I wish to reiterate that the poem as autopoiesis is a living system and that there are new *and* (rather than *but*) classical relations behind the habit involved. This strongly relational habit will change our understanding of the poem's experience through its "still," "motionless, / folding . . . on nothing" (1st and last stanzas) plane. For Deleuze, the living system—the autopoiesis of the poem in my reading—is "a *habitus*, a habit, nothing but the habit in a field of immanence," and produces novelty, or a life, when it is seen as one of "contracting a habit" (*Difference and Repetition* [hereinafter *DR*] 74). To the extent that habit results from repetition as contraction of habit creates a continually living present, Deleuze emphasizes "the contractile contemplation which constitutes the organism itself before it constitutes the sensations" (*DR* 78). The myriad repetition of present moments such as "contractions, contemplations, pretensions, presumptions, satisfactions, fatigues" do not comprise a receptive, passive self, but an organizing machine of passive and presumably established syntheses that births a newly constituted self (*DR* 78). This thinking on the repetition and difference (an interlace of classical and new) of habit aids my reading of the first stanza. The newness of habit is indicated by the adjective "classical," which suggests that some kind of disso-

nance and subversive resonance is confronted or released to expose what might appear to be the dominant signifying elements of recognition. At this point, one of the significations is Rooke's reading of "a habit of mind," of "the fabric of the arras," as a dreamland where Page writes. While the habit in her view is "new" in the sense of being revolutionary or consciousness-altering, being 'classical' means 'antique, formal, and enduring'" (Rooke 136). However, to recall Deleuze and Guattari's earlier analysis, the habit, while classical, brings together formed poetic elements or figures of speech; in short, the habit now is the machinic in the sense that it visually confronts the bodily parts in the arras and figuratively confronts the images in the poem. In line with "the one-two" that is expressed with a comma to stress the distinction between the classic and the new as they respond to each other (*ATP* 338), the distinction animates to life.

Of material vitalism, Deleuze and Guattari claim that it is "life proper to matter as such . . . and doubtless exists everywhere but is ordinarily hidden or covered, rendered unrecognizable, dissociated by the hylomorphic model" (*ATP* 512). The hylomorphic hyphen between "new" and "classical" adds the vital quality to the sensation of the habit. Besides, the newness that the habit produces and reads as "unrecognizable" not only is, but also always has been, a vital and material element of this poem. In this nearly paradoxical relation, the classicism-dissociated newness exists as its material vitalism. The articulation of the vital bodily parts of the human and the non-human such as "our sandaled feet," "tail," "finger/s," "a monarch's face," "a hand/hands," "a heart," "heels," "a bone," "eyes," "head," "lovely tail," and so on, lays out the arras, which is, however, also an organic environment sensible to both the subject of the poem and the poem (or arras) as object. The habit here functions to put the material parts of the body on their "creative flight" (*ATP* 233), making the machinic process out of a pure and abstract form, for the machinic is "pure Matter-Function" (*ATP* 176). And yet the material process of experimenting with something new emerges and is seen as a chaotic, "disguise[d]," figure-shifting, and "infinite" matter, which evolves to make its way from a habitual and human subjectivity to arrive at the impersonal territorialization actualized in the poem as a garment.

The poem reaches a level of what Deleuze calls "habit of living" (*DR* 74) or "the living present" (81), and the renewing habit (a machinic process) emerges as it breaks through the membrane of the arras or even the poem "Arras." "[O]ur sandaled feet," "their hands," and their "slow eyes" all show the pragmatic habit formation in relation to its operation, according to which "the subject is constituted within the given" (*Empiricism* 104), or the peacock is invisible, but the body parts seen. There could be "determined virtuality" (*DR* 209) in this double process: "what is being invoked is . . . the completely determined structure

formed by its genetic differential elements, its 'virtual' or 'embryonic' elements" (DR 209). The individual physical pieces, which are figuratively represented as the classical patterns of the arras printed on the garment, become contracted in the effort to constitute an emergent "voluptuous" peacock, with "living patina, eye-bright—maculate," though "no one care[s]." In this reading of stanza six, the living peacock reflects "its lovely tail," which was once strangely folded to fit someone's eyes, but the "living patina" from which the reflection arises itself emerges out of the retina of "my eyes." The peacock as an ecological subject is formed through the synthesized constitution of its visible, organic parts, which are, in Guattari's term, "auto-referential existential assemblages engaging in irreversible duration" (*Three Ecologies* 44). The succession of connected peacock parts given in the arras, in accordance with being-viewed-instantaneously, explains how the habit occurs when the observer I, the intrusive I, the ego-driven I, the I that fears and confesses, and the I that keeps standing up in front of the green screen and blocking the reader/viewer's view all alight. They make a virtual landscape in which the imagery is working, autopoiesis emerging.

The autopoiesis of the new habit also suggests that its relation to the machinic process creates an assemblage consisting of the figural and figurative formation of a habit, a recurrent disposition of reading or writing behavior that is acquired by frequent repetition. This machinic assemblage therefore functions in a dual operation—an unruly chaos compared with a figurative or metaphorical representation—as the verbal, figural expression of the new order of a habit. Deleuze could have taken the coupling structure of habitual processes to be like a "furled disguise," to borrow Page's poetic description of a habit, because in his view, a habit naturally concerns syntheses involving the sensory motors with their generalizing capacities and organically-composed passiveness (DR 74). In other words, by a renewal habit being classical here, the primary, conventional or habitual usage of poetic language unfolds and the subjectification, in its written or interpretive expression, discloses itself to view: "It is simultaneously through contraction that we are habits, but through contemplation that we contract. We are contemplations, we are imaginations, we are generalities, claims and satisfactions" (DR 74). By either writing or reading the poem's itselfness, subjectification is produced by imaginations, generalities and contemplations, which are simultaneously transformations out of verbal placement. The figural signification of the images therefore renders the resources of giving "Arras" an identity in its way of producing one singular sensation.

To some extent this poem brings the arras as a synthesis to the fore and puts it to work as a resource rather than as something to be masked as an illusion of the representation of a personal poetic subject behind or at the center of

the poem. At the same time, this synthesis also answers questions regarding an ecological and “emergent” view of habitual processes (Guattari, *Chaosmosis* 65), for example, how the habit could now be at equilibrium, in chaos, to make synthetic but homogeneous all the individual particles of the poem. The machinic assemblage of the arras reveals a primary habit the speaker has already had, a habit which is “contracted” through the manner in which it is contemplated, imagined, and satisfied as well as through this classical garment of “jewels and silk.” However, the words or phrases—“still,” “stillness” (repeated twice in stanza five), “nothing moves,” and “motionless”—suggest that the complexity structured by and coupled with the sensory-motor should lose its capacity to work and become blunt, inactive, and “passive” while the intensities of unrestrained pleasure caused by the sensory-motor are made sensible with jewels and silk. The figures of speech now disseminate and diffuse themselves while they are characterized by verbosity, wordiness, and repetition, rather than concentration, order, and sensibility. It is the machinic assemblage functioning here to make the renewal habit, as the tactile sensation of the plumpness of the lantern-like peaches, the thickness of the fleshy peacock, or even the stickiness in “a treacle” are aroused. Besides, the assembled habit, as it is new and classical, seems to foreshadow that “[n]o one is moving now, the stillness is / infinite. . . . Nothing moves” (stanza five), and to imply that the passive non-movement synthesized now as “Gemini” is another two-in-one and so folded image, “starred for a green garden of cinema.” However, this autopoietic, cinematic image of the “green garden” relies on the figural and virtual quality of the adjective “green” to create greenness, which then becomes an unrefractive, non-representational plane, the imagerization of the peacock image.

Fascinatingly, Page associates human body parts with non-human machinic parts by connecting various images in the garden with the peacock’s swift movement, a technique of representation that draws attention to the autopoietic process. It is not so much that the body parts—“our sandalled feet,” “their hands,” and their “slow eyes on nothing”—refer to different human organs simultaneously laid out in the poem, but rather that the depiction of existence in a way that excludes the whole human indicates the machinic process. To convey the non-human sense of the body parts—stiff and immobile—is to set an end to the speaker’s consciousness and reasoning capacity, and in so doing open up another realm of being. The collective assemblage of the body parts—the narrator’s fingers “slip” and “twitch” as well as “stand” and “stare”—mimics and produces the component materialist elements of the machinic assemblage. The garden is stifled now and so replete with immobile, paralyzed parts that a positive force waits to burst forth as “the infinite,” “slow eyes on nothing.” Thus



the point of entry is gorgeous but static, as the body parts are constitutive of the potentiality that inheres in the banal but autopoietic act of creation.

In contrast to creative assemblage, or what I have elsewhere referred to as autopoiesis, human perception is depicted in terms of partial and impaired embodiment. The "I" that repeatedly appears in the third stanza seems intended to emphasize the importance of the "eye," the visual organ that makes human perception possible. The repetition of this "eye"—it is mentioned four times in the course of the poem—mimics the pattern inscribed upon the peacock's unfurling tail. Many eyes perceive, and in turn are perceived, illustrating the dialogic potential of aesthetic sight. Upon the peacock's "lovely tail," the speaker perceives "bright," "slow," "slim," and dully "maculate" eyes. In other words, the speaker gains the vision with which to perceive the bird's burgeoning presence by surveying the garden through the patterned eyes on the peacock's tail. Such perceptive accomplishment would seem to assume that one must rely on the visual organ of the eye in order to "see," or to comprehend the world, and it is taken to its extreme when the poetic eye is altered in order to see the world as the peacock's tail. And then the poetic eye is transformed into the poet's mind. This transformation asserts the devisualizing but necessary condition of creative chaos. And here is the point: to immerse the poem into the chaos of its creative, ecological assemblage. Thus, it would have to be in the very general sense found in John Orange's criticism on Page's 1970s work that, "[R]ecurring images and metaphors came to be seen as an enclosed poetic world, or myth, which emphasized ways of seeing, the nature of the real, and mystical vision, in an increasingly transparent language" (10). The creative assemblage is a poetic confinement for Orange, but it is a plane of composition that translates quite readily into a theory of living.

The other beings surrounding the peacock in the arras also appear as ecological, operational forces: they do not appear to the senses or, perhaps more accurately, do not appear at all, but rather disguise their appearance. At the same time, there is something strangely visible and vivid about the peacock from the moment it breaks into the garden, from its disguise to the furls of its feathered tail. It cannot be accidental that the speaker sees the "peacock-living patina, / eye-bright, maculate!" and then finds the bone-like reality of the bird. Indeed, the image of the immobile peacock (only a living patina now) may allegorize the speaker's fear of disturbing the equilibrium of stagnation, even though the immobility never appears but remains invisible. However, once the speaker wishes to "take to . . . springy heels" and "make a break," she becomes the peacock itself, a newly-born being associated with "the future" that she is close to seeing. From this moment onward, the speaker no longer encounters the visible

or sensible peacock, despite searching for self-referential meaning in its patterns or discovering its emerging, virtual presence in its transformational withdrawal. And in the process of making itself disappear as the tail is furled, the peacock signifies the presence of that which is unrepresentable. At this point, the poem no longer offers a visual representation of the moralist doctrine that a work of art should “reconcile the internal and external, to make a harmony out of the double landscapes” (Namjoshi 21), nor does it justify “the heavy critical emphasis on the recurring metaphor of eyes and seeing as a poetic device” (Relke 236). From the peacock to the eyes and from the actual to the counter-actualized bodily parts in the garden, there is no distance but merely stillness. Nothing but the peacock is perceived in the garden because the peacock has become the all and everywhere of the arras. All other creatures fade into the background, and unlike the peacock, fail to transform or evolve in the chaos of the undistinguishable folds of the furled, disguised tail. The speaker is confused to realize that, “No one joins those figures on the arras.” The difficulty of distinguishing the peacock from the figures that give birth to it does not result from the peacock’s advance against an invisible chaos nor from the elimination of its own presence of “jewels and silk.” In contrast, the peacock surges as soon as the tail unveils and enfolds the bird.

Upon entry, the peacock reveals a dynamic presence as it “shake[s] its jewels and silk upon that grass,” rendering insignificant the others in the garden. Its shaking action heightens the possibility of its being seen. However, the notion of visibility here cannot explain the speaker’s fear of what will be seen. In this poem, the peacock is the visual object, but the speaker’s eyes perform the visualizing act: “I confess: / It was my eyes.” There is no transformational phase in the act of viewing the peacock in which the speaker’s confession acknowledges a virtual yet actual being; there is only an Oedipal search for the original image in the hidden tail: “It was my eyes. / Voluptuous it came.”

This confession would be unreasonable without the trick played in the card game according to which the royal cards are conceived in such a way that “a monarch’s face” refers to “the head.” The trick reintroduces the creativity expressed in the form of the speaker’s private desire for “a hand to clutch, a heart to crack.” The pack of cards in the speaker’s hand somehow matters. In addition to symbolizing the significance of the uncertainty involved in creative writing, it exposes the construction and disfigurement of this major extended metaphor. The cards here do not only serve as the deterritorializing plane, from which its prominent peacock features fade, they also reterritorialize the autopoietic state of shifting perception. This reterritorialization emerges in the relation between the peacock and the cards. The autopoiesis in the play of

multiplied perceptions is bound to be untranslatable. The sudden entry of the peacock, whose rapidly unfolding tail disturbs "a green garden of cinema," is marked by an audible breaking-through, or "screaming." The bird is now registered through a range of senses—the visual, the auditory, and even the tactile. In other words, despite being tricked or experiencing the unrepresentable, the speaker finally sees what the peacock is when its representational image is gone and its existence is virtual. Here, the peacock is no longer a whole entity but a fragmented image comprised of a head and lovely tail.

### Conclusion

Engaging with the imagistic tension in Page's poetry, S. Namjoshi argues that the confusion found in Page's work mainly derives from a failed mediation between private experience and the external world. Observing that the tension of such a painful and violent confrontation is a salient feature of her poetry, Namjoshi suggests that Page's work exhibits a political and artistic concern to reveal poetic vision in the midst of two juxtaposed yet discrete worlds (26). "Arras" distinctively illustrates the negative feelings—frustration, despair, etc.—toward the external world that the poet wrestles with when struggling to make visible what is invisible. However, when Namjoshi further links the eye in Page's poetry with "the gateway between the two worlds," that is, the threshold across which the speaker moves from the insubstantial world to the world of external "realities" (27), the invisible provided by the clash between two worlds is further enhanced by the lack of the speaker's recognition of the visible. Namjoshi reads the darker elements of the poem—as evoked through words such as "sinister," "disquiet," and "fear"—in relation to what the speaker in "Arras" sees, suggesting that the sinister peacock is captured by the poet's eye and brought into the formal garden of the tapestry at the same time that it disturbs the external world. In effect, Namjoshi finds in Page's poetry an expression of the struggle to coherently align internal and external worlds while her reading may remain a narrative allegorizing the poet's struggle for a vision of her own. However, "Arras" is not merely a narrative about a peacock in a garden in a tapestry or a poet in poetry establishing her poetic identity through writing. The poem is a creative assemblage that reveals the construction of an interdependent plane through the working-together of the percept and affect. The poetic plane comprises multiple discourses that metaphorically express the creation of poetic vision. The arras consists of the visible (human body parts, plants, animals, metal materials) and the invisible (that which is the sweetness of the fold, the weight of fingers'

slipping, the coarseness of the peacock's screaming). As Deleuze delineates, "For the sign develops, uncoils at the same time that it is interpreted" (*Proust and Signs* 90); these two opposing discourses do not cancel out each other but combine the interlocked multiplicities to unravel the whole tapestry.

Imagerization is not an imagistic or a representational process as such; as long as the machinic assemblage, or the vitality of greening, is experienced, rather than visualized or reasoned, then subjectification is sensation, or imagerization in terms of the poetic language in poetry. The present reading that highlights the imagerization of the speed by which the peacock breaks into the green garden has not been narrated nor represented in the common criticism but could well exemplify the virtual quality of the peacock. Again, the rapidity of the peacock's movement is more than a figure of speech to represent its royalty or splendor; its velocity is not symbolically attributed to its feather's luster so to infer the monarchical status of the tapestry and the great light and grandeur of colorful threads. However, part of the force of the peacock image lies in its break into the arras, which co-exists with the fragmentary but essential parts of the feathered being making "a territorial assemblage" (*ATP* 312), a percept now, inseparable from the viewer's (either the poet's or the reader's) perception. The co-existence of percept and perception makes this assemblage and territorializes the significations of the poem while an impression of royalty, splendor or even nobility is created by the affect of the bird's small, disconnected bodily parts. The peacock's movement draws on the figural expression of the parts or fragments, which express the peacock. Deleuze and Guattari assert that "what defines the territory is the emergence of matters of expression (qualities)" (*ATP* 315), and the appearance of such expressive qualities constitutes the imprint of territorialization. The speed at which the peacock breaks into the garden is one such expressive quality, as are its fragmented bodily parts.

The autopoietic function of the machine is appropriated in the present essay to make the point that the new but classical habit works to allow the habit to arrive at the machine itself. In "Arras," the machinic elements are witnessed in the multiple, interconnected relations between the speaker, who seems unable to see the peacock's image, the lawn, the flat and remote figures, the disembodied bodily parts of human beings, etc. The image of the peacock and the plane of composition created by the percept and affect may not have any relation with each other, but at the outset the peacock is not an exploited image that passively receives interpretations of its existence. On the contrary, the peacock constitutes a violent and intense image that effaces itself and its visibility. The radical philosophical edge of autopoiesis is possible not only by laying bare the imagerization as a process but also by striking out against the peacock-image, by

almost forming in de-animalizing the peacock. In return, the peacock-image, in order to produce itself, calls for thought as radical as Deleuze and Guattari's "art as abstract machine" (ATP 496), a call that is no less forceful and involves a violent abstraction of ecological aesthetics.

Now the peacock image is new and alien to the reader, in that its parts are discretely and disjointedly registered; the sensation of breaking is thus produced in the act of reading. The royalty has become suggestive or even invisible. Consequently, the peacock's expressive qualities are not only a mark of territorialization, or metaphorical significance, but also of deterritorialization, a block of sensations that comprises several entities which are interconnected but also bring openness to other possibilities. Such openness to possibility relies on a radical inclusion of "the virtual," an important realm that Guattari uses to discuss the precondition of new forms of subjectivity in terms of a self-organizing formation of the actual in the peacock's bodily parts and the virtual in the speedy action of the bird.

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## 沛居〈掛毯〉中的自生發： 作為視覺機器的孔雀意象

### 摘要

本文從德勒茲與瓜達里的自生發概念出發，討論加拿大現代主義作家沛居早期詩作〈掛毯〉中自我佈置創作的機器性。這首詩表現了詩作環境中既有元素如何產生變形更新的生態意涵，亦即詩作自身如何成為理解視覺意象的藝術模式。本文解析〈掛毯〉詩中的意象，但不以此作為闡述德勒茲與瓜達里概念術語的寓喻。反之，閱讀〈掛毯〉旨在展演新意與古典兩者互織，進而創造意象的過程，此意象化過程尤其表現在詩中彩衣與孔雀兩處意象。自生發的自我佈置出現於彩衣意象的機器系統，開展出一道穿越疆域化、解疆域化，乃至倫理政治面向的過程。這首詩是潛在平面的樣貌、機器運作的成果，具體而言，詩作即是孔雀的生成之物。孔雀意象的運作過程，不僅揭示詩中說話人的視界，同時也改變這首詩的語言元素。此一新穎卻又古典的彩衣或習慣是機器運作的結果，孔雀不只是鳥，而是以解疆域軌跡運行的意象質素，是藝術發生過程中的自動創發連結。

**關鍵字：**自生發，機器，意象，德勒茲與瓜達里，〈掛毯〉