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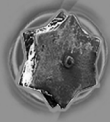
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Becoming-Fantastic: Deleuze and Mackay on Fantasy RPG Performance

Joshua Hall

Abstract

*I begin with a consideration of *The Fantasy Role-Playing Game: A New Performing Art*, by theorist Daniel McKay, which explores how these games evolved from games used to train Prussian military officers in war tactics, to recreational games without winners and losers in which players controlled imaginary groups of soldiers, to, most importantly, the construction of multilevel identities out of “fictive blocks” of popular culture. Having thus laid the foundation for this critical linkage of role-playing and Deleuze, I then turn to a close reading of *Thousand Plateaus*. In addition to exploring functions in the text of classic fantasy characters (including vampires, sorcerers and zombies), I will also consider how other concepts in the text (including maps, bodies with organs, and weapons) can be linked to fantasy role-playing gaming in a politically productive way, opening up new lines of flight for the reader toward both Deleuze’s politics and creative fantasy.*

Introduction

For the reader of twentieth-century French philosopher Gilles Deleuze who is unfamiliar with *A Thousand Plateaus*, but familiar with his hostility to fantasy, mere possibility, etc., it might seem as though fantasy literature and fantasy-role playing gaming would be about the least likely phenomena in the world that could be effectively connected to Deleuze's explicitly political thinking.

In that most bizarre work of his several bizarre works with Guattari, however, one finds an emphasis on various elements central to the fantasy/horror genre, including wolf packs, vampires, werewolves, sorcerers, zombies and nomads¹.

Moreover, many of the emerging canonical texts on fantasy and fantasy gaming emphasize the real, social and even politically-subversive dimensions to fantasy gaming as ultimately more central and accurate than accusations of mere infantile or adolescent escapism².

To explore this perspective further, in particular at the intersection of fantasy literature and role-playing gaming, I begin this essay by turning to the work of performance theorist Daniel Mackay, in his fascinating book, *The Fantasy Role-Playing Game: A New Performing Art*³. Having laid down the foundation

1 Cfr. especially Deleuze, Gilles, Guattari, Pierre-Félix (1987), pp. 232-309.

2 Cfr. for example, Fine, Gary Allen (2002) and Gilsdorf, Ethan (2009).

3 Mackay (2001).

for this critical linkage of fantasy role-playing games (hereafter FRPG) and Deleuze, I will then move to a close textual analysis of his and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*. In addition to exploring the functions of the above-mentioned fantasy entities (sorcerers, vampires, etc.) in the text, I will also consider how other concepts in the text – including maps, bodies without organs, and weapons – can be linked to FRPG in a politically productive way.

The upshot of these analyses is twofold.

First, utilizing these comparisons could constitute a new and effective strategy, given the immense popularity today of fantasy role-playing games (especially so-called “massively multiplayer online role-playing games,” or MMORPG's, such as *World of Warcraft*), for guiding undergraduate students onto the difficult but important terrain of Deleuze's work.

And second, the number and intensity of resonances between Deleuze's work and FRPG suggest that it might merit further critical attention (both in regard to Deleuze and beyond), helping philosophy in particular begin to catch up with other academic disciplines such as sociology which are already mining these exciting new territories⁴.

Before I begin, however, it might be helpful to clarify my essay's method, which is inspired by Deleuze's concept, from *Difference and Repetition*, of

⁴ Cfr. for example, Nardi, Bonnie (2010).

the “dark precursor” that causes two separate “series” to “resonate” together. Deleuze’s (non-)image for this phenomenon is the invisible connection that races from the ground to the cloud immediately before the lightning bolt returns along that path down from the cloud to the ground.

In other words, I am trying in this essay to apply Deleuze’s own playful method on his own work, to – in his terms – create a dark precursor of my own, in order to establish resonances between (a) the series constituted by the “plateaus” of Deleuze’s (and Guattari’s) *A Thousand Plateaus*, and (b) the series constituted by fantasy role-playing games and the secondary literature on them. This is also one of the reasons that I approach these texts in the form of a sequential, literary “reading.”

Put differently, I am asking the reader to try this experiment with me of reading Deleuze – who infamously describes his own readings of philosophers, problematically, as “buggering” them in order to cause them to give birth to “monsters” – in a Deleuzian fashion (albeit minus his problematic violent sexual rhetoric).

If we can try this, I would simply ask that the reader evaluate the results of this experiment according to whether or not, by the end, one sees a new lightning bolt about to strike the ground, or perhaps at least feels the tingling sensation of its immanent arrival. And if the lightning does flash, the credit is due, at least in part, to the distinctive powers

of fantasy role-playing games to philosophize with lightness and humor (along with related media such as superhero comic books and time travel science fiction films)⁵.

I. Mackay's Performance Game of Fantasy

In his "Introduction," Mackay early on stipulates that his ultimate concern is with role-playing gaming not as a kind of game, but as a kind of performance, and thus as a new type of artform (2).

His book is the result of a kind of auto-ethnography (perhaps surprisingly popular in this area) of a "campaign" of Dungeons and Dragons role-playing games that he "conducted with four other role-players from 1989 to 1992"⁶. It is divided into the following four parts, "each following on a particular structure of the role-playing game: cultural, formal, social, and aesthetic"⁷.

Mackay begins by defining the role-playing game as "an *episodic* and *participatory* story-creation system that includes a set of quantified rules that assist a group of players and a *gamemaster* in determining how their fictional *characters*' spontaneous interactions are resolved." In the case of the campaign under

5 For related analyses of these two field, cfr. Hall, Joshua M. (2015).

6 Mackay (2001), p. 2.

7 Op. cit., p. 3.

consideration, his groups met “either weekly or bi-weekly” with “sessions” “averaging five to six hours” in duration⁸.

For those unfamiliar with table-top RPG’s, as they are called, the games are played by players sitting around a table, one of whom (the “gamemaster” or “dungeonmaster”) often uses a pre-packaged guidebook to describe the fantasy-inspired imaginary settings to the other players, whose alter egos will “explore” those settings by way of the players’ telling the gamemaster what they wish to do, with the gamemaster relaying back the feasibility and consequences of those actions, often relying on a (usually) dice-based system of randomization.

Of central importance for Mackay, “During role-playing game performances the action takes place in the players’ imagination, as communicated through verbal exchange between players and the gamemaster”⁹. Also crucial in Mackay’s view, “an inherent part of the game is cooperation among players”¹⁰

Sociologist Gary Allen Fine, whom Mackay draws on extensively, offers the following helpful summary of the content of the first and paradigmatic table-top FRPG, *Dungeons & Dragons*:

D & D does not present a specific social system, although the setting is supposed to be reminiscent of medieval society. There is no

⁸ Op. cit., p. 5.

⁹ Op. cit., p. 7.

¹⁰ Op. cit., p. 9.

attempt to maintain the fiction of an explicit social structure – flexibility that [co-creator Gary] Gygax finds essential to the game’s success. Most of the action in *Dungeons & Dragons* involves players organizing themselves into a party, and under the guidance of the referee [or gamemaster or dungeonmaster] exploring a dungeon, which the referee has composed (on graph paper). In this dungeon players try to collect gold coins, jewels, and magical items, and gain experience points by killing monsters and demons¹¹.

For reasons of space, I will now focus the rest of my analysis of Mackay on his first chapter, “Cultural Structure.” It begins by showing how FRPG originated from Prussian military officer Herr von Reisswitz’s 1811 game *Kriegspiel* “Wargame,” a modified version of War Chess, itself (as its name suggests) a kind of inflection of chess simpliciter¹².

Wargame later migrated to Britain, and was transformed in 1915 by H. G. Wells, one of the founders of speculative fiction, into *Little Wars*, the primary innovation of which was that “abstract counters representing the soldiers each player controlled were replaced” by “miniature figures.” In 1968, war gamer Dave Wesely began experimenting with a “non-zero sum” multiplayer game, and though it “ended in chaos,” Mackay reports that the players “had a ball and clamored for more”¹³.

11 Fine, Gary Allen (2002), p. 16.

12 Mackay (2001), p. 13.

13 Op. cit., p. 14.

Finally, in 1974, one of Wesely's first player guinea pigs, Dave Arneson, who was particularly interested in medieval war gaming and was a devoted fan of Tolkien's fantasy novels, teamed up with Arneson's friend Gary Gygax to create and publish "the world's first role-playing game," the now-famous *Dungeons & Dragons* (D&D)¹⁴.

Interestingly in connection to Deleuze, Gygax names another primary influence on D&D as H. P. Lovecraft, the undisputed master of twentieth-century fantasy/horror discussed in *A Thousand Plateaus*. Also interestingly along these lines, the same cultural milieu that shaped Deleuze and Guattari's work and has become the primary engine for its distribution and popularization (namely the university) was also the primary locus for the distribution and popularization of D&D (as well as for Tolkien's fantasy). At the universities FRPG's "continued to increase in popularity until the early 1980's," and by 1982 D&D had been "translated into fourteen different languages".

The two preexisting groups that formed the base of this popularity were "war gamers and fantasy/science fiction fans," who began to form a new subculture which "cohered around annual conventions, formed itself into special-interest groups, and communicated via newsletters (often self-published fanzines)"¹⁵.

14 Op. cit., p. 15.

15 Op. cit., p. 16.

In other words, like Deleuze, the new FRPG gamers both were interested in actively promoting subculture and counterculture, and also overlapped largely with the counterculture of those who love Deleuze (as indicated by the higher-than-average percentage of philosophers who love fantasy and science fiction).

D&D's popularity and creative intensity was such that it soon burst the bounds of its identity as a role-playing game and expanded into the world of fantasy literature. "A survey among *AD&D* [*Advanced Dungeons & Dragons*] players had revealed that players wanted more dragons in *AD&D* material," and "If TSR [Gygax's company, which owned and produced D&D] did not own the copyright to an established world of dragons, then it could always publish its own novels, thereby preestablishing the world in gamers' imaginations in preparation for marketing a role-playing game"¹⁶.

The first of a trio of these novels was published in 1984 and they were "a huge success," the profits from which even "eclipsed that of the role-playing game products"¹⁷. By 1996, there were already "242 novels set in *AD&D* worlds alone!"¹⁸ Mackay also emphasizes the other direction of influence, the massive impact of U. S. popular culture more broadly on FRPG, which he terms "a dialogue".

¹⁶ Op. cit., p. 18.

¹⁷ Op. cit., p. 19.

¹⁸ Op. cit., p. 20.

He begins with popular cinema, including the science fiction series *Star Wars* and “a wave of fantasy films” including *Conan the Barbarian* (inspired by one of Deleuze’s muses, Nietzsche) and *The Never-Ending Story*¹⁹.

In the last section of Chapter One, Mackay focuses on “the fictional setting” of the FRPG, which “has been very important” insofar as “much of the appeal of the early role-playing games was the opportunity to pretend to live within another world”²⁰. In other words, the “theater of the role-playing game needs a stage”²¹.

Might one strategically interpolate a “plane of immanence” or a “plane of consistency” here? Mackay paraphrases this stage as “an immersive experience of verisimilitude” by which the gamemaster attempts to “engross his players,” which engrossment, Mackay claims, involves “the idea of emancipation from their social bonds”²². Notice that this liberation only takes place via a kind of re-shackling in other social bonds; to use Deleuzian lingo, the FRPG deterritorializes the players from their everyday (or “real life”) social existence only by reterritorializing them on the FRPG itself.

This new territory, however, has a bizarre ontology all its own, to the point where it does not seem like a territory at all, at least in the sense that

19 Op. cit., p. 21.

20 Op. cit., pp. 26-7.

21 Op. cit., p. 27.

22 Op. cit., p. 28.

Deleuze uses that concept in *A Thousand Plateaus*. The FRPG involves “the phenomenon of the ‘shared world,’ in which a setting transcends any one particular author and can be accessed through many difference interfaces, from books and films to computer games and comic books”²³.

In other words, the FRPG, like the rhizome according to Deleuze in *A Thousand Plateaus*, has “many entrances.” Moreover, this “specific fictional environment” of the FRPG “grows and changes as if it were a character itself.” All this paves the way for one of the central new concepts in Mackay’s thought, a modification of performance theorist Brook McNamar’s concept of “entertainment environments,” namely “*imaginary-entertainment environments*.” Mackay defines the latter as follows:

fictional settings that change over time as if they were real places and that are published in a variety of mediums (e.g., novels, films, role-playing games, etcetera), each of them in communication with the others as they contribute toward the growth, history and status of a setting.

The “success” of an imaginary-entertainment environment (examples of which include Star Trek, Star Wars and Tolkien’s “Middle Earth”) Mackay defines as being “evaluated by the sense of consistency

23 Op. cit. p. 29.

found within its various forms”²⁴. This concept of consistency, so central to Deleuze’s thought in *A Thousand Plateaus* and elsewhere, is so important in the world of imaginary-entertainment environments that there is “person in charge of maintaining” consistency, whose title is “continuity editor”.

Zooming back to the more concrete level of a specific D&D campaign (such as the one whose study is the basis of Mackay’s book), such a campaign can itself be understood as an imaginary-entertainment environment, in which “[i]n addition to other responsibilities, the gamemaster performs the role of a continuity editor,” by selecting “what products are part of his world’s canon and which products are not”, where, again, such products include various rulebooks, novels and other technical and fictional material published regarding the fictional world.

In summary, and again using language sympathetic to Deleuze’s emphasis on creativity, drawing and spatiality, in the case of “imaginary-entertainment environments *imaginary* space is created for the role-players’ performances”²⁵.

The “contours” of this space, in turn, “are shaped” “through a material interface” such as “a gamemaster’s oral description of a setting” or “a celluloid strip of film (cinema)”. Note the emphasis on interfacing, the cinema, and technology – and on

²⁴ Op. cit., p. 30.

²⁵ Op. cit., p. 31.

machination generally – all of which remind one of Deleuze’s thought in *A Thousand Plateaus*, to which I now turn.

II. Deleuzian-Guattarian Demonic Powers

In the “Introduction: Rhizome,” the authors belittle “what a book means” in favor of an emphasis on “what it functions with,” understanding a book as “a little machine”²⁶. This conception of the book-as-machine seems particularly appropriate for the books that are the rulebooks for FRPG, such as the current rulebooks for D&D. Appropriate to this (machinic) linkage, D&G on the next page claim that a book “has to do with surveying, mapping, even realms that are yet to come”²⁷.

This emphasis on mapping recurs (for the first of many times) a few pages later. “The ideal for a book would be to lay everything out on a plane exteriority of this kind, on a single page, the same sheet”²⁸. Interestingly, this is a literally accurate description of the crucial roles that the map plays in many FRPG, as elaborated in detail by author Ethan Gilsdorf in *Fantasy Freaks and Gaming Geeks*²⁹.

26 Deleuze, Gilles, Guattari, Pierre-Félix (1987), p. 4.

27 Op. cit., p. 5.

28 Op. cit., p. 9.

29 In exploring an old cooler full of his childhood D&D paraphernalia, Gilsdorf (2009) finds “enough hand-drawn maps of faraway lands and dungeons to fill an atlas: “Before me, after all these long years, the backdrop for my heroic stories and imaginary derring-do: the Craggy Hills, the Untreaded Lands, the

The majority of the D&G's introduction lays out the concept of the rhizome, one significant example of which is the book per se, and therefore also *A Thousand Plateaus*. Just as a wasp and orchid can be understood to form a rhizome through their symbiotic behavior, the authors assert, the book "forms a rhizome with the world"³⁰. One characteristic of the rhizome is that it is itself "a map," and the following description of the rhizome-as-map could equally well apply to FRPG players like Gilsdorf:

In the case of the child, gestural [like role-players acting out their parts], mimetic [imitating figures from popular culture], ludic [FRPG is a kind of game] and other semiotic systems [such as the natural languages employed throughout] regain their freedom and extricate themselves from the 'tracing,' that is, from the dominant competence of the teacher's language – a microscopic event upsets the local balance of power³¹.

Lorsearch Plains. I looked closely at mountains called Ramen-Nashew that I'd painstakingly scribed, and Elfwood, the forest I had planted with my pencil tip. Here, an evil wizard's lair. There, an underground labyrinth guarded by traps and monsters, with rooms numbered from 1 to 37, which I had drawn on graph paper. And Elloron, my old friend, my old self [his former character], now just a sheet of gold paper [a character information sheet]. These game scenarios and imaginary lands were coming back to me. This D&D gear had once represented more than a teenage pastime. It had been my world", p. 19. As Gildorf makes clear later in the book, this relationship is by no means unique to him as a D&D player. On the contrary, "all D&Ders love their precious maps". p. 66. Fine supports this claim with his own research as follows: "Maps and plans are often complex. Many gamers keep large loose-leaf notebooks filled with information about their worlds and dungeons; one Boston-area referee reportedly created a dungeon with 110 levels", p. 73.

30 Deleuze, Gilles, Guattari, Pierre-Félix (1987), p. 11.

31 Gilsdorf (2009), pp. 12-5.

All this reminds one of Mackay's analysis of the subversive virtuality of FRPG, buttressed by D&G's reference to the distinctly American phenomena of "the underground, bands and gangs"³².

D&D is even historically played most often in peoples' basements, and therefore literally underground. For another example of such buttressing, the authors describe the rhizome as "a model that is perpetually in construction or collapsing," and as "a process that is perpetually prolonging itself, breaking off and starting up again"³³.

Similarly, FRPG session works with imaginary environments that are constantly being created, reworked and abandoned, and the sessions typically constitute interrupted durations of an indefinite and open-ended campaign of performative play. One could even understand each individual session as a kind of "plateau" in the authors' sense of that word, "any multiplicity connected to other multiplicities in such a way as to form or extend a rhizome"³⁴.

The second chapter, or plateau, of *A Thousand Plateaus* is entitled "2: 1914: One or Several Wolves?" It is fundamentally concerned with what one might call pack-being, as manifested in the wolf pack. It is perhaps significant that the table-top FRPG is necessarily played out by a small group, or pack, of people who are themselves essentially engaged

³² Deleuze, Gilles, Guattari, Pierre-Félix (1987), p. 19.

³³ Op. cit., p. 20.

³⁴ Op. cit., p. 22.

in imagining themselves to be (or performing the roles of) a small group or pack of warriors (and/or perhaps nomads?) in pursuit of adventure. This is an issue to which I will return below, especially in regard to the famous concept of becoming-animal, which also has an important place in FRPG.

Plateau 4, “November 20, 1923: Postulates of Linguistics,” also links up productively with FRPG, primarily because the way that language functions there is illustrative and illuminating of the philosophy of language the authors develop in this plateau.

Most importantly, language in a FRPG obviously takes the form of “order-words,” defined as “the relation of every word or every statement to implicit presuppositions, in other words, to speech acts that are, and can only be, accomplished in the statement”³⁵. That is, the most important use of language by the gamemaster is to give commands to the players, the most important use of language by the players is to enact speech-acts vis-a-vis their characters. Its every “rule of power” is indeed “a power marker before it is a syntactical marker”³⁶. Words are used as tools to make things happen. Additionally, since the entire FRPG consists of an imaginative performance of an adventure engaged in by avatars who have no independent subjectivity, it is also intensely true of the FRPG that language there is centrally “*indirect discourse*”³⁷.

35 Op. cit., p. 79.

36 Op. cit., p. 76.

37 Op. cit., p. 77.

In other words, as the imagined first-person characters do not, technically speaking, exist, then all of their speech is spoken of them or for them by the players; it “necessarily goes from a second party to a third part, neither of whom has seen,” as there is nothing literally there to see and no one (a hypothetical first party) literally there who could see even if there was something there to be seen.

Thirdly, the layering of the players’ identity is one affirmation of D&G’s claim that “[t]here is no individual enunciation,” as the speaking player is a person and a player and a character and so on³⁸.

And finally in this plateau, the authors’ example of “the transformation of the accused into a convict is a pure instantaneous act or incorporeal attribute that is the expressed of the judge’s sentence” could be reworded appropriately for a FRPG as “the transformation of an assemblage of numerical attributes into a full-fledged character is a pure instantaneous act or incorporeal attribute that is the expressed of the player’s ongoing performance”³⁹.

Plateau 6, “November 28, 1947: How Do You Make Yourself a Body without Organs?” provides another powerful link between the book and FRPG, namely

38 Op. cit., p. 79. An even more direction connection to this aspect of the FRPG is found in the authors’ observations that “In the course of a single day, an individual repeatedly passes from language to language. He successively speaks as a “father to son” and as a boss; to his lover, he speaks an infantilized language; while sleeping he is plunged into an oniric discourse, then abruptly returns to a professional language when the telephone rings; cfr. p. 94.

39 Op. cit., pp. 80-1.

that a character created and performed in FRPG can be understood as a kind of body without organs for the player playing that character.

Many of the many attributes mentioned in the first few pages of the plateau already bear this out.

First, the first sentence of the plateau claims that “you have one (or several)” body without organs [BwO]; in FRPG’s, similarly, the player must have at least one character, but may have many different characters over the course of their careers”⁴⁰.

Second, the BwO involves “desire”; so too does the creation and performance of the character in an FRPG. Third, the BwO is described as “an inevitable exercise or experimentation, already accomplished the moment you undertake it”; this is also true of the FRPG player’s character.

Fourth, it, like FRPG, is “a set of practices”⁴¹.

Fifth, one is “forever attaining it, it is a limit,” much like the limit experience of total immersion in FRPG’s so valorized by Mackay. And sixth, “on it,” as in FRPG’s, the players “fight – fight and are fought – seek our place, experience untold happiness and fabulous defeats”⁴².

40 Op. cit., p. 149.

41 Op. cit., p. 150.

42 One might object that the subsequent opposition between the BwO and “phantasy” would undermine the FRPG character as a candidate for a BwO, but that is only the case if one ignores the way in the FRPG creates new, interpersonal, meaningful, rewarding social relations—the “shared fantasy” that forms the title of Gary Allen Fine’s aforementioned sociological study of FRPG communities; cfr. op. cit., p. 151.

This linkage between the BwO and FRPG characters seems even more appropriate in D&G's subsequent analysis of the "two clearly distinguished phases" of the BwO⁴³.

"One phase is for the for the fabrication of the BwO" – like the creation of the FRPG character in D&D from the random, dice-generated numerical attributes – "the other [phase] to make something circulate on it or pass across it" – like the performance of the FRPG character in pursuit of the limit experience of total immersion/engrossment.

Each phase has an associated risk of failure, "at the level of the constitution of the BwO and again at the level of what passes or does not pass across it," much like, in D&D, having unlucky rolls of the dice (or choosing the wrong alignment) along with performing the FRPG character in an implausible way, respectively.

Also supporting the linkage of the BwO and the FRPG character is D&G's subsequent analysis of desire in the BwO and its relation to pleasure.

"The renunciation of external pleasure, or its delay, its infinite regress" – such as the player's rejections of the pleasure of sports or sexual intercourse in favor of mostly-male FRPG sessions – "testifies" ultimately "to an achieved state in which desire no longer lacks anything but fills itself and constructs its own field of immanence" – such as the

43 Op. cit., p. 152.

FRPG players' enjoying their desire to construct and inhabit a virtual world built of coordinated imagination⁴⁴.

The supporting cast articulated for the BwO also aligns nicely with coordinated aspects of the FRPG.

First, the virtual world of the FRPG could appropriately be understood as “the plane of consistency” or “the totality of all BwO’s [or characters], a pure multiplicity of immanence”⁴⁵.

Second, as suggested above, the FRPG session could be thought of as a plateau, here described as “a piece of immanence. Every BwO is made up of plateaus”, much like every character is in a sense the totality of its manifestations across the various sessions of an FRPG campaign⁴⁶.

Third, just as the “BwO is not at all the opposite of the organs,” but opposes rather “that organization of the organs called the organism,” so the character could be understood as a reorganization or deterritorialization of the organs of the player.

Fourth, just as “God, the theological system” “cannot bear the BwO” and “pursues it and rips it apart so He can be first,” so the religious right, as referenced in Mackay above, is similarly hostile to, and destructive of, the characters and the entire D&D world which they populate⁴⁷.

44 Op. cit., p. 152.

45 Op. cit., p. 157.

46 Op. cit., p. 158.

47 Op. cit., pp. 158-9.

Fifth, there is a very real danger in FRPG, in that “one courts death” in “dismantling [one’s] organism” and “courts falsehood, illusion and hallucination and psychic death,” which is to say that one can become addicted to RPG in such a way that the rest of one’s life suffers terribly⁴⁸. Along these lines, D&G talk about the dangerous BwO of, among others, “the drug addict”⁴⁹.

The tenth Plateau, “1730: Becoming-Intense, Becoming-Animal, Becoming-Imperceptible...” is probably the richest one in, quantitatively, in terms of concepts that relate to FRPG. First, the second sub-section, “Memories of a Naturalist,” suggests a model of becoming according to which A becomes C, not by being like (or imitating) C, but by relating to B in the way that C relates to D⁵⁰. Similarly, in a FRPG, the players become characters by reacting to the other players in ways similar to those in which the characters would relate to each other if they existed.

Second, the third sub-section, titled “Memories of a Bergsonian,” offers several helpful points. To begin with, it mentions for the first time in this plateau

48 This danger seems most prevalent in online FRPG’s such as *World of Warcraft*. Gilsdorf tells the story of a woman who compared it “to breathing for the first time,” and who “had been playing WoW for several hours a day over the past two years” (pp. 182-3). The game even led her “to question her marriage” (p. 184). Another player, at the height of what he viewed as an addiction to WoW “would wake up in the morning, head to his computer, and play all day, twelve hours at a time, drinking nutritional shakes”; he ultimately “failed out of med school and moved in with his parents” (pp. 202-3). There is now even an “On-line Gamers Anonymous” group, started in 2002 (p. 203).

49 Op. cit., p. 163.

50 Op. cit, pp. 236-7.

the concepts of “vampires” but also “sorcerers” and “tales”⁵¹. This sub-section also clarifies that what one becomes does not have to exist independently in the world. “The becoming-animal of the human being is real, even if the animal the human is becoming is not”⁵².

Therefore, it is no objection to my claim that there is a becoming-character of the player even though the character does not strictly speaking (at least pre-) exist.

Thirdly, this sub-section situates “alliance” at the core of becoming, suggesting the centrality of the alliance of the players (and players-as-characters) in a FRPG. And finally, this sub-section introduces the concept of becoming as “involution,” and one could appropriately understand the character-performance of an FRPG player as an involution, or folding-into-itself, of the player’s subjectivity and/or cultural stereotypes (analyzed as fictive blocks and strips of imaginary behavior in Mackay).

Third, each of the next three sub-sections, all of which have “Memories of a Sorcerer” in their titles, offer a wealth of new FRPG-relevant material. The first of these introduces the notions of “demon animals,” along with “epidemic,” “contagion,” “wolf-men,” “secret brotherhoods” and “battlefield,” all of which figure prominently in fantasy-literature and the FRPG’s based on it⁵³. The second of these three introduces “the Demon” and the “pact with

51 Op. cit., p. 237.

52 Op. cit., p. 238.

53 Cfr. op. cit., pp. 240-1.

the Demon,” as well as going into more detail about the lives of sorcerers, who have “always held the anomalous position, at the edge of the fields or woods. They haunt the fringes. They are at the borderline of the village, or between villages”⁵⁴. And the third of these three introduces “witches” and “sorcerer’s drawings” of a magical “Door”⁵⁵.

Later in this plateau, in “Memories of a Spinozist, II”, the authors emphasize that their concern is always with “affects,” or what a body “can do,” and with how these affects “can or cannot enter into composition with other affects, with the affects of another body”⁵⁶.

This sounds much like the character-creation phase of the FRPG, in which numerically-determined traits are assigned to the new characters, which could be appropriately understood as affects. Appropriately, then, following this discussion, the authors return to the concepts of “a plan(e), not a phantasy” and “cartography”⁵⁷. And following this return, the authors go on to introduce their central concept of “haecceity,” described as “a mode of individuation very different from that of a person, subject, thing, or substance,” which “consist entirely of relations of movement and rest between molecules and particles, capacities to affect and be affected,” examples of

54 Op. cit., pp. 244-5.

55 Cfr. op. cit., pp- 248-52.

56 Op. cit., p. 257.

57 Op. cit., pp. 260-1.

which include a “season, a winter, a summer, an hour, a date”⁵⁸. I would suggest that the FRPG session is an ideal additional example of a haecceity, supported by the authors suggestion that “What a story!” is a good example of the kind of thing one says to designate a haecceity.

The next significant moment in this plateau for FRPG’s is found in “Memories of a Molecule”, specifically in its concept of “becoming-imperceptible” as that which all the other forms of becoming are “all rushing toward”⁵⁹.

To begin with, this already sounds fitting for the FRPG performance, insofar as one tries to efface one’s extra-gaming personhood as completely as possible in order to facilitate total engrossment. Furthermore, the authors describe the characteristic of becoming-imperceptible as trying “to be like everybody else,” which is what the players are doing whenever they are playing.

And again, this process of “[b]ecoming everybody/everything,” D&G claim, is “to world (*faire monde*), to make a world (*faire un monde*),” and this is a common way to describe the activity of the FRPG, as I have already noted in reference to D&D co-creator Gary Gygax above⁶⁰.

Appropriately, then, immediately after this discussion with linkages to the most addictive

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁹ Op. cit., p. 273.

⁶⁰ Cfr. op. cit., p. 281.

component of FRPG's, the D&G return to the issue of drug addiction, concluding with a move beyond drugs themselves as the ideal to the place where

drugs have sufficiently changed the general conditions of space and time perception so that nonusers can succeed in passing through the holes in the world and following the lines of flight at the very place where means other than drugs become necessary⁶¹.

Does this not sound very much like the (non drug-related) practice of FRPG's? Perhaps they are the kind of thing D&G are thinking of when they write below the above quote that "the place must distill its own drugs, remaining master of speeds and proximities."

The last truly fecund plateau for the FRPG is 12, "1227: Treatise on Nomadology – The War Machine." After mentioning the "magician-king" on its first page, the next page begins an extended comparison between the games of Chess and Go, which I wish to suggest could be productively expanded with the FRPG. The central claim is that Go is more nomadic/war-machinic than Chess because its "pieces, in contrast, are pellets, disks, simple arithmetic units, and have only an anonymous, collective, or third-person function"⁶².

Additionally, characters in an FRPG are even more abstract/molecular/imperceptible in that

61 Op. cit., p. 286.

62 Op. cit., p. 352.

there are no pieces whatsoever, only the imagined (or perhaps diagrammed-as-lines) positions in the collective imagination of the group of players.

The FRPG also seems to be even more a “pure strategy” than is Go in comparison with Chess, in that it is even less “an institutionalized, regular, coded war, with a front, rear, battles”⁶³. Finally in this comparison, the space of an FRPG, insofar as it is merely imaginary (or graph-paper enhanced) space, is as much more a “‘smooth’ space” than Go as Go is than Chess.

Later in this same plateau, D&G turn to a richer description of the nomad and nomadic life as such, consisting of a series of characteristics, many of which align smoothly with the FRPG player.

First, the nomad’s life, like the sessions of an FRPG campaign, “is the intermezzo”⁶⁴.

Second, the “nomadic trajectory,” like the FRPG as practice, “*distributes people (or animals) in an open space*”, an imaginary space in the the case of the FRPG, and thereby “a space without borders or enclosure”.

Third, D&G (following Toynbee) define the nomad as “he who does not move”, much like the FRPG players who congregate in the same basement week after week (for perhaps months or years) and sit around the same card-table for hours at a time⁶⁵. Fourth, the land for

63 Op. cit., p. 353.

64 Op. cit., p. 380.

65 Op. cit., p. 381.

an FRPG player, like the nomad, “ceases to be land, tending to become simply ground (sol) or support”, forming the game’s “smooth space that gnaws, and tends to grow in all directions”; the latter could be said of the way that the FRPG can consume almost all of the player’s life if s/he allows it to do so⁶⁶.

Fifth, the “absolute” for the FRPG player, as for the nomad, “does not appear in a particular place but becomes a nonlimited locality” and is achieved “in an infinite succession of local operations”⁶⁷.

Sixth, the FRPG player does not “provide a favorable terrain for religion” either, as s/he too “is always committing an offense [by simply playing a FRPG] against the priest or god.”

The next sub-plateau is devoted to the centrality of number to the nomad/war machine, and one could argue that number is similarly central to most if not all FRPG’s, typically in the form of dice-facilitated chance. In D&D, for example, whenever a player wants to take a major action, such as a difficult physical maneuver or an attack in imaginary combat, that player rolls one or more dice, and the result of the dice-throw is in some way measured against the number associated with the character’s relevant ability. For example, the player wishes to attack, his character’s strength is coded as “5,” and therefore only a roll of 5 or lower will be interpreted as indicating a successful attack.

66 Op. cit., pp. 381-2.

67 Op. cit., p. 383.

Another parallel between the role of number in nomads and FRPG is that for players of the latter, too, “men are simultaneously extracted from each lineage to form a special numerical body”.

In the case of FRPG, this special body consists of a group of friends (self-)selected to play the FRPG⁶⁸. These friends are selected according to the third method the authors mention for generating this “special body,” namely “from a totally foreign element” vis-a-vis the world of the FRPG.

Each friend/player is like D&G’s “slave-infidel-foreigner,” who “becomes a soldier and believer while remaining deterritorialized in relation to the lineages and the State,” because the “State” of the FRPG is merely imaginary, and the players stereotypically adopt the personae of wandering adventurers⁶⁹. Like D&G nomads, FRPG characters tend to have “no history”, and instead only “a geography.”

The next sub-plateau is also critical for the FRPG linkage/rhizome I am trying to make, as it deals with weapons, which are one of the central concerns of FRPG. And as before, the details of D&G’s analysis also have various points of contact with the role of weapons in a FRPG.

First, it is especially true in most FRPG’s that weapons “are consequences, nothing but consequences,” as the most important weapons are those which are the result of successfully-completed missions, including

68 Cfr. *op. cit.*, p. 391.

69 *Op. cit.*, p. 393.

dungeon-hunts and dragon-slayings⁷⁰. It is, similarly, particularly true of weapons in an FRPG that “[w]eapons are affects and affects weapons,” as particular weapons, especially magic-enhanced ones, make a significant difference in the character’s abilities, expressed as changes in the numerical values used to calculate successful dice-throws⁷¹.

Thirdly, that “the weapon” possesses “an essential relation with jewelry” is similarly true in the world of the FRPG⁷².

Fourth and finally, metalworking (especially in the quasi-mythical figure of the smith) has a place there which is similarly privileged as its place in the world of the nomad.

Finally, D&G might well have been speaking of FRPG when they assert that “an ‘ideological,’ scientific, or artistic movement can be a potential war machine, to the precise extent to which it draws, in relation to a phylum, a plane of consistency, a creative line of flight, a smooth space of displacement”⁷³.

III. Conclusion

As I state at the beginning of this essay, the two phenomena under consideration here – Deleuze’s philosophy and FRPG – are both deserving of more,

70 Op. cit., p. 398.

71 Op. cit., p. 400.

72 Op. cit., p. 401.

73 Op. cit., p. 423.

and more sustained, investigation than they have heretofore received in mainstream philosophy.

Moreover, despite their obvious differences, one can (as I have attempted here) build a kind of Deleuzian political assemblage out of, or establish resonances between, the two. And in doing so, as I hope I have shown, one discovers both that Deleuze and FRPG are in fact mutually illuminating (thus facilitating this process of intensified philosophical investigation) and also an exciting new strategy for assisting (especially) undergraduate students in their first encounters with Deleuze.

Finally, in this spirit of future inquiry, I leave the reader with the following question: what do these resonances suggest about Deleuze's political thought and FRPG, both in their interconnection and in their respective singularities?

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