

Stevens after Deleuze: The Effects of a New Ontology on the Problems of Poetics

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of
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ABSTRACT

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Abstract

Gilles Deleuze's definition of the other as the expression of a possible world has introduced a novel ontological organization into philosophy. It makes possible the conception of a singular being which may be expressed by a potentially infinite number of possible worlds. This, in turn, has led Deleuze to propound the idea of "a life," immanent and impersonal but singularly determinate, as different from the universe of subjects, objects, and the transcendence that appears as their concomitant. This study resituates Wallace Stevens in the ontological universe of "a life" as opposed to the common practice of associating him with the questions of subject, object, and transcendence. It observes that Stevens's poetry primarily invests the field of the other, which functions as the structure of the perceptible. The result is a poetry predominated by the yearning for the immanence of "a life," an outside, that escapes the limits of the subject and is "disappointed" with the function of transcendence, rather than being explained by them. The study argues that Stevens's poetry can be read as a dramatization, itself regulated by an affective charge, of the passion for an outside, which goes beyond the framework of subjectivity and "feels" the inhuman stirring beneath the human.

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INTRODUCTION

“What for me takes the place of reflection is constructionism. And what takes the place of communication is a kind of expressionism. Expressionism in philosophy finds its high point in Spinoza and Leibniz. I think I have found a concept of the Other, by defining it as neither an object nor a subject (an other subject) but the expression of a possible world. . . . Including possible worlds in the plane of immanence, even in this very sketchy way, makes expressionism the counterpart of constructionism.”¹

This study presents a detailed examination of this novel organization in philosophy, with a special emphasis on the concept of the other and, within the dimension of expression that entails this concept, a particular interest for its emotive component, i.e., affects. Deleuze’s phrasing betrays that he surprised himself with his own concept: “I think I have found a concept . . .” In this study I completely agree with him on the originality of this concept. I argue that the concept of the other as the expression of a possible world brings about unexpected and unexamined transformations in the problem of aesthetics, when the latter is exposed to its implications. It is not always remembered that the question of aesthetics, in its modern Kantian formulation, is closely related with the concept of feeling. Deleuze’s succinct formulation proves exact also on this point. “Reflection” is a function in relation to which the concept of the subject is formulated. Why should the function of “communication” be its counterpart? Aesthetic feeling in Kant is supposed to establish

¹ Gilles Deleuze, “On Philosophy,” in *Negotiations 1972-1990*, trans. Martin Joughin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 147.

the communication among the faculties that define the life of the subject or to excavate an interior nature for the subject who otherwise lacks it.

To replace reflection with “constructionism” means to do away with the subject of thought in favor of a transcendental field without a subject, to replace communication with “expressionism” as a new counterpart means dissolving the interiority delineated by aesthetic feeling. I cannot help but feel that in the contemporary revival of interest in the concept of feeling, now approached with all the assistance that can be mustered from both natural and human sciences, there is something of the axiom that our societies suffer from the lack of communication. By appropriating the ground of communication for expression, Deleuze responds, as he always did on this topic, that we have on the contrary too much communication (he added that what we lack is creation, that is, constructionism). Communication of course becomes excessive when expressions of all kinds interact in an immanent field which they populate. In expressionism, therefore, feeling or affect ceases to designate the interiority of the subject, but as an event it signifies the variation of power in an immanent field that is a dimension of exteriority and a field of the other for its subject. The problem of expression accomplishes nothing less than a redefinition of the “ground” of the notions of feeling and aesthetics.

The first chapter stages a confrontation between Kant and Spinoza, which constitutes one of the central moments of its general argument, within this general framework. I demonstrate, as I indicated, that the problem of aesthetic feeling in Kant is the continuation of his theory of the subject by different means. This can alternatively

be seen as a desperate attempt to contain the theoretical problems encountered by the subject of epistemology or a reopening of the restrictive theoretical framework. (Deleuze, for example, both congratulated Kant for his generosity late in life and criticized the results of his attempt). This is not, however, what is important. Since the theory of feeling (and aesthetics) depends on the viability of the subject of thinking, what is important is to see whether the concept of the subject can be philosophically displaced and, given that this is possible, to ask how the space vacated by aesthetic feeling would be theorized. As I explain in the chapter, Deleuze exposes the “moral” presupposition assembled within thought (“the image of thought”) by identifying an amoral “thought without image.” The latter relates thinking to a violent “genesis” rather than to the subject who, sustained by “common sense,” exercises it naturally. With the demise of the subject of thought also goes the claims to its “interiority,” inner life or nature.

This operation leaves us with a transcendental field without a subject (a field of pure immanence). It is well known that Deleuze’s ontology is based on a script according to which the virtual (that which is real without being actual) is actualized on a plane of immanence (*a* life) while subsisting on the plane as virtual, and therefore co-existing in its virtuality with the actual. The subject is now actualized on this plane. What actualize it are the same genetic elements of the plane (event, affect, or intensities) that function as the forces of individuation. This is the sense in which I argue that Deleuze does not simply abstractly criticize the subject or announce its death, although this might still have some sense for the subject of epistemology, but shows the

affective or intensive ground of the emergence of a subject. Yet this is a subject of the field that is divested of its interiority, which was a presupposition of the subject of representation; rather, it shows that the psychic organization of the “I” and the “self” presupposes an affective individuation, which now constitutes their “outside.”

This is why the concept of the other is so interesting and important. By virtue of expressing a possible world (something offered to be “realized”), the other appears as the “representative” of the forces of individuation in a given field of representation. In this way, it is a sign or an evidence of the virtual process of individuation that coexists with the actual. The being of the representative is the possible, but that which it is representative of is not defined by the possible. This means that the same singular being can be expressed by infinitely proliferating possible worlds. The process of individuation of the singularities is by definition exterior to the subject, but this is also the way the subject coexists with its constitutive outside. Ultimately, this is the way “expressionism” is the counterpart of constructionism: what it guarantees is a “communication” with the individuating outside.

The most important aspect of Deleuze’s account of individuation for me is that it does not let the abyss which opens beneath or beyond the “I” and the “self” to turn into an indeterminate impersonal ground (or groundlessness) –an alien transcendence. On the contrary, the real determination comes from the process of individuation since it is defined by absolutely determinate singularities. Affects are singular determinations. It is the abyss that is determinate. It is the “flux” and the process of “becoming” that gives determination. I think that this is a profoundly Spinozian insight: that the only modality

of being is necessity, that being is absolutely integrated at the level of its affection or modification, and that God is not a despot.

In this chapter, I also present and discuss Spinoza's theory of feeling and Antonio Damasio's appropriation of it in relation to the problem of individuation. Spinoza's theory is based on a logic of singularity, which is why it can identify an individuation different than that of the subject. Deleuze wrote in the moving last chapter of his *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, "Spinoza and Us," that people very different from each other and from different occupations may suddenly find themselves to be Spinozists. I think that he would have liked Damasio's book. Damasio's account has the benefit of dispensing with the cleanliness of the cognitive theories of feeling. He provides a good scientific elaboration of the Spinozian distinction between emotion and feeling or affection and affect, and highlights the importance of such a distinction. As I read him, his ultimate argument on feeling may be summed up as follows: feeling emerges out of patterns of multiplicity that are composed of singularities.

In associating Wallace Stevens with the framework that I summarized, I was not guided by the idea that his poetry can somehow be made to confess these philosophical ideas. Rather, I was guided by a feeling that I get from his poetry. It is the same feeling that is related for me with what I have expressed about Deleuze on the process of individuation. It seems to me that, and this can be taken as my general argument about Stevens, Stevens's poetry turns around the variable dramatizations of a life that coexists with the "I" and defines its being essentially, from which the "I" is nonetheless separated. In other words, Stevens was overwhelmed by too much presence and felt this

presence to be exterior to the categories of representation, therefore felt it as difference. This means that he started with the coherence, however obscure, of an outside that excludes the identity of the “I” and exiles it to equivocity. This intuition goes against most criticism on Stevens. Stevens criticism starts with the thesis of the centrality of the “I” and seeks for the signs of its encounter with a transcendent being, which makes “interiority” an indispensable component to which feeling is attached.

In this sense, the critical literature on Stevens is much more “philosophical” than mine. I initially started this project with the question of the way in which Gilles Deleuze can, if he can at all, provide the procedures of a different literary criticism. This seemed to me a worthwhile inquiry since his writings on literature are unclassifiable in comparison to the procedures of literary criticism that I encountered. I am not sure now if it is possible to deduce literary critical procedures from Deleuze, or whether this is the right way to pose the question. What I gathered by way of an answer in this study must be sought in what I have to say about the theory of affects. It seems that this is where thinking on literature and probably on other arts must start. I am reporting these in relation to the “philosophical” aspect of Stevens criticism. His critics, implicitly or explicitly, implant philosophical models in the poems. As I indicate in the second chapter, a vague Kantianism seems to be the model that is thought to fit for Stevens. This is probably due to the idea of aesthetic feeling, which postulates an interior life of the poet embodied or externalized in the poem. But this is itself a philosophical model that is necessarily external to the poem. What is more, as this study tries to demonstrate, it is not as if aesthetic feeling is the soundest philosophical idea, on the contrary. For

example, I never understood the grounds for reducing the poem to “propositions” by deducing them from it. This is perhaps indispensable in the criticism of poetry. I am forced to do it myself, although I do not presuppose a generative model at work in the poem. It seems that the postulate of interiority is particularly liable to look for the propositions of an “I.”

Thus, to return to the question of the relation between the poetry and the philosophical framework I advance here, suggesting that Stevens’s poetry is occasioned by responses to an outside is what insures against imposing a philosophical model. What I do can be more accurately described as transferring Stevens to a different universe: a universe of individuation through affects, in which the other functions as the representative of these forces. This explains the role of the other in Stevens, which I discuss in the second chapter. The other is not the other subject; “I” is another. In this way, the field of perception strangely becomes anonymous, without a subject and composed of the expressions of possible worlds. The other is the promise of the possible, which is well registered in Stevens (“It is possible, possible, possible. It must / be possible.”), but it also harbors the threat of its foreclosure, the possibility that there will not be any possibilities, which is equally well registered (“I saw how the night came / . . . And I remembered the cry of the peacocks”).

It is this absence of the prior existence of the “I,” or rather its determination in the form of an emotion in its encounter with a field of exteriority, that determines my engagement with some well known critics of Stevens such as Harold Bloom, Helen Vendler, and B. J. Leggett, in the context of several poems from *The Collected Poems*.

My starting point is Laura Quinney's brilliant study on "disappointment," which I reread as an affect that can register both the barring of the subject and the opening of the vision of an immanent life. Mutlu Konuk Blasing's work on lyric poetry provides an account of the lyric "I" that I find myself closest.

The third chapter moves deeper into the poems and considers the problem of the other in terms of the constraints of figuration that it brings. What seems most important in this chapter to me is the manner in which "pastness" in general becomes the representative of immanence in Stevens. This finds a correlate in the predominance of the third person "he" in his poetry. These aspects of the poetry are further evidence of my general argument that Stevens's poetry is organized by an exteriority that is re-situated at the center. Maurice Blanchot's work proved indispensable on the "he." The "he," together with the past world that it comes to inhabit, interestingly links with my earlier discussion of "style" (in terms of the dramatization of the virtual) in Deleuze at the end of the first chapter. In this chapter, I also discuss Jameson's thesis of Stevens's "structuralism," which I take to be a synonym for the investment of the perceptual field sustained by the other, and John Dolan's investigation into a rhetorical strategy in Stevens ("praeteritic antithesis"), which I take to presuppose indirect discourse as the "only" figure of language according to Deleuze.

I conclude with Frank Lentricchia's evaluation of Stevens. His reading both enables me to return to the themes of sexual difference, becoming-woman, and desire in Deleuze, in relation to the question of the other, that I started with and to discuss the

Kantian framework of aesthetics and interiority that he situates within a social and political setting.

1. THE OTHER, IMMANENCE, AND AFFECT

There has to be a necessity, in philosophy and elsewhere; otherwise there is nothing.¹

The possible does not pre-exist, it is created by the event. It is a question of life. The event creates a new existence, it produces a new subjectivity (new relations with the body, with time, sexuality, the immediate surroundings, with culture, work...)²

1.1 The Transcendental Field: A Detour from the Other

How can one hope best to characterize the transcendental? In Deleuze's work we encounter recurring attempts to approach this problem. His very short last piece of writing, "Immanence: A Life," gives us an idea about the questions which he must have thought to fall within its force field. "Were it not for consciousness," he writes, "the transcendental field would be defined as a pure plane of immanence, because it eludes all transcendence of the subject and of the object."³ "Consciousness," "immanence," "subject – object" and their "transcendence." Indeed, Deleuze has dealt with these questions from *The Logic of Sense* to "The Image of Thought" in *Difference and Repetition*, and to "The Plane of Immanence" in *What Is Philosophy?*. He later said of the second text that it remained for him "the most necessary and the most concrete"

¹ Gilles Deleuze, "What is the Creative Act?," in *Two Regimes of Madness*, trans. Ames Hodges and Mike Taormina (New York: Semiotext(e), 2006), 313

² Gilles Deleuze, "May '68 Didn't Take Place," in *Two Regimes of Madness*, 234.

³ Gilles Deleuze, "Immanence: A Life," in *Pure Immanence: Essays on A Life*, trans. Anne Boyman (New York: Zone Books, 2001), 26.

chapter in the book; moreover, in reading *What is Philosophy?* we realize that the question of “immanence” addresses the same set of problems with “the image of thought”: the institution of what it means to think by a given philosophy in the practice of this same philosophy. In *What Is Philosophy?*, however, the account is even more illuminating in that it both allows for real differences in the history of philosophy and does this by insisting on a singular plane of immanence, as of a singular nature for all modification, to which any philosophical practice can be referred back, not in spite of but because of its difference –or insofar as it is capable of making a difference.⁴ It is illuminating also because the topics which Deleuze and Guattari inevitably highlight in the discussion of the problem of immanence or the image of thought, among them centrally that of the “subject,” are so many clues to the sense of Deleuze’s own concepts and the centrality of Spinoza to his philosophical project. We will come back to these questions in detail, especially to the significance of the emergence of the question of the subject alongside the discussion of the determination of the image of thought, of what it means to think or what it means to orient oneself in thought, and to the implications of

⁴ I believe this is related to the unmistakable feeling one has when one thinks of Deleuze’s work: its insistence on pluralism in philosophy. Pluralism, the need for philosophical creativity, whose necessity we feel more and more everyday, is not a willingness to accept several conclusions by given philosophies at once or to accept that different philosophical procedures may exist, which is an assumption worse in what it implicitly asserts than what it suggests. Its spirit is better understood if one refers it to what is characteristic of real experience: not being able to find in oneself the will for a different course while being fully aware and certain that different courses, even perhaps an infinity of them, do exist and are real. Philosophers know and often do not hesitate to announce that not every encounter is beneficial in philosophy, that one cannot, even should not, turn to read any text or work anytime. Avoidance is part of the apprenticeship. This image is at least closer to the issues one must consider when one attends to the “love” or “friendship” that is contained in the title “philosophy”. It is not surprising that Deleuze reflecting on philosophy is also led to reflect on love or friendship, and this more significantly so when he turns to politics in *Anti-Oedipus*. There is no reason why love should survive that which the lovers cannot, that philosophy should emerge unscathed from the catastrophes that befell on human societies.

this for Deleuze on Kant, and for Spinoza in Deleuze. For now, we will take a detour, on the way to the problem of the transcendental field or immanence, through the problem of the other, the other person [*Autru*] in Deleuze, and in this I will begin with an essay from 1945, interesting both in its content and because of the presence, even that early, of the preliminary articulations of some of Deleuze's most fundamental positions.

The essay starts with an observation about Sartre on desire and love in *Being and Nothingness*. Despite his criticism of the "asexuality" of the philosophies of the other, Sartre thinks of the latter, Deleuze suggests, as if it were another "I" who is itself a subject with its own structures, a decision that creates an unexpected, strange result in the love situation. For the encounter must now take place between two subjects, each of whom by turns appears as a special object whenever the other occupies the position of the "I": "It is as if the lover alone were sexed, as if it were the lover who conferred the opposite sex on the beloved; moreover, it is as if there were no essential difference between habitual love and homosexuality."⁵ Thus, Deleuze offers a new concept of the other person and calls for a phenomenology of the beloved, who will no longer acquire her sex from the lover. According to this new concept, the other is defined as "the expression of a possible world."

In what sense is the other the expression of a possible world? Let us ask the question, what is the function of the other in a field of experience where "things do not

⁵ Gilles Deleuze, "Description of Woman: For A Philosophy of The Sexed Other," trans. Keith W. Faulkner, *Angelaki* 7. 3 (December 2002), 17.

have to wait for me in order to have their signification”⁶ As Deleuze observes, in such a world there is (say) the signification “fatigue”: there is the dusty uphill road, the big round sun, a sensation of tiredness in the back. “I” am not there to “attach my little significations to things.” Such a world is without a subject; it is purely objective insofar as objects do not have significations but “are” themselves their significations. However, if we imagine that the other is the expression of a possible world in which (say) there is no tiredness, this will result in making *me* the only one who experiences fatigue in the world that *I was*. “I am tired” already lies in the depths of the past, since there now appears a world, expressed by the other, in which tiredness does not exist. Yet the crucial fact is that the other exists in my world or the field of experience I am situated in as an expression that designates an expressed (a possible world), which does not exist outside of this expression. It does not matter, therefore, that the possible world does not actually exist; the absent expressed still subsists in its expression. Indeed, this is one of the senses of the modality we call the *possible*. This new world is like “the action of a hollow presence, but one which is enough to force the old universe back into me, to make it stick in my throat, to make me conscious that this time it is really me who is tired.”⁷

This new concept of the other introduces new distinctions between a world without a subject, a possible world which does not exist outside of its expression, and the subject and object which are constituted within a field of experience. These

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., 18.

correspond to the whole problem of the other. Deleuze announces that he will not treat the problem as such but retain it only insofar as “the description of woman cannot be made without reference to the male-other.” The following would perhaps be a helpful paraphrase of the new configuration that appears in Deleuze’s essay: for the lover, for whom the beloved cannot be taken as a reciprocal consciousness or another subject (which, if it were, would hypostasize an asexual world, as in Sartre), the beloved is already sexed, which in turn means that the lover-subject is caught between the two poles of Man, associated with possibility as the other-structure, and Woman, associated with presence and the negation of possibility in the “genesis” of the other.⁸

Why is woman not the other? The alterity of woman is not related to the objective possibility of an exterior world. As the unique being that can utter “the truth of love,” as Blanchot had Freud claim, she is more like the origination of the other-structure as possibility, with which capacity she problematizes any other possible world

⁸ It is possible to see here some aspects of the Freudian theory of sexual conflict as explained by Maurice Blanchot in his commentary on a *récit* by Marguerite Duras (*The Malady of Death*): “the conflict which according to Freud (a caricatured Freud rather) breaks out implicitly or explicitly between men, makers of groups thanks to their homosexual leaning, be they sublimated or not (the S.A.), and the woman who alone can speak the truth of love, which is always ‘encroaching, exclusive, excessive, terrifying’” and so forth. See Maurice Blanchot, *The Unavowable Community*, trans. Pierre Joris (Barrytown/New York: Station Hill Press, 1988), p.59, n.12. Deleuze’s philosophical operation, from this transitional essay up to *Anti-Oedipus*, is of course, as we shall see, going to aim at shattering this sexual organization. It is interesting to observe, however, that the distribution suggested by Deleuze in this essay is adequate to the psychoanalytic account of sexualization. In terms of the possible external world that it offers up, the other person appears as the friend–enemy. We said above that the other, revealing the possibility of a world in which there is no tiredness, made me the only one who is really tired, thus appearing in a rivalry; however, as Deleuze says, it is also the offer of friendship: “I will overcome my tiredness; I will turn the sun, the street, and even the fatigue into so many encouragements; I will sacrifice myself without reciprocity; I will sacrifice this tiredness that has now become my own, that has become me, that was so dear to me; I will finally realize this external world that the Other reveals to me –in a word, I will team up with the Other” (“Description of Woman,” 18). For the lover-subject, then, the pole of possibility, “teaming-up with the Other”, points toward the male-structure (Freud’s homosexuality), whereas the genesis of woman points at the closure of a possible external world because she is self-expression, her own possibility.

by pointing at the “exclusive” and “excessive” world that dawns with her. In this way, the terms are reorganized: she is self-expressive; the expressed, nothing like an absent world, is the expressing; in her the internal is the external and the external is the internal; the flesh and consciousness coincide in her. “Here we must be simplistic,” writes Deleuze, “and adhere to the naïve image: the woman in make-up, who torments the tender, misogynist, and dissimulating adolescent.”⁹ For this adolescent, the male-other and the world expressed by him can be denied and ridiculed insofar as a “possible” can be denied. The woman is different precisely because of her imposing, undeniable presence: “Woman, on the contrary, in her enormous presence, is impossible to deny or insult . . . [she] is given in an un-decomposable block, she simply appears.”¹⁰

Now, this will condition a whole phenomenology of the beloved. It often reaches exhilarating peaks in Deleuze’s essay, such as when he speculates about the “noumenal” freckles that cannot be touched but are seen, like the presence of the interior on the exterior; the “mistrustful beauty mark”, which can be touched, is non-noumenal, and organizes the entire face around it as opposed to the multiplicity of freckles that cannot sustain such a “disastrous” effect; the “red lips” as the exteriorization of the interior that suggest a red interior reaching to the exterior; and the “black mascara” around the eyes which closes the look on itself and makes it internal to itself, accomplishing the interiorization of the exterior.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

I would like to single out, however, only a few points which have important implications for the question of sexuality and the concept of the other. Woman as the sexed other associates both the traits of interiority and those of exteriority that coincide with interiority, for example, and most notably, the “secret.” So often invoked in relation to women, reaffirming the absence of a function of the expression of a possible world, the secret is a category of things whose manifest being harbor something latent: “she *is* the object of the Secret itself, of the Innuendo. The secret is a category of things –it is something one does not say aloud, which by its very nature must be understood by half-words.”¹¹ It is at this point that Deleuze turns to “children”, and the “girl,” which expose the limit of this entire phenomenology of sexual difference:

It is true that, for children, the secret is not simply a category of things, since for them everything, strictly speaking, is a secret: secret alphabets, winks of the eye, nudged elbows –nothing with regard to nothing. This is innuendo in the pure state: a form without matter. And these same children, on the other hand, are absolutely receptive, they have a naïve consciousness, they reflect and express all sorts of things which they do not even try to interpret: a matter without form. But then comes puberty. Puberty is the encounter between the form without matter and the matter without form –and this concerns the *girl*, the woman. Adolescents nudge each other, no longer for no reason, but when a girl walks by. The secret has been incarnated, the form of the secret has been materialized, matter has been informed. The secret has become woman, and everything that touches on sexuality. It is a scandal. From this is born the complex of puberty whose muffled influence will weigh on us for the rest of our life –the provincial life, the door-to-door life, which one talks about in a hushed voice.¹²

What is the “scandal” exactly? And if it is clear that the claim cannot be that children have no sexuality, why is the child invoked in relation to a state prior to the

¹¹ Ibid., 22.

¹² Ibid.

scandal? Having raised Artaud's Spinozian notion ("the body without organs"), each page of *Anti-Oedipus* resonates with the answer anticipated here: the sexed body, the entire sexuality of man and woman is a scandal. It is revealing, however, that the issue is broached in the present essay in relation to the concept of the other, as though intimating the question of what sexuality might consist in without or in the absence of the other. As it happens, Deleuze's subsequent work on the concept of the other asks exactly this question. It is an essay written in 1967 on the occasion of a novel, a rewriting of the story of Robinson Crusoe by Michel Tournier, whom Deleuze had nevertheless already acknowledged in the present essay from 1945 as the author of an "unpublished text," in which he found the formulation ("the expression of a possible world") for his definition of the concept of the other.

In "Description of Woman" the other is determined as "male" whereas the text on Tournier only invokes the other as structure, what it calls the "Other-Structure." What is the significance of defining a male-other, who expresses a possible world and without reference to whom "the description of woman cannot be made"?¹³ The ambiguity lies not in that the woman could also have been defined as the other. It is after all the thesis and demonstration of the essay that the expression which pertains to woman is not of an objectively possible exteriority. The ambiguity lies in what seems like an a priori confiscation, by man, of "possibility" associated with the other.

The world in which woman is confronted as the sexed other, but only from within the rivalry or friendship determined in relation to the expression of a possible

¹³ Ibid., 18.

world by man, is itself a possible world. That is, the world that attributes woman and man their sexual identities is a possible world, and the difference between sexes belongs to this world. This conclusion derives directly from the concept of the other as the expression of a possible world, since the other designates not persons but the world in which persons are situated. Such a world is always strangely “complete” with its unique forking paths: it is (say) a world without fatigue or pain, whereas there is not a moment that I do not feel the pain that encumbers my body; everything would be different if only “I” could inhabit that world. As we will see, this is the sense in which Deleuze claims that the other is the “structure” that sustains the perceptual organization of the world. Deleuze, therefore, has a very strange and provocative presupposition in “Description of Woman.” He suggests that the world of man and woman is itself the man’s world, that the being of woman as the sexed other is a product of the world of man. That is why he aptly names his undertaking in the essay as a “phenomenology of the beloved,” since the object of this phenomenology presupposes an element of the structure sustained by the other: the difference of sexes. This is what a theory of the other which situates it in the circuit of the “subject-object-another subject,” without reference to the other as structure, could not account for, since it proceeds as if the other is not already “structurally” sexed. As Deleuze wrote, it is as if the lover confers the opposite sex on the beloved. Yet we are now saying that, by the same logic of the other-structure, the world of sexual difference is itself a possible world. For, the other-structure knows its own vicissitudes; for example, it can dissolve and collapse. Deleuze’s essay on Tournier, “Michel Tournier and The World Without Others,” is

going to deal with this question. What happens to the difference of sexes, something which is part of the perceptual organization of the world, if the other-structure dissolves?

* * *

All these propositions and inquiries point at, in the context of the Deleuzian theory of the other, the most important component of this theory. Deleuze argues that the being of the other is that of a “representative,” and in this way identifies a dimension of which the other is a representative and at which it does not, therefore, exist as it does at the level of the perceptual organization of the world. “Individuation” is the name Deleuze reserves for this dimension of the process of desire. The other is representative of this movement or process, to which it owes its powers of individuation. It is true that possibility does not exist before the other; however, the possible does not have an existence in the order of individuation, although it is necessarily produced within the movement of the latter. If Deleuze’s essay on Tournier constitutes the second moment in the sequence of the theory of the other in dealing with the dissolution of the other-structure, we can say that the concept of “becoming-woman,” which is first formulated in *A Thousand Plateaus*, constitutes the third moment. Significantly, the concept of “becoming-woman” takes as its condition of possibility the world of “individuation,” of the process of real-desire, rather than the possible world to which sexual difference and gender belong. Deleuze and Guattari famously argue that “becoming-woman” names a process which both men and women must undertake. Contrary to what its name might suggest, the concept envisages an exit

out of the world of man and woman; it envisages leaving behind the field of possibilities of this world, which is defined by the “majority” of man in which woman is included. It does not propose bringing forth a feminine principle or reserving a potential for gender. If these would be the hallmarks of feminism, it is not a feminist concept. It has to do with a philosophy of difference in which the concept of the other – which does not concern the category of person, although it does not refer to an impersonal substratum either – is finally related to a specific process of individuation.

Now we can look for the resonance between the problems raised in “Description of Woman” and the one that concerns the concept of “becoming-woman” in *A Thousand Plateaus*. One of the accomplishments of this concept is found in defining what a “majority” is. In fact, the occupation of the possible does not sound like a bad definition for patriarchy. It is “Man” who controls the rights of expression, especially when this is a matter of another, yet absent world. As Deleuze and Guattari say, regardless of the fact that he may be less in number than mosquitoes, women, or children, man constitutes a majority in the universe. This means that power as such does not constitute a majority; it is rather “majority [which] implies a state of domination.” The point is therefore to understand the nature of the domination that characterizes the majority of man or man as majority. The state of majority implies a right that is not only possessed by those who have it but also exercised over those who lack it. Yet who would determine the “lack” of this right other than the one who possesses it? Therefore, “similarly, the majority in the universe assumes as *pregiven* the right and power of

man.” As Deleuze and Guattari conclude: “In this sense women, children, but also animals, plants, and molecules, are minoritarian.”¹⁴

Minoritarian, however, does not designate a state but a tendency, which Deleuze and Guattari will call a power of becoming. Depending on this conception, they claim that not only men but also women, everyone, must become woman. To put the matter in these terms suggests the presence of an explanation for women’s inclusion in the condition of majority. For instance Deleuze and Guattari write, “In a way, the subject in becoming is always ‘man,’ but only when he enters a becoming-minoritarian that rends him from his major identity.”¹⁵ Their way of dealing with this problem is different from those suggested by the notions of gender and the ideas about the “construction” of sex, of which today even the media is very fond. Deleuze and Guattari allow that women do not need to be constructed, that they can construct themselves. For them the concept of majority shows, or must show, why a woman is caught in a binary machine of domination *and* why women define a special situation compared to the man-standard.

In fascinating pages on what they call “the facialization of the entire body,” Deleuze and Guattari remark that racism as the claim of the white man has never operated by exclusion or by designating someone as other; whereas, for instance, the

¹⁴ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis/London: University of Minnesota, 1987), 291, my emphasis.

¹⁵ Ibid.

primitive societies always grasp the stranger as an other. They write that “from the viewpoint of racism, there is no exterior, there are no people on the outside.”¹⁶

Here we find an idea that resonates with the problematic of the possible and the other as the “expression of a possible world”: man never ceases to discover a possibility in a face; or rather, he facializes each body and thing. This will have to be the case if it is true that the face, as Deleuze and Guattari maintain, figures an expressed that has the peculiarity of residing in its expression. Not surprisingly, they also argue that facialization requires an operation of “binarization,” and the machine of faciality brings together a semiotics of signification and subjectivity. While the former presides over the establishment of “units,” the latter presides over the “choice” that comes to bear on them. *On the one hand* a progression which determines the units and puts them in a biunivocal relationship (man or woman, adult or child, leader or subject, teacher or student, etc . . .), *on the other hand* a selective response of “yes-no” (“A given face is neither a man’s nor a woman’s . . . It is not a man and it’s not a woman, so it must be a transvestite.”) where the signification of the “yes” of recognition does not guarantee “tolerance” but can also mean “an enemy to be mowed down at all costs.” The face, Deleuze and Guattari argue, is the substance of the signifier, i.e., a specific regime of signs in which the notion of the sign itself drops out of the equation because every sign refers to another *ad infinitum*. In Levi-Strauss’ words, in this regime the world starts to

¹⁶ It should be seen then that it is the “recognition” of the other, the principle which assures that the other is not exclusive, that renounces any exteriority. Conversely, insisting on an outside would *not* recognize the other, as it is the case with the primitives. From this perspective, it is not difficult to see in today’s campaigns, which have almost worldwide currency, for the recognition of others and its company “political correctness” the will to sanctify capitalism and liberal democracy as the only substance of human populations without any outside. We are in 2010.

signify before anyone knows what it signifies; the signified is given without being known. One not only jumps from one signification to another but also passes from one successive subjective choice to another. It is clear how the face may be the substance of such a formalization of expression, since it is both what changes and what fuels interpretation from one change of expression to another –and, what is more, a voice emanates from it.¹⁷

In the movie *Klute*, Jane Fonda plays a call-girl with whom a rich industrialist, a pure and chaste “ordinary everyday Erotomaniac,” in short the face in person, is obsessed to the point of murder. He carries around a recording of her voice, which functions for him as an entire landscape. (The movie opens with a *close-up* of the recorder playing Fonda’s voice to which it will often return.) Moreover, it is the *picture* of a missing man that puts her at the point of intersection of the police and a private detective about whom she finds herself being interrogated –she cannot remember the face, which is a fake, a *substitute* for the real killer anyway. What is more, she aspires to become a model and an actress; she wants to slip into a face herself. At the fashion agency, a man, his face off-screen, walking down inspecting a row of seated women, asks her to show her hands after what we surmise to be a glance at her. This settles the choice, he moves on to the next girl: she is a low type; *it is* her hands. It is because the woman’s body or a body part is facialized that the man’s face is off screen. Finally, to the psychiatrist, exhausted but also strangely invigorated, she says: “What I would really like to do...is to be faceless and bodiless...and be...left alone.” It is all very

¹⁷ Ibid., 112-115, 177 and 178.

touching. It would be impossible to count the instances; the entire movie is an exploration of “the face,” whose “corollary,” ratifying Deleuze and Guattari’s observation, turns out to be the “landscape” of the city, from the fashion houses and seedy bars to the police station and the office of psychiatry.

But if the face becomes the universe (“the face of the universe”) by translating bodies into a single substance of expression, signifying and subjective, then conversely the mobilization of bodily traits can disrupt the semiotic subtended by the face. I cited Deleuze above on the incarnation of the secret that the “girl” becomes at the meeting point of the form without matter and matter without form. Indeed, *A Thousand Plateaus* argues that in the organization of the great dualism machines, the girl’s body is stolen first (to come then to the boy “by using her as a trap for his desire”).¹⁸ Conversely, therefore, the reconstruction of the body, the composition of the body without organs, has to pass through a becoming-woman. Deleuze and Guattari invoke figures of forced movement when they talk about becoming: “You don’t deviate from the majority unless there is a little detail that *starts to swell* and *carry you off*.”¹⁹ The movement of becoming is double. Although all becoming is the becoming of man, there is no becoming-man –for man is the majority, the standard. As Deleuze and Guattari describe it, all becoming is only *minoritarian* because for the subject of becoming who withdraws itself from the majority the medium (or agent) of becoming can only be the minority, from where the withdrawal finds a response (this movement of “withdrawal-

¹⁸ Ibid., 276.

¹⁹ Ibid., 292, my emphasis.

response” being simultaneous). Strictly speaking, becoming belongs to neither majority nor minority. It is double since while the subject of becoming grasps a chance to withdraw itself from the majority, a modification that affects the abject state of her minority becomes visible in the medium or to the agent of becoming. This puts into place a process, called becoming, which implicates both and passes through them.²⁰

Becoming is the fault of the machine of faciality, the machine of binarization.

These are signs, I believe, that Deleuze on the concept of the other is motivated, as elsewhere, by Spinoza, in whose *Ethics* everything is either necessary or impossible but never possible. This is also why *Difference and Repetition* develops the thesis that the other is the “representative” of individuating factors; that it “envelops” the elements of individuation and these elements are “implicated” in the other as “centers” of envelopment. In *Difference and Repetition* the “I” and the “self,” as the “form” of determination and the “matter” of organization in psychic systems respectively, are not seen as figures of *individuation*. Individuation for Deleuze always corresponds to the movement of the real-desire: it is singular, yet not indeterminate. This is succinctly stated in the following passage from *Difference and Repetition*; it elaborates a key idea for my broader argument in this study. Deleuze is writing about Nietzsche’s “great discovery,” which marks the break with Schopenhauer:

²⁰ Cf. the case of the philosopher dramatized by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in *What Is Philosophy?* (trans. Graham Burchell and Hugh Tomlinson [London/New York: Verso, 1994]): “The thinker is not acephalic, aphasic, or illiterate, but becomes so. He becomes Indian, and never stops becoming so – perhaps “so that” the Indian who is himself Indian becomes something else and tears himself away from his own agony... Becoming is always double, and it is this double becoming that constitutes the people to come and the new earth. The philosopher must become nonphilosopher so that nonphilosophy becomes the earth and people of philosophy” (109). Also see Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema II: The Time-Image* (trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989], 215-224.) on the becoming of the filmmaker and the “missing people” in the context of minor political cinema.

No doubt the I and the Self must be replaced by an undifferentiated abyss, but this abyss is neither an impersonal nor an abstract Universal beyond individuation. On the contrary it is the I and the self which are the abstract universals. They must be replaced, but *in and by individuation, in the direction of the individuating factors which consume them* and which constitute the fluid world of Dionysus. What cannot be replaced is the individuation itself. Beyond the self and the I we find *not the impersonal but the individual and its factors*, individuation and its fields, individuality and its pre-individual singularities. For *the pre-individual is still singular, just as the ante-self and the ante-I are still individual* –or, rather than simply ‘still’, we should say ‘finally’. That is why the individual in intensity finds its psychic image neither in the organization of the self nor in the determination of species of the I, but rather in the fractured I and the dissolved self, and in the correlation of the fractured I and the dissolved self.” (258-59; my emphasis)²¹

That the other is a representative (of the movement of individuation) means two things. First, it offers evidence that the I and the self have a destiny which lies beyond them; since it is what the other is “representative of” that they set out to develop and explicate (i.e. another world). Second, precisely for the same reason, however, the factors of individuation (which, as we will see, are intensities as degrees of difference) themselves do not remain alien or indifferent to the individual, but qua *difference* they constitute its essence –the other world strangely does not have the form of alterity or is not another world; it is nowhere because different, it is not possible because necessary.

This is somewhat like the situation Blanchot describes in *The Madness of the Day*, that pain and pleasure, misery and bliss would naturally follow each other if only they could find a body serene enough to accommodate their movement: “and I saw that even on the worst days, when I thought I was utterly and completely miserable, I was

²¹ Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994). It is due to this understanding of individuation that Deleuze repeatedly emphasizes the issue of “resemblance.” The individuating factors or intensities do not resemble the individual. Expression does not resemble the expressed, which “causes” it.

nevertheless, and nearly all the time, extremely happy. That gave me something to think about. The discovery was not a pleasant one. It seemed to me that I was loosing a great deal.”²²

Woman is not the other because the other is “No-one.” The other organizes the world of perception; “it is a structure which grounds and ensures the overall functioning of this world as a whole.”²³ The world of perception, however, is invested by semiotic regimes and constrained by the organization of matters. That is why Deleuze’s “Description of Woman” presents her as the sexed other in relation to a male-other, the attempt being a pure description –a “phenomenology” of the beloved. Similarly, when the problem becomes the other as such, what has to be considered is sexuality itself in the absence of the Other-Structure. This fiction of the absence of others, following Tournier’s literary experiment, is what Deleuze’s next essay on the concept of the other deals with.

Before moving to that, however, the following passage from the earlier essay reminds us of the difficulty of the conception of desire with which one can account for the structure of the world of woman and man and yet whose own reality could not be explicated by the latter. In a sense, *Anti-Oedipus* relies on nothing but a Spinozist, “non-figurative” elementary definition of desire and love.²⁴ A desire at work below the

²² Maurice Blanchot, *The Madness of the Day*, in *The Station Hill Blanchot Reader*, trans. Lydia Davis, Paul Auster, Robert Lambertson (Barrytown/New York: Station Hill Press, 1999), 192.

²³ Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 281.

²⁴ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983): “The fundamental

minimum conditions of identity. It is an episode about the contrariety of the friend and lover. Deleuze drives the idea home following his argument which contrasts the possible world expressed by the male-other and the world without exteriority that the woman embodies.

It is well known that there is a profound contrariety between the friend and the lover. When I say “This woman is desirable,” it is not me who projects this signification on her (recall the “great principle”). It is not me who desires her, it is she who appears to me as desirable. But in this very world centered around the woman, my friend can find her to be contemptible and ugly: the revelation of a possible world in which she is not lovable. Whence the famous conflict between love and friendship. Am I going to realize the possible external world that this Other reveals to me? The woman senses this conflict, and can do one of two things: either she can attempt to put me on bad terms with my friend, or she can impose on him the expression of a world in which she is desirable, reducing him to be the muted existence of a rival next to me –a rival of whom I am jealous, and no longer a friend who only exists in the opposition of the worlds. All this constitutes the pretext of innumerable novels.²⁵

“The face, what a horror!” wrote Deleuze and Guattari. Is there a universe for love other than this universe of faces, this theatre of horror? It seems to me that for Deleuze only the world of individuation hinted at above can give us the clues to a different universe of desire. This is the same universe that had already been charted by Spinoza. He saw in

difference between psychoanalysis and schizoanalysis is the following; schizoanalysis attains nonfigurative and nonsymbolic unconscious, a pure abstract figural dimension (“abstract” in the sense of abstract painting), flows-schizzes or real-desire, apprehended below the minimum conditions of identity” (315).

²⁵ Deleuze, “Description of Woman,” 20.

friendship *or* love the prototype of the *natural* relationship as such, which infinitely precedes its own compartmentalization.²⁶

Deleuze's is not a philosophy of the other, who is neither man nor woman. It is a philosophy of difference in which the other has an irreducible expressive function.

Levinas who, in his *Time and the Other*, attempts to define the feminine as the other could assign this status to her precisely because he described the experience of the other as the "impossibility of possibility."²⁷ According to the phenomenology presented in Deleuze's essay, this can only correspond to woman described in relation to the male-other. Accordingly, this is why Levinas has to formulate a love relationship that will not pass through "desire."

²⁶ Ulus Baker puts the matter most eloquently in "From Opinions to Images: Towards a Sociology of Affects," diss., Middle East Technical University, 2002: "This is called 'friendship,' the only mode of social relationship which does not necessarily result in 'obligatory' ties or bonds. Physical proximity is not a presupposition in friendship, but only an outcome. And it is defined as a matter of 'perception' rather than 'responsibility,' 'obligation' or even 'sincerity'. It can be constituted between anyone without reference to sex, geography, or physical neighborhood; while religious, familial, and even civil ties (citizenship) are always 'forced,' presupposing a membership or identity. One can be a member of a community (religious, sectarian, cultural, sub-cultural), a family, a city, a state, but one can never say that he is a member of a 'friendship.' We will say that friendship is the 'natural' relationship in the Spinozist sense, as this philosopher is the one who reminds us that 'nature does not produce nations, states, casts, but only individuals'" (71-72).

²⁷ Emmanuel Levinas, *Time and the Other*, trans. Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh/Pennsylvania: Duquesne University Press, 1987). Levinas's phrasing is significant: "Is there not a situation where alterity would be borne by a being in a positive sense, as essence? . . . I think the absolutely contrary contrary [*le contraire absolument contraire*], whose contrariety is in no way affected by the relationship that can be established between it and its correlative, the contrariety that permits its terms to remain absolutely other, is the *feminine*" (85).

On death as the experience of alterity he continues: "Death in Heidegger is an event of freedom, whereas for me the subject seems to reach the limit of the possible in suffering . . . It is not the nothingness of death, of which we know nothing, that the analysis must begin, but with the situation where something absolutely unknowable appears. Absolutely unknowable means foreign to all light, rendering every assumption of possibility impossible" (70).

The editor of the English translation of Levinas's work notes that Simone de Beauvoir cited the sentences in my first quotation below to condemn Levinas for his sexism in her *The Second Sex*, detecting in the status of the other a secondary position to the subject (he) as absolute. He suggests, as a note of correction, that for Levinas, however, the other has priority over the subject. This is only a sign how confused the matter is. From our perspective Levinas's definition is valid only in a specific semiotic regime and mode of domination (i.e. faciality). It is not in vain that the "face" emerges as a fully elaborated concept in his work. He nevertheless succeeds in what Deleuze saw Sartre fail to do: constructing a sexed theory of the other. De Beauvoir runs the risk of accusing Levinas of sexism in an asexual world, if she falls short of developing a theory of the sexed other, who cannot just be another subject. Now, I will turn to the entire problem of the other as structure.

1.2. The World without Others

Deleuze must have found it a poignant image: we bang against things as in total darkness in the absence of the other. It is one that occurs several times in his discussion of the concept of the other. It is rivaled only by that other image, "a horrified face" as the expression of a "terrifying world," which is equally revealing about the stakes in his conception. We have already touched upon the function of the other in relation to the perceptual world. "Michel Tournier and The World Without Others" fully develops the two theses in the argument of the other. The first one, according to which the other conditions the organization of the perceptual field, that it is a structure; the second one,

according to which it is the expression of a possible world, that the existence of the possible is an expressed situated in its expressing. From a structural point of view, then, the subjects effectuate the other-structure, which itself is the reason why the other person expresses a possible world. However, the argument becomes interesting when, following Tournier's novel, it reaches beyond the other towards its disappearance: "The effects of the absence of the Others are the real adventures of the spirit: this is an experimental, inductive novel."²⁸ Deleuze first traces the two stages of the "spiritual adventure" of Tournier's Robinson in the absence of the other-structure. As a result, neurosis, with its retreat into memory and hallucination, is like the functioning of the structure in the void in the absence of others who can fill it, which is then followed by a psychosis of excessive production in an attempt to repopulate the world when the structure starts to fall apart. His descriptions of a third, pervert stage are theoretically the most exciting.

The presentation of the concept of the other in this essay follows the coordinates established in *Difference and Repetition*: 1) for any given system one must distinguish between individuation-implication and explication-differentiation, 2) in the psychic system, the I and the self are figures of differentiation and not those of individuation, and 3) the presence of the other in the psychic system of the "I" and "Self" is evidence of the existence of the values of implication (or the factors of individuation) in the latter, to which they cannot be reduced.

²⁸ Gilles Deleuze, "Michel Tournier and The World Without Others," in *The Logic of Sense*, ed. Constantin V. Boundas, trans. Mark Lester with Charles Stivale (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 305.

The third stage Robinson reaches reveals the liberation of what was constrained by the other. Insofar as it contains, as their envelope, factors of individuation which are of a different order than either the form of the I or the matter of the self, the former must point to an existence, as it were, beyond the other (or rather beyond the effect of the existence of the other). Deleuze calls what is thus liberated something “wholly other [*un tout-autre*] than the Other” or a “Double,” in whose introduction Friday has a role. The argument is less a negative one concerning the dissolution of the I or the self along with the other-structure (although there is perhaps something of that too, since as *Difference and Repetition* puts it, the individual in “intensity” is defined by the system of “the fractured I – dissolved self”) than a positive one about the nature of the “free” elements of individuation or, in short, the concept of difference as such. Friday arrives too late, after the disappearance of the other-structure. He cannot revive it or himself serve as a rediscovered other:

Sometimes he [Robinson] treats him [Friday] as if he were falling short of the Other, sometimes as if he were transcending the Other. The difference is essential. For the Other, in its normal functioning, expresses a possible world. But this possible world exists in our world, and, *if it is not developed or realized without changing the quality of our world, it is at least developed or realized in accordance with laws which constitute the order of the real in general and the succession of time*. But Friday functions in an entirely different way –he indicates *another*, supposedly true world, an irreducible double which alone is genuine, and in this other world, a double of the Other who no longer is and cannot be. Not an Other, but something wholly other (*un tout-autre*) than the Other; not a replica, but a Double: one who reveals pure elements and dissolves objects, bodies, and the earth. (317, my emphasis)²⁹

²⁹ Ibid.

The possible is “realized or developed”; it is not actualized like the virtual. It is already on a par with the real and the order of time. This is what the above passage seems to say: in a sense the possible has no potentiality. How could it if it conditions the perceptual organization of this world? This means that the elements in the structure (what will then be called their “doubles”) may gain potentiality in its absence.³⁰

The foregoing pages were trying to intimate both a concept of immanent difference that does not have the form of a transcendent alterity and a level of desire liberated from the difference of sexes. The world of difference is not felt by its individuals as an other world; therefore, the body composed by them must be able to refer us to a desire or sexuality beyond that of the different sexes.

Concerning this point, we could exploit two remarks by Deleuze on consciousness and sexuality in relation to the *a priori* other-structure, which suggest that the distinction between consciousness and its object and the connection of sexuality to generation (desire to objects) are “effects” of the structure. In the absence of the structure “consciousness ceases to be a light cast upon objects in order to become a pure

³⁰ The “potentialization of the possible” as opposed to “arborescent possibility.” This is a theme that emerges in the discussion of “faciality” in *A Thousand Plateaus* at the moment when Deleuze and Guattari seek a positive description for the liberation of “traits of faciality,” as a corollary of the dismantling of the face. “Each freed faciality trait forms a rhizome with a freed trait of landscapity, picturality, or musicality. This is not a collection of part-objects but a living block, a connecting of stems by which the traits of a face enter a real multiplicity or diagram with a trait of an unknown landscape, a trait of painting or music that is thereby effectively produced, created, according to quanta of absolute, positive deterritorialization –not evoked or recalled according to systems of reterritorialization. A wasp trait and an orchid trait. Quanta marking so many mutations of abstract machines, each of which operates as a function of the other. Thus opens a rhizomatic realm of possibility effecting the potentialization of the possible, as opposed to arborescent possibility, which marks a closure, an impotence” (Ibid., 190).

phosphorescence of things themselves.”³¹ This is consciousness as double which can obviously no longer authorize a distinction between itself and its putative object, since such a distinction finds its deeper reason in the temporal distribution of the before and after. However, as we observed above, the possible expressed by the other has the effect of terminating my world by making of it a past world (“I was”).³² When consciousness becomes the double of the thing or when things double themselves by becoming phosphorescent surface beings, without any resemblance to a past world and outside the constraint of the possible, their repetition would go as far as difference without positing the preceding or succeeding worlds as separated from each other.³³ It is a strange illusion of consciousness to rely on the temporal order to denounce the fact that difference can have a form because the other exists.

As for sexuality, the other functions as the guardian of the difference of the sexes. In its absence, in a perverse structure, in a beyond that is “not an Other but something wholly other,” sexuality will encounter “victims” or “accomplices,” like Friday as he appeared to Robinson. Deleuze here refers to the Lacanian interpretation of

³¹ Deleuze, “Michel Tournier and The World Without Others,” 311.

³² “If the Other is a possible world, I am a past world. The mistake of the theories of knowledge is that they postulate the contemporaneity of subject and object, whereas one is constituted only through the annihilation of the other” (Ibid., 310).

³³ On this repetition, which may be said of difference, compare the following: “Let us take seriously the famous question: is there a difference in kind, or of degree, between differences of degree and differences in kind? Neither. Difference is a matter of degree only within the extensity in which it is explicated; it is a matter of kind only with regard to the quality which covers it within that extensity. Between the two are all the degrees of difference –beneath the two lies the entire nature of difference– in other words, the intensive. Differences of degree are only the lowest degree of difference, and differences in kind are the highest form of difference. What differences in kind or degree separate or differentiate, the degrees or nature of difference make the Same, but the same which is said of the different. Bergson, as we have seen, went as far as this extreme conclusion: perhaps this ‘same’, the identity of nature and degrees of difference, is Repetition (ontological repetition)” (Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 240).

perversion, according to which perverse behavior, rather than presupposing the presence of others, betrays a lost structure which can no longer be actualized by real others, who in turn must appear (as in de Sade) as victims, agents, or accomplices. Indeed, and especially in Deleuze's reading, the most beautiful pages of Tournier's novel follow in the wake of the new found body, an "elementary" world, the island itself, a double life, which Robinson comes to discover with the dissolution of the a priori other as the structure of the perceived. For "it is initially in the Other and through the Other that the difference of the sexes is founded. To establish the world without Others, to lift the world up (as Friday does, or rather as Robinson perceives that Friday does) is to avoid the detour. It is to separate desire from its *object*, from its detour through the body, in order to relate it to a pure *cause*: the Elements."³⁴ We would have to wait for *Anti-Oedipus* to see the elaboration of such an unconscious through the notion of production, so that it does not appear as a mere beyond or outside of this world.

1.3. The Components of the Concept of the Other

But Deleuze on the concept of the other is not a restatement of the famous "The other is hell!" In fact, "when one complains about the meanness of Others, one forgets this other and even more frightening meanness –namely, the meanness of things were there no others."³⁵

³⁴ Deleuze, "Michel Tournier and The World Without Others," 317.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 306.

For Deleuze, the concept of the other must first and foremost be understood in relation to the problematic of the subject or the system of the I and self. As I have repeatedly emphasized, it discloses the field and elements of individuation that the components of the subject presuppose, itself having being defined as a kind of representative of this field and its factors. Above, we touched on a very crucial point in Deleuze's argument: his suggestion that the I and self are not figures of individuation but those of differentiation. The other might just be hell for the I insofar as the latter perceives in it its own superior individuation, that is to say its dedifferentiation – differentiation pertaining to its form. But this is not because the other is another I; on the contrary, it is because the I is an other. So much so that, if one were to come up with it, the correct formula would have to be “I, who am hell.”

Compared with the philosophies of the other, Deleuze's theory is bound to sound strange. It both confers an incommensurable power on the other and renders impossible its enthronement in that country called the Possible, which would resemble the actual but still be different from it. The reason for this is that the possible state as the expressed does not exist without (outside of) what expresses it. As Deleuze puts it succinctly: “By ‘possible,’ therefore, we do not mean any resemblance but that state of the implicated or the enveloped in its very heterogeneity with what envelops it: the terrified face does not resemble what terrifies it, it envelops a state of the terrifying world.”³⁶ It is impossible not to respond to the terrified face, but it is another question whether one is going to realize the possibility of a terrifying world by explicating it. It

³⁶ Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 260.

follows, therefore, that the measure of the conduct before the other must be taken in terms of power or potentiality. One may quite conceivably find it in her capacity, depending on the configuration of the forces in which she finds herself, not to “develop” the possible world offered by the other. The other-structure is dissolved through its development, a photographic image as it were, which is the moment it is grasped either as an object or a subject. Thus, taking into account both its powers of and limitations for individuation, Deleuze even outlines a strategy or an ethics of the other: not to explicate the other too much, not to explicate oneself with the other too much, but to populate one’s world with the possible states it expresses. Why? “For it is not the other which is another I, but the I which is an other, a fractured I.”³⁷ What this means is that the self, whose cogito would necessarily be split, *is* the explication of the possible world that the other expresses. The “I” would be split because, as in Kant’s schema, it is the thought of a self, which refers to a passive determination in time or appears to be the determinable substance of the form of time. If this is the case, the more hidden indication of the above statement can be a politics of individuation based on an economy of power, which is explained neither through the other nor the “I,” but through the factors of individuation (which in existence, of course, co-exist with subjects and others). For psycho-somatic systems these would be physiological affects which are simultaneously events of thought.

Deleuze seems to be suggesting that one risks missing the multileveled event with which one remains in touch through one’s powers or strength by chasing after

³⁷ Ibid., 261.

others. Since what could one end up with but the sterile truth that after all the other was just “another I,” at the end of that long race in which the other-structure is dissolved in its explication and “he” or “she” appears as a subject? The model Deleuze dismisses in this way is that of recognition. Realizing the possibility offered by the other, denouncing its unreality, or managing to remain indifferent in the face of it, these options must now be traced back to implicit values of individuation. These designate the relations of force, the navigation among which constitute the conditions of real experience, and the mere recognition of the other does not give any idea about their nature.

* * *

This theory of the possible offers us a very productive insight into Deleuze’s thinking on art. For my broader aims in this study, which is not just to reconstruct Deleuze’s thought on art, an endeavor from which one can already learn a good deal about the problems of aesthetics and the work of art in several mediums, but to excavate working principles for a literary criticism with different objectives – a criticism attuned to the *body* or the *territory* of the work (to that “state” of the world “implicated”) rather than its representations, as I would like to describe it – with this theorization, then, we now have an account of *the creation of the possible through what pertains to individuation or the event, although the event cannot be explained through the possible and the possible still possesses its incommensurability*. This holds because the possible is now salvaged from a relation of resemblance to the actual. To emphasize it one more

time, this account of the other does not erase but stipulates the incommensurable status of the possible in relation to the actual.

In *What Is Philosophy?*, the work of art is defined as a “being of the possible.” However, here as elsewhere, one finds that Deleuze puts the emphasis on the *necessity* that watches over its creation or construction. *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, perhaps Deleuze’s most important text with Guattari in literary criticism, establishes its distinguishing axis of discussion around the problem of the “necessities” felt by Kafka that simultaneously turn out to be a set of “impossibilities,” an assemblage that is now just another name for a certain conception of literature or writing.³⁸ What seems important to me is the manner in which such a perspective can transform the practice of literary criticism. Rather than constructing itself as a theory that identifies certain objects in order to search for them in turn in the works of art, it must now find its material in the works it studies and learn its problems there. We will see that this creates a certain tension with what is termed, still with ambiguities, “aesthetics.” Since according to our perspective, (say) taking stock of the question of his presence in the work, the author appears as an operator of “individuating forces,” to the struggle with whose individuating necessity corresponds the construction of the work as the being of the possible. In this way, although (but given Deleuze’s theory of the possible we should say ‘precisely because’) it forces us to take into account two stages (not just the being of the work of art but also its creative necessity), the work itself turns out to be

³⁸ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan (Minneapolis/London: University of Minnesota Press, 1986). See especially chapter 3, “What Is a Minor Literature?”

situated on a single plane: the composition of forces. There is no distinction to be found here between the inside and the outside; no case to be made in favor of an interior either as the author's psyche or the intentionality holding the work together; no reason to invoke an external condition or cause. This would be one way to understand Deleuze's assertion that literature (art) is part of medicine, that it is a matter of "health."³⁹ Not only is there no subject of expression on the plane, since all expression is reserved for the plane as such, but also, more importantly, the impossibility of not portraying the aesthetic as intersecting with other domains (epistemological, moral, juridical, and indeed clinical, etc.) proves the illegitimacy of the attempts to demarcate autonomous domains on the plane as such. The success of Kant's *Critique of Judgment* was to bear witness to the fact that the realms specified in his previous works could not be closed in on themselves; its failure was to theorize all the difficulties encountered by the aesthetic judgment into an evidence of its specificity. Can one say, in this sense, that it is a successful failure, a failure better than a success? Insofar as the problem is posed in terms of judgment, aesthetics is still tied to the problem of knowledge and of metaphysics understood as critique in Kant. It, then, provides a juncture at which one must be curious to observe the transformations one can initiate by a philosophy released from epistemology and salvaged from judgment. We will return to this problem. From what I have been discussing so far, however, we can observe that by defining the work of art as the being of the possible and by putting the possible in direct communication

³⁹ Gilles Deleuze, "Literature and Life," in *Essays: Critical and Clinical*, trans. Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 3 - 4.

with the immanent necessity of affective individuation as its creative principle, Deleuze clears an ontological ground for the work of art. In this univocal ontology of individuating difference, philosophy will have to develop a no less creative set of procedures for its own products than those of the work of art. The plane of immanence, “infinite movement or the movement of the infinite,” now becomes the common presupposition for both. *What is Philosophy?* attempts to show this: immanence takes it all.⁴⁰

1.4. The Process of Feeling & The Meaning of the Distinction Between Emotion (Affection) and Feeling (Affect)

What does it mean to say that Deleuze’s is not a philosophy of the other? It means that it is not a philosophy of the subject and that it does not formulate the transcendental in reference to the subject. The latter part of this diagnosis carries a special importance for this study. We see that the transcendental field as such may be characterized by the movement of what Deleuze calls affect or feeling, intensity, degrees of difference or power, or finally these considered as movements. There is a recent growing body of work in literary criticism that take its cues from the concept of feeling and in which feeling crucially has a transcendental rather than an empirical determination. These studies situate transcendental feeling in reference to the framework of subjectivity, and they seem to find a great heuristic value in the

⁴⁰ “Thought demands ‘only’ movement that can be carried to infinity. What thought claims by right, what it selects, is infinite movement or the movement of the infinite. It is this that constitutes the image of thought . . . Movement takes in everything, and there is no place for a subject and an object that can only be concepts” (Deleuze and Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, 37-8).

vicissitudes of the subject, which are affective in nature. Yet, for Deleuze, as we have been witnessing, feeling or affect cannot be taken as the unfathomable depths of a transcendental subject. In Deleuze's parlance, that way of proceeding would be said to consist in making immanence immanent to consciousness rather than grasping immanence as "immanent to nothing other than itself."⁴¹ Instead of experience and its conditions, a plot according to which feeling designates the undefinable condition of subjective experience, Deleuze talks about event and its embodiment or composition. Since his project conceives the transcendental without reference to the subject, it should be possible to observe the difference that such a program will create in the analysis of the works of literature. We would like to see how can one develop a Deleuzian argument in this realm; what can be the components of such a theory and what are its means and aims.

Antonio Damasio's recent work on the neuropsychology of feeling contributes a great deal to the elucidation of Spinoza's theory of feeling and emotion (affect and affection). I should add that Damasio's own work is motivated, in turn, by a study of Spinoza. He highlights three main topics: the methodological importance of making a distinction between emotion and feeling to begin with, the importance of understanding that feeling comes "after" emotion (or "follows" from it, as Spinoza would say), and finally the importance of understanding the implications of the definition of feeling in its essence as an idea functionally different from other ideas, whose difference lies in having the states of the body, and hence their variation, as its object.

⁴¹ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, 47.

There seems to exist a “Deleuzian” opinion in which “affect” functions almost like an occult quality. We are urged to make a distinction between emotion or feeling and affect in such a way that the former would belong to a “subject,” be “semiotic,” and “narrative” whereas the latter would not require a subject, be “assignifying” and “non-narrative,” whatever these might mean.⁴² The distinction between emotion and feeling about which Damasio informs us, and which, I think, corroborates the sense and function in which Spinoza and Deleuze take these notions, does not have anything to do with this. As a matter of fact, if the philosophical radicalism would consist in dispensing with the subject, as it seems to be the motive behind these proposals, the real test lies in whether one can succeed in producing a script according to which “emotion,” first and foremost, does not require a subject, and not in a capricious distribution into the “subjective” and “non-subjective.”

Damasio simply reminds us that emotion and feeling designate two distinct events and that if this distinction is methodologically taken seriously, it will teach us something essential about the nature of feeling that is otherwise not available. To give a sense of the antecedents of this idea in Spinoza, he refers to Spinoza’s definition of love: “joy accompanied by the idea of an external cause.” He observes that with such a definition Spinoza shows that he knew that the object which is the cause of the feeling, including the ensuing bodily state, is one thing, and the process of feeling called joy is another. It will emerge from the following that the supposedly Deleuzian distinction

⁴² See Sianne Ngai (“Introduction”) who presents this taxonomy in relation to Brian Massumi and Lawrence Grossberg and, I think, rightly rejects the rationale behind it, although for different methodological premises than mine (*Ugly Feelings* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005]).

between (subjective) emotion/feeling and (non-subjective) affect trivializes Spinoza and Deleuze's argument. Suggesting that there is a *real* distinction between the subjective, on the one hand, and the non-subjective, on the other, it falsifies their philosophical function by reintroducing what amounts to a dualism.

The Spinozian distinction between feeling (affect) and emotion (affection) cannot be split in order to hold one term of the pair against the other. Neither does one term of the pair (in this case emotion) correspond to what can be understood as "subjective feeling" in the manner of Kant. As I see it, it is meaningful to talk about "subjective feeling" insofar as it corresponds to an identifiable, Kantian, philosophical paradigm; however, "non-subjective feeling" is a meaningless phrase since the Spinozian/Deleuzian theory does not refer feeling to the subject to begin with (which is why it is not denied to it either) but refers it to a plane without the subject (although the subject will be situated in relation to the plane at some moment.) Moreover, Spinoza is rather talking about two types of "ideas," and not about the subjective or non-subjective feeling. The relevance of Damasio's discussion here is that his distinction also operates at the level of ideas. As a result, in my usage, "emotion and feeling" is interchangeable with "affection and affect," none of which have a reference to subjectivity.

Damasio's second topic actually demonstrates why such a distinction between emotion and feeling (in terms of the criterion of subjectivity, that is) cannot be maintained: feelings come "after" emotions. This seemingly simple observation is crucial not only for the definition of feeling in its functionally distinctive essence, but also for teasing out the difficulties related to the question of how to conceive the

temporality implied in the term “after,” which, in turn, holds the key for understanding, among other things, the Spinozian/Deleuzian ethico-political theory of the “selection” of joyful feelings. The insistent pseudo question, “How can one select them if they necessarily come after?” must be answered.

Damasio introduces his topic through the example of a chance occurrence, which took place during the treatment of a patient afflicted with Parkinson’s disease. An unplanned electric current sent down the brain stem triggers a series of movements – “emotions are actions or movements”– without any antecedent: the patient abruptly stops her conversation; she assumes all the bodily traits of sadness; then begins to cry, and soon after to sob; and “as this display continue[s],” she starts talking about how profoundly sad she feels.⁴³ When the electric current is stopped, the sadness and its appendages disappear just as they started, to the puzzlement of the patient and her doctors. Damasio points out that this example highlights the sequence of emotion and feeling, impossible to dwell on in its speed and complexity in daily life, in a purity that reveals a fundamental aspect of feeling:

There were no thoughts whatsoever to induce her behavior, no troubling ideas that came to her mind spontaneously, and no troubling ideas that she was asked to conjure up. The display of sadness, in all its spectacular complexity, came truly out of nowhere. No less importantly, sometime *after* the display of sadness was fully organized and in progress, the patient began to have a *feeling* of sadness. And, just as importantly, after she reported feeling sad she began having thoughts consonant with sadness –concern for her medical condition, fatigue, disappointment with her life, despair, and a wish to die. (69)⁴⁴

⁴³ Antonio Damasio, *Looking For Spinoza: Joy, Sorrow, and the Feeling Brain* (New York: Harcourt, 2003), 28 and 67-8.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

In this primacy of “display,” which may encompass the sad facial expression as well as the verbal utterance, over the organic state it induces to be felt and the kinds of thoughts that derive from such a feeling, one can already discern Pascal’s parable in which Althusser saw the embryonic definition of ideology: “Kneel down, move your lips in prayer, and you will believe.” Hence Althusser’s vision of the increasingly complex materiality of the practices through which culture is reproduced.

Therefore, the first thing we learn from the distinction to be drawn between emotion and feeling must concern the *order* in which they are held. As Spinoza famously puts it in the *Ethics*, “the order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things.”⁴⁵ I take Damasio’s description of the machinery of emotion and feeling, in which feeling comes “after,” to mean that the order and connection of feeling follows or “is the same as” the order and connection of emotion. And it is difficult to see how one could take it to mean otherwise. *Succession* certainly could not designate the temporality marked by “after”: “there *is* the emotion *and then* the feeling.” “After” neither says anything about nor explains at all a temporal relation between *two* orders. *Simultaneity* or coexistence, however, interestingly does not cause such a problem: there is an order and concatenation of feeling which follows the order and concatenation of emotion, insofar as the body is affected or modified. The “delay” between emotion and feeling cannot be an issue here either. As Damasio makes clear, there is delay on both ends of the process. William James’ proposition that feeling is a perception of the actual body modified by emotion has habitually been rejected on the

⁴⁵ Spinoza, *Ethics*, ed. and trans. G.H.R. Parkinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 117.

presupposition that feeling should somehow be swifter, and that this would be compromised if it depended on actual body states. However, if the relation between the two is one of succession, should not “delayed” feeling be the most expected consequence? Damasio’s response shows once again that the idea of succession produces a falsified presentation: “It does take time to change the body and map the consequent changes. As it happens, however, it also takes quite a time to feel. A mental experience of joy and sorrow involves a relatively long duration, and there is no evidence whatsoever that such mental experiences are faster than the time it takes to process the body changes we have discussed.”⁴⁶ It is perhaps the notion of private interiority that is the reason for this illusion of fast and easy access to feelings.

It is important to take stock of this temporal illusion concerning conditioning since, in Damasio’s account, the nature of the relationship between emotion and feeling reveals the distinctive functional nature of feeling as a specific kind of idea, different from emotion and other kinds of ideas. As conceived in his work, this relationship stipulates both that feeling comes after and that the temporality defining this fact cannot be conceived as a succession. In other words, its dependency on emotion is the guarantee of the originality of feeling, which also explains for Damasio its position in the evolutionary stage in the wake of emotions.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Damasio, *Looking For Spinoza*, 112.

⁴⁷ “Evolution appears to have assembled the brain machinery of emotion and feeling in installments. First came the machinery for producing reactions to an object or event, directed at the object or at the circumstances –the machinery of emotion. Second came the machinery for producing a brain map and then a mental image, an idea, for the reactions and for the resulting state of the organism –the machinery of feeling” (Ibid., 80).

What, then, is feeling? Damasio's book presents several formulations concerning its distinctive nature. They can be used to approach the sense Deleuze confers on the distinction between *affectio* and *affectus* or emotion and feeling in Spinoza. We can, thus, also avoid the misunderstandings that may attach themselves to Deleuze's way of presenting things. Deleuze seems to want to underline two things about the way Spinoza's distinction should be understood. The first point concerns the content of feelings; the second concerns the temporal quality of this content.

For instance, after denying the validity of any distribution of emotion and feeling between body and mind respectively (something which Damasio does *methodologically*, as a provisional step), Deleuze suggests that the real difference is found in what affection and affect "involve" as different from each other. Because, I assume, he rules out in Spinoza the possibility of affirming one thing of the body without also having to affirm it of the mind and vice versa, he argues that affection "involves the nature of the external body" whereas affect "involves an increase or decrease of the power of acting," both of these contents having to be affirmed of the body and mind alike. That is, the body has the trace of an external body (of its encounters) *and* the mind has the idea of this affection, which involves the nature of the external body (*indication*). An affect "follows" this affection through which the body's power of acting *and* the mind's power of thinking (thinking is the act of mind) is

decreased or increased. In other words, the content of a feeling is (the perception of) a variation of the state of the body.⁴⁸

This determination of the being of feeling/affect as variation necessarily prepares for its second characteristics. Deleuze argues that the type of content that feeling *is* must be temporal in itself. The unit of experience of a feeling is a slice of duration, “a lived duration,” which, therefore, means that the feeling “involves the difference between two states,” since at a given duration the passage from one state to another must necessarily be involved. This is what allows Deleuze to claim that feeling/affect is “purely transitive, and not indicative or representative.” Finally, this is why he is keen on repeating with Spinoza that what is at issue here is not a “comparison of ideas,” which he takes as the sign of Spinoza’s rejection of an “intellectualist” interpretation.⁴⁹

All these points are given, I believe, a succinct philosophical formulation in a late essay on Spinoza, in which Deleuze finds three distinct forms of expression running side by side in the *Ethics*. Since they are effects, affections and affects are signs, and signs refer to other signs. “Confused mixtures of bodies and obscure variations of power,” Deleuze writes, are the referents, respectively, of affections and affects. And since they are effects/signs, affection is “the effect of one body upon another” and affect

⁴⁸ Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, trans. Robert Hurley (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1988), 49.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

is “the effect of an affection on a duration.”⁵⁰ This definition of feeling as “the effect of an emotion on a duration” is especially illuminating.⁵¹ It reveals the co-implication of emotion and feeling (Damasio calls it “a nesting principle”) and adds to the precision of their specificity. Damasio writes that “once you looked beyond the object that caused the feeling and the thoughts and mode of thinking consequent to it, the core of the feeling came into focus. *Its contents consisted of representing a particular state of the body.*”⁵² Feelings are distinctive in their contents. The last sentence has the merit of bringing home to us what ought to be the sense of Deleuze’s remark about the non-representative but transitive nature of feeling. It would be a big mistake to think that feelings, in not being representative, are not ideas or perceptions. They certainly are for Deleuze and Spinoza. As Damasio also puts it, the issue is better understood in terms of the type of material that feelings comprise, beyond the object that happens to be their cause and the mental content formed in the wake of this object. Feeling is, as it were, the perception or the idea of these. This is the most difficult point for understanding Spinoza on feeling. Feeling or affect is not a “state of mind,” not a mental tag for an idea or image, not even a mental content in these senses. That is why Deleuze hastens to say that the passage from one state to another does not mean that this is a comparison of ideas. Following his “hypothesis” about the definition of feeling as “the perception of a certain state of the body,” Damasio also feels it necessary to address the same issue:

⁵⁰ Gilles Deleuze, “Spinoza and the Three ‘Ethics’,” in *Essays: Critical and Clinical*, 141.

⁵¹ Yet another occasion to observe that succession cannot explain the priority of emotion to feeling. One would have to think of an emotion that does not have any duration, so that a feeling may truly *succeed* it.

⁵² Damasio, *Looking For Spinoza*, 85; my emphasis.

The above hypothesis is not compatible with the view that the essence of feelings (or the essence of emotions when emotions and feelings are taken as synonyms) is a collection of thoughts with certain themes consonant with a certain feeling label, such as thoughts of situations of loss in the case of sadness. I believe that the latter view empties the concept of feeling hopelessly. If feelings were merely clusters of thoughts with certain themes, how could they be distinguished from other thoughts? How would they retain the functional individuality that justifies their status as a special mind process? My view is that feelings are functionally distinctive because their essence consists of the thoughts that represent the body involved in reactive processes [i.e., affection as the effect of one body upon another, according to Deleuze]. *Remove that essence and one should never again be allowed to say “I feel” happy, but rather, “I think” happy.* But that begs a legitimate question: What makes thoughts “happy”? *If we do not experience a certain body state with a certain quality we call pleasure and that we find “good” and “positive” within the framework of life, we have no reason whatsoever to regard any thought as happy. Or sad.* (86-7, my emphasis)⁵³

Damasio’s final reflections are especially important here. He suggests that consciousness is accompanied by an affective individuation, which cannot be derived from the *cogito*. And to that extent, a question remains about the origination of consciousness itself within the process of feeling. He also points at the “lived duration” as the *sine qua non* of feeling, because it is pleasure or sorrow that defines a feeling, and the former are nothing other than increases or decreases which involve the difference between two states.

The account of the process of feeling I have been trying to reconstruct aims at dispelling a particular misconception or even an illusion, since it is so persistent that one might take it as a structural component of consciousness. Spinoza said that human beings think themselves free because they are conscious of their appetites and volitions,

⁵³ Ibid.

but are ignorant of their causes.⁵⁴ The illusion I am referring to is to imagine that one is talking about names, or thoughts with a certain “feeling label” as Damasio put it, when one deals with feelings. Spinoza was quite aware of this tendency when he undertakes a definition of emotions at the end of the third book of *Ethics*. Concerning the definition of emotions, he writes: “I know that these names mean something else in common usage. But my purpose is to explain, not the meaning of words, but the nature of things, and to refer to them by terms whose common meaning is not entirely at variance with the meaning in which I wish to use them.”⁵⁵

From his strictly neuropsychological perspective, Damasio observes that the “origin” and “content” of feeling, as a distinctive type of perception or idea, can easily be identified. The body, whose “many parts” are mapped in brain structures, is at the origin and constitutes a “general object.” The “varied body states” mapped by the brain constitute the content.⁵⁶ These remarks follow the same direction with the account we have been reconstructing. However, there is more to be derived from Damasio’s work. For instance, what is the sense in which emotions and feelings are signs/effects, and do not, to that degree, refer to objects or structures as such but to other signs? Damasio argues that the object at the origin of a feeling is “inside” the body. The body may well be the general object, but an “emotionally competent” object is established as *the* object at the origin of *a* feeling: “Thus when we refer to the ‘object’ of an emotion or of a

⁵⁴ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 107.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 217.

⁵⁶ Damasio, *Looking For Spinoza*, 87.

feeling we must qualify the reference and make clear which object we mean. *The sight of a spectacular seascape is an emotionally competent object. The body state that results from beholding that seascape x is the actual object at the origin x, which is then perceived in the feeling state.*⁵⁷

Inside and outside, internal and external are reversible here. An “external” object establishes the most intimate perception of the body, an interoceptive sense of it. But the curious thing is that such an object is the perfect candidate for what one would like to call an “internal” one. Philosophically, therefore, we are not faced with the epistemological problem of the object but the semiotic one of the sign. Discussing Spinozian ethology, Deleuze writes that “the interior is only a selected exterior, and the exterior, a projected interior.”⁵⁸ This statement would be hopelessly misunderstood if one placed it within the problematic of judgment, without which the phenomenal object does not exist and which, thereby, legitimates an irreducibly subjective act. However, from a semiotic perspective the interior presents, as Deleuze above says, nothing but a confused mixture of bodies, which is itself already an entangled web of perceptions, while the perspectives on this mixture in the form of feelings bring about obscure variations of power.

According to Damasio, what distinguishes feeling from other perceptions of an external object (e.g., visual perception) is precisely the presence of a reciprocal influence between the object at the origin of the emotion and the brain map of that

⁵⁷ Ibid., 91; emphasis original.

⁵⁸ Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, 125.

object. The object of sight does not change even though one's thoughts about it may change while looking at it. Yet, because it is internal to the body, the brain's action on it can radically change the object of the feeling. The object, in turn, can influence the brain map since it is not (say) the seascape, it is the state of the body induced by it; yet this state is still a determinate and singular configuration, not an amorphous given that the brain will mold. Remember that the content that is feeling is auto-temporal. In other words, although it is an effect or a sign, feeling is not passive. It is not something to be formed as a phenomenal object; it indicates an auto-formation. We may say that it carries in itself the questions, "who can form such a feeling," "when," and "under which circumstances." Such questions belong to feeling in its essence; they define its dynamism. This point will be important for our understanding of the Spinozian theory of the selection of feelings. As Damasio says, "feelings are not *a passive perception or a flash in time*, especially not in the case of the feeling of joy and sorrow. For a while after an occasion of such feelings begins –for seconds or for minutes –there is a dynamic engagement of the body, almost certainly in repeated fashion, and a subsequent dynamic variation of the perception. *We perceive a series of transitions. We sense an interplay, a give and take.*"⁵⁹ We established that the feeling's coming "after" designated the coexistence of the order of feeling with that of emotion. Now that we are also saying that feelings have an inner temporality, being neither passive perceptions nor flashes in time, nor instantaneous effects of an external object, it seems that one

⁵⁹ Damasio, *Looking For Spinoza*, 92; my emphasis.

must be able to think of a succession organized within coexistence. A theory of the selection of feelings has to take into account such a problem.

The perception that is feeling has, in Damasio's theory, an essential relationship with the brain activities that produce maps of the body states. Thus, my exposition of the themes and problems related to feeling has proceeded presupposing the part played by the brain without thematizing it as such –this miraculous entity that gives unexpected turns to the being of things while we give explanations of them. To anticipate: contrary to what an ordinary imagination of scientific explanations on these matters would expect –that is, as the explanation for a certain feeling one will be offered a description of the movements of the brain chemicals and the zones in which they are active, whereas, as the objection to this then goes, what is in question is a (human) phenomenon with an irreducible meaning– in Damasio's theory, the brain is called on precisely to show that such an explanation is possible at the expense of leaving the brain out of the picture. What is useful for our argument here is the way in which feeling can be conceived as formative, since we have already said that it is not a passive process. The “reverberative process” already provides such a direction: the object and the brain map of that object, since the former is “inside” the body, can uniquely influence each other in the feeling process in a way that cannot be the case in other perceptions. Yet, Damasio gives another twist to this argument. It is true that we are strictly guided by the idea that emotion and its underpinnings provide feeling with its machinery; that is, feeling is always that of the states of the body, and the body sensing regions of the brain map these states. But we are equally strictly reminded that what counts for the brain and

for feeling is any *presence* whatsoever. It does not make a difference whether the body state in question is actual or not, hallucinated or false, induced by the presence of an external object or by the interference of the brain itself. In other words, the absence of fidelity in the mapped pattern (the pattern being formed at a chemical-molecular level in the body) does not “compromise the idea that we feel what is mapped in the body-sensing brain.” Hence Damasio’s exciting formulation: “feelings do not arise necessarily from the *actual body states* –although they can –but rather from the *actual maps* constructed at any moment in the body-sensing regions.”⁶⁰

Given all the insistence on the emotional–bodily roots of feeling, this may sound inaccurate. However, with this argument the account of feeling comes full circle. There would be an inaccuracy if the maps in question were pure acts of consciousness; as if the brain were some sort of computer, or any other consciousness machine that one might come up with as its metaphor. Yet, for example in a case of natural analgesia, where it is not the actual body state but the actual map of the state which varies from the body state that brings about the feeling, do we not rather witness the brain acting or interfering as a body? Even more important, one cannot account for the resultant feeling in terms of molecules and their chemical effects. How does a certain drug achieve its effects, for instance? “It is not clear at all why having chemical X attach itself to the neurons of brain area Y can suspend your anguish and make you feel loving,” writes Damasio.⁶¹ On the one hand, chemically different substances acting on different

⁶⁰ Ibid., 112.

⁶¹ Ibid., 119-20.

chemical systems of the brain produce similar feelings (almost always identifying a “body core”); on the other hand, there are demonstrable spatial discrepancies, in the case of the same substance, between the neural sites on which the feeling depends and in which the chemical molecules have their effect. If one must avoid the nominalism of the pleasure molecule, one must also avoid the idealism of the synthetic consciousness that can coat molecules with pleasure. Damasio seems to be clear on the alternative: there are existing “configurations,” which can neither be explained through chemical molecules nor through the “experienced” pleasure or pain, since they are multiplicities. He writes, “Feeling pain or pleasure consists of having biological processes in which our body image, as depicted in the brain’s body maps, is conformed in a certain pattern. Drugs such as morphine or aspirin alter that pattern. So do ecstasy and scotch. So do anesthetics. So do certain forms of meditation. So do thoughts of despair. So do thoughts of hope and salvation.”⁶² The pattern is not object specific; it is the product of singularities. And the elements of the pattern cannot be referred to consciousness since they are not subjective but physical. So these are the transcendental elements of feeling: increases and decreases, or continuous variation as the being of feeling.

We are taken in this way to the principle of *conatus* to which not only the brain itself but every individual living cell that compose the organism conforms. As Damasio confirms, when the living is concerned, atomism is incorrect. This is ultimately the difference between an intelligent machine and a living organism: “every cell is an *individual* living organism –an individual creature with a birth date, life cycle, and

⁶² Ibid., 124.

likely death date.”⁶³ This was Spinoza’s understanding of what an “individual” is: not a building block but a complexity which composes greater or lesser complexities guided by the principle of *conatus*. Therefore, the maps constructed in the body sensing regions (by whatever agents) on which feelings arise, attest to the biological life of the organism under the principle of *conatus* rather than to some abstract, and to that extent autonomous, computing or picturing. “The fact that we,” writes Damasio, “sentient and sophisticated creatures, call certain feelings positive and other feelings negative is directly related to the fluidity or strain of the life process.”⁶⁴ Positivity and negativity are under the sway of *conatus*. This shows well why Spinoza’s definitions of feelings do not make any sense if they are not referred to *conatus*. The exasperated student of the *Ethics* protests why she must necessarily feel hatred towards the one whom she imagines she is hated by and believes she has given no due cause for hate.⁶⁵ Can she not choose to avoid hatred? Maybe we can now respond imitating Damasio: “Yes, you can. On the condition that we identify what has brought about the map of your body state, the feeling of which you will have called ‘choosing to avoid.’ Is it the *thought* that you will be moving away and won’t see that person again anyway; your *belief* that human beings are vulnerable to such unwarranted opinions about other human beings and can therefore be excused; or the happy *drug* that you just popped, and so an. Also on the condition that we understand the diagram on which you are stationed, since it is the

⁶³ Ibid., 127.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 131.

⁶⁵ See Spinoza, *Ethics* (Proposition 40 of Book III), 195.

coexistence of affects and enables you to pass from one affect to another. Otherwise, the strain put on your life process, which is the pain that your perception is and is produced by the association of another individual as the cause of this pain, will necessarily be felt as hatred.”

Feelings have a formative dimension insofar as they are figures of *conatus*, pain or sorrow as much as pleasure or joy. One can, therefore, conceive how the “history” of a given individual’s *conatus* would be involved in his desire. For example, there are people who never attempt to, care to, or simply cannot develop adequate ideas of their encounters. In each encounter they miss the cause that would grant understanding. Lacan had called this amassed and amassing missing causes, which are traces of previous encounters, the excess of the signifier (over the signified). It may even be the case that their pleasures are dependent on such incomprehension. Their *conatus*, then, will mostly be exercised in trying to expel the sadness and hatred that inevitably attach themselves to each new encounter. And this thinking of sadness, which is the necessary result of the endeavor to get rid of sadness, will reproduce it exponentially. Until a good, that is joyful, encounter arises that can counteract this process.

The following are Damasio’s final formulations about the “origin” and “content” of feelings; they now encapsulate all the richness of the foregoing insights:

The origin of feelings is the body in a certain number of its parts. But now we can go deeper and discover a finer origin underneath that level of description: the many cells that make those body parts and exist both as individual organisms with their own *conatus* and as cooperative members of the regimented society we call the human body, held together by the organism’s own *conatus*.

The contents of feelings are the configurations of body state represented in the somatosensing maps. But now we can add that the transient patterns of body state do change rapidly under the mutual, reverberative influences of brain

and body during the unfolding of an occasion of feeling. Moreover, both the positive/negative valence of feelings and their intensity are aligned with the overall ease or difficulty with which life events are proceeding. (132)⁶⁶

1.5. Subject and Feeling

Who or what is the subject that every theoretician seem to be referring to? In her book, devoted to a series of contemporary philosophical responses to the theoretical challenges posed by emotion, Rei Terada, for instance, claims that the formula that may be reserved for Deleuze in this constellation would be an adherence to the notion of “expression” while dropping the concept of the “subject,” which puts, according to her construal, emotion and affect in a relationship of contrariety in Deleuze. What should we understand when this author speaks of the “death of the subject,” or even uses such a designation as “non-subjective”? The debates sometimes sound as if they do not derive from or belong to philosophical concepts or texts.⁶⁷

In response to a question exactly about the subject and in the space of two pages, Deleuze delineates what he sees as pertaining to the philosophical concept of the subject. As can be observed in relation to the work of Hume, the subject first fulfilled a “function of universalization” in a “field” where the representatives of the universal must then become “acts” that are “noetic or linguistic”: acts that transcend the given and pose the question of legitimate belief. Further, as can be seen in Kant, it fulfills a “function of individuation” in a field where the individual appears to be a “person,” where this notion gathers within its purview the question of the relationship between the

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ See Rei Terada, *Feeling in Theory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001).

determinations “I” and “me,” the articulation of the “universality” of the former and the “individuality” of the latter. It is interesting that Deleuze does not mention Descartes (that supposed culprit for the modern malaise of the subject for many) within the cluster of the concepts that came to designate what “has been called the philosophy of the subject.”⁶⁸

The question for Deleuze then becomes whether one can delineate new functions and fields in which those that informed the concept of the subject fade away. He indeed offers “singularization” as such a function. The emission and distribution of singularities, which define “a transcendental field without a subject,” single out the notion of “contrivance” (*dispositif*), which moves to replace that of knowledge or belief. Correlatively, it becomes possible to talk about individuations that are not personal; individuations that one can account for in terms of “events.” “We can call *ecceities* or *hecceities* these individuations that no longer constitute persons or ‘egos’,” he writes. Two functions with their correlative fields, then, carry us beyond the philosophy of the subject: “pre-individual singularities and non-personal individuations.”⁶⁹ However, as Deleuze also indicates in conclusion, these are just programmatic remarks; they must take us to concrete philosophical operations in order to be meaningful. It is precisely for such a purpose that one could employ them: to determine the status of the concept and the question of the subject in Deleuze.

⁶⁸ Gilles Deleuze, “A Philosophical Concept...”, in *Who Comes After the Subject?*, eds. Eduardo Cadava, Peter Connor, Jean-Luc Nancy (New York/London: Routledge, 1991), 94-95.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 95.

To say that a philosophy is not a philosophy of the subject is not to say that that philosophy does not, or cannot, provide a theory of the subject. Several discourses on the subject sound deeply confusing on this point. For instance, one can evoke neither the so-called “death of the subject” nor the “critique of the subject” to make sense of the script by Deleuze that I have just summarized. On the contrary, by delineating the functions of the apparatus of the “philosophy of the subject” –for instance, showing that the Kantian articulation brings together the two questions of the universality of an act and the identity of the substance it is supposed to determine– Deleuze exhibits both the space in which the discussion of the “philosophy of the subject” might plausibly be undertaken and identifies, so to speak, the real coordinates that a “theory of the subject” must have marshaled, given that individuations are non-personal. In any case, this is what I would like to suggest: for Deleuze, the set of problems associated with the “philosophy of the subject” concern “thought” as such, insofar as thought acquires a determination about its own nature in the juncture where it meets the concept of the subject; whereas those that are associated with the “theory of the subject” concern “affectivity.” That is why, I argue, the discussion of the philosophy of the subject appears, from *Difference and Repetition* to *What is Philosophy?*, under such topics as “the plane of immanence” or “the image of thought,” and a theory of the subject is provided, notably in *Anti-Oedipus*, in terms of an affective/intensive individuation, where the subject appears only within a process.

In relation to the problem of aesthetics, this last point will have an additional importance for our discussion below. Kant had to accept “feeling” into his critical

enterprise because it was the only tool with which he could provide his subject of knowledge with a feeling of its own life, who is otherwise not sentient, although he may continue to know. (Damasio's point above, on the difference between "I think happy" and "I feel happy" might be recalled in this context.) The question of aesthetics is therefore necessarily bound up with the question of subjectivity, as the Kantian definition of aesthetic feeling as a subjectively universal pleasure clearly shows. This is a juncture, then, at which we find another reason why Deleuze has to keep the space of a theory of the subject. Kant theorized feeling in resolutely and somewhat ambiguously subjective terms, in which it emerges as the sign of an irreducible interiority.⁷⁰ Yet, if an alternative theory of feeling is proposed then what is proposed by the same token is an alternative, as it were, a corrected or revised theory of the space and the nature of the subject, in which the subject can no longer retain the traits of the subject of epistemology. As I indicated above, my presumption is that the Kantian question of aesthetics is a continuation, in the form of an attempt at a solution of its problems, of the epistemological subject of the previous works. A philosophical demonstration of the unconstructibility of such a subject of thought would have the effect of exposing the illegitimacy of its extension into the realm of affectivity to begin with. Yet, what account will, then, be given of the actors of the realm of "non-personal individuations,"

⁷⁰ Fredric Jameson's description of the "central tension" of Adorno's aesthetics clearly underscores this inherent (Kantian) sense of the notion of aesthetics: "The central tension in Adorno's aesthetics is that between his formal project of desubjectifying the analysis of aesthetic phenomena and his commitment – inevitable, one would think, in any attempt to prolong the traditional framework of philosophical aesthetics – to the description of aesthetic *experience*: some last remnant of absolutely subjective categories which the desubjectifying impulse cannot wish to dissolve" (*Late Marxism: Adorno or the Persistence of the Dialectic* [London/New York: Verso, 2007], 123).

of affectivity itself, if we agree that the Kantian recourse to feeling was only an attempt to mould it according to the requirements of the supposed subject of thinking?

Deleuze provides both a discussion of the subject of epistemology in terms of the question of thought and a theory of feeling within whose process something like a subject will emerge. We will now turn to these. However, let me restate my guiding thought before continuing to prevent misunderstanding. I mean to suggest that since the question of the subject is *exhausted* within the problematic of thought, one cannot seek for *it* (again) in the problematic of affectivity or sensation. I do not claim that Deleuze and Guattari propose a *new* theory of the subject; I suggest that the delineation of a thought without a subject (“thought without an image,” as Deleuze puts in *Difference and Repetition*) affirms that the subject could have only belonged to the problematic of affectivity, that it should not have been introduced but in this context, and that one can therefore show the conditions of its genesis.

If a subject of thinking were demonstrable, it should also be demonstrable that there is a natural capacity for thought, which can be determined in the form of common sense. But this philosophy cannot do, since it can only “presuppose” it. The entire argument of the chapter titled “The Image of Thought” in *Difference and Repetition* can be read as the attempt to unpack this thesis of a non-conceptual, “implicit,” and “pre-philosophical” presupposition about the nature of thought in its various forms. It is an exhaustive investigation of this pre-philosophical presupposition. Yet, the problem is neither to revise the presupposition nor to conclude critically that philosophy cannot proceed without presuppositions. The issue concerns the problem of “beginning” and

“grounding” in philosophy, and Deleuze unambiguously accepts the legitimacy of beginning without presuppositions and its attendant procedure of grounding. The project philosophy sets up for itself through its pre-philosophical presupposition is to begin without presuppositions. Therefore Deleuze’s argument, not surprisingly, is that it is because of this presupposition, which is “the” presupposition of all philosophy insofar as philosophy falls prey to the system of representation, that philosophy cannot truly “begin,” and a philosophy which can truly begin –which will come into being and be “engendered” in thought –cannot possess or sustain that image of thought characterized by that presupposition.

The presupposition affirms that thought has a natural affinity with the true, and error is extrinsic to it, which, together with a series of other postulates, culminate in the grand postulate of the common sense. Just as beginning with another presupposition is not an alternative, for a philosophy that can truly begin (that is to say, mark a difference) it is imperative to confront the pre-philosophical presupposition, “the image of thought,” is imperative.⁷¹ It is worth quoting the exquisite dialectic such an operation puts into play:

As a result, the conditions of a philosophy which would be without any kind of presuppositions appear all the more clearly: instead of being supported by the moral Image of thought, it would take as its point of departure a radical critique of this Image and the ‘postulates’ it implies. It would find its difference or its true beginning, not in an agreement with the *pre-philosophical* Image but in a rigorous struggle against this image, which it would denounce as *non-philosophical*. As a result, it would discover its authentic repetition in a thought

⁷¹ It is true that “The Plane of Immanence” in *What is Philosophy?*, which is in many ways a summary of the main ideas found in “The Image of Thought,” gives a creative role to the pre-philosophical and suggests that the multiplicity of the planes of immanence in the history of philosophy is part of its creativity. I will come back to this.

without Image, even at the cost of the greatest destructions and the greatest demoralizations, and a philosophical obstinacy with no ally but paradox, one which would have to renounce both the form of representation and the element of common sense. As though thought could begin to think and begin again, only when liberated from the Image and its postulates. (132)⁷²

Its difference from the “pre-philosophical” gives thought the capacity to denounce the latter as “non-philosophical,” which in turn allows it to declare itself as properly and uniquely “philosophical.” Yet, will not this (new) thought be inescapably characterized by its own presuppositions? This claim comes right out of the center of the thought that presupposes a common sense and announces that thought cannot be characterized otherwise. To that degree, it lays bare the inner mechanism of its presupposition. The goal, as I have said, is to secure a presuppositionless beginning for philosophy; it is not surprising then that an investigation for the presuppositions of philosophy, perceived as a threat, will be countered by charges of harboring presuppositions oneself. This, pressing the rule of the pre-philosophical presupposition, conceals the essential: thought acquires a determination in this way that elevates representation to the status of its adequate principle.

However, Deleuze’s project is to account for the conditions of a “genesis” within thought. And the movement he describes not only cannot aspire to reach a representation that would effectively provide the only way in which thought must be pictured (say, its nature), but by definition “denounces” the consistency of such a philosophical construal that claims to fully illuminate, in its every fold and corner, from within and through reason, the complex architecture of thought since this is something

⁷² Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*.

which rules out at the outset the possibility of a notion like “genesis” that could be said of thought. What he denounces in this way is the supposed good nature –the affinity with truth, the natural capacity for thinking– that thought is said to possess. The stakes in the theory of the categories and faculties in philosophy turn out to be much higher than one imagines. It was both Descartes and Kant, for example, who set off with the project of a full identification of the categories of thought, installing a common sense on which every singular act must converge. In fact, this explains why the issue of a presupposition, a pre-judgment, which attributes itself to the act of thinking can be broached at all. What prejudices is the proposition that any thought will have had a presupposition, and this is taken to mean that even the contestation of common sense must be grounded within common sense itself.

However, why not suggest, conversely, that thought which must enable a beginning without presuppositions cannot lend itself to common sense, and the genesis within thought cannot have it as a presupposition? If such a malevolent and amoral nature, without image and common sense, were “presupposed,” thought that presupposed it would undergo violence and encounter a sliding of the ground. It would not find the harmony of its faculties with recognition as their rule; on the contrary, the shock it receives from the landslide, convincing it that it has never thought before, would force it to think for the first time. Deleuze evokes only three things in the above passage: a “repetition” within thought which initiates thinking and, therefore, marks a “difference” insofar as one can thereby talk about a “beginning.” This does not prescribe an image outside of which thought cannot be located; it affirms that thought

can only begin outside such an image. It affirms the existence of an outside such as a thought without image. A thought without an image does not, cannot, function as another presupposition; it makes possible, for the first time, creations within thought that would be without any presuppositions. Philosophy now does not have any guarantees other than its contingent encounters. Moreover, this is where it finds its necessity.⁷³

These remarks can help us explain the central place the question of the faculties occupies in Deleuze's chapter. How are they to be characterized, if their harmonious convergence on an object can be no more warranted than thought endowed with an innate capacity for thinking? In fact, we have seen, it is the latter that must enable the scenario of the harmonious exercise of the faculties, the central role of the common sense. Thus, we observe an interrelation between a series of concepts at whose description the chapter is particularly adept: the model of "recognition," the "object" to be recognized, the cogito expressing the "unity" of the faculties in the subject, and the subject whose "identity" will have been reflected in the object of recognition.⁷⁴ These problems develop together. Perhaps Deleuze's great insight is that they do not have any sense as isolated problems but find their legitimacy in an assemblage that holds them together.

⁷³ "Thought is primarily trespass and violence, the enemy, and nothing presupposes philosophy: everything begins with misosophy. Do not count upon thought to ensure the relative necessity of what it thinks. Rather, count upon the contingency of an encounter with that which forces thought to raise up and educate the absolute necessity of an act of thought or a passion to think. The conditions of a true critique and a true creation are the same: the destruction of an image of thought which presupposes itself and the genesis of the act of thinking in thought itself" (Ibid., 139).

⁷⁴ Ibid., 133-34.

In a fascinating study, Levent Kavas shows the two differing routes in Western philosophy along which the concept of selfhood is elaborated. The problem broached by the cogito, informing the Cartesian tradition, can be described as the following: The retreat from the ordinary affairs of the world to the self, let alone forging an identity, entirely disestablishes the self. This is the moment of doubt. However, the world is reestablished with the return of the ordinary, and this without the consciousness of the split being erased. This is the passage from doubt to certainty, from suspension to assertion, which, whenever it can be said to be the case, will be called the *cogito*. What is problematic is, therefore, “the identity of the (thinking) substance,” and, to that degree, it is what formulates the problem of the self.

For Locke, however, the question of the self does not take us to the problem of the identity of a substance. It consists instead in the problem of the identity of a *person* that must be accounted for in terms of “consciousness” or memory when it is a question of the continuity of personal identity through time. As Kavas notes, since Locke replaces the concept of “self” with the concept of “person,” the meaning of the problem changes. This tradition can take personal identity for granted precisely because the identity of a substance does not pose a problem; therefore, there is no room for questioning the belief in a substantial self, as the Cartesian tradition does. This is not because the person is devoid of substance but because personal identity refers to consciousness /memory.

Kavas also shows how these two articulations of the concept of self get co-articulated in Kant. Now “self” and “person” demarcate two different problematics of

the subject. The ebb and flow of the ordinary, the suspension of the world and the disestablishment of the self it brings about, the consciousness awaiting passage to certainty, all these themes accentuated by the cogito problematize a “demarcation of realms,” whence comes the theme of the duality of a thinking and corporeal substance. The concept of personal identity, however, because it does not inquire into a distinction of substance, construes a notion of substance which it problematizes as a “bearer” or as that which “lies under.” The subject (“personal identity”) then tends to emerge in the context of the problem of the possession of properties, of a substance beyond the given. The pair substance-property, animated and interrogated through empiricist tendencies in this manner, puts into crisis the identification of the agent with its actions.

Returning to Kant’s co-articulation, we can make the following observations. Kant takes the Cartesian “hemorrhage of being” seriously, seeing in it an “embarrassment” for all philosophy. But he cannot resign himself to the substantial identity of the self. Phenomenalizing the world, he finds a new determination for it: the object of inner intuition, the self is determined as temporally passive; otherwise, as a paralogism of reason, it is a transcendent Idea. This is the famous transcendental location of the Cartesian cogito.⁷⁵ However, although “my” self can only be transcendent from the point of view of the theoretical interest, the practical interest sanctions its immanence. This is where the empiricist commitment to the “person”

⁷⁵ Cf. Deleuze and Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, “Beginning with Descartes, and then with Kant and Husserl, the cogito makes it possible to treat the plane of immanence as a field of consciousness. Immanence is supposed to be immanent to a pure consciousness, to a thinking subject. Kant will call this subject transcendental rather than transcendent, precisely because it is the subject of the field of immanence from which nothing, the external as well as the internal, escapes” (46).

seeps in and, in the “Preface” to the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant settles on an intelligible, noumenal self, which can be identified as the agent of its *own* actions.⁷⁶

Levent Kavaz’ study goes on to show that such a locating in terms of the “speculative/practical,” which cuts deeper than the theoretical transcendental location and brings together the concepts of will, its causality, and the person as their agent, finds its inevitable “dislocation” in the hands of Nietzsche –inevitably, since the attempt to “locate” that which is supposed to provide the sole beginning of philosophy is the harbinger of its own “dislocation.” Thus, Nietzsche, relying on the same criteria of “phenomenality,” this time of the “inner world” however, accomplishes the task of disarticulation by identifying the “moral presupposition” of this thought. Heidegger’s criticism of Nietzsche is, according to Kavaz, fundamentally misguided, since it is blind to the nature of the Nietzschean disarticulation precisely because of its own commitment to the *cogito*.⁷⁷

This account involves an important conclusion for my argument. I have been asking whether the *topos* of the philosophy of the subject is not exhausted when it is engaged within the general problem of the determination of thought as such, and here we are confronted with the convergence of the two routes of the modern conception of the self in Kant’s transcendental location and its eventual dislocation in the hands of Nietzsche. Deleuze above presumably had a similar topology in mind in his otherwise

⁷⁶ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 2002), 3-22.

⁷⁷ Levent Kavaz, “An Inquiry into the Modern Conception of Self Articulated and Disarticulated,” diss., Middle East Technical University, 1995.

peculiar response to the questionnaire on the subject (or rather on “who comes after the subject?”): if the two functions along which the philosophy of the subject has been elaborated are corroded, the concept is equally corroded. And the two functions emerge precisely in expounding the dimension of the universal and accounting for individuation through personal identity.

Descartes’ fading into the background in this scenario is equally suggestive. Kenneth Surin has recently directed attention to Étienne Balibar’s work on the origins and vicissitudes of the concept of the modern subject. Along similar lines, Balibar, as it were indicating the different “image of thought” in which Descartes might better be situated, both singles out Kant as the place where the problems of the modern subject are imbricated, and exhibits the specificity of the Lockean tradition of the self.⁷⁸ But what is more important for us in Surin’s argument is the way in which the pursuit of the (Kantian) question of the subject, passing through the *Critique of Judgment*, leads him to the problem of feeling, which is theorized according to a univocal ontology that Kant’s theory of faculties cannot contain or sustain. This is also the direction I was seeking.

⁷⁸ Kenneth Surin, “Rewriting the Ontological Script of Liberation: On the Question of Finding a New Kind Of Political Subject,” in *Theology and the Political: The New Debate*, ed. Creston Davis, John Milbank, Slavoj Žižek (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005). On the Kantian practical interest, he writes: “Kant chose to foist on Descartes something that was really his own ‘discovery,’ and with Heidegger as his more than willing accomplice in this dubious undertaking . . . Kant, however, was about more than just the ‘discovery’ of the transcendental subject. The Kantian subject had also to prescribe duties for itself in the name of the categorical imperative, and in so doing carve out a realm of freedom in nature that would enable this subject to free itself from a ‘self-inflicted tutelage’ that arises when we can’t make judgments without the supervision of an other, and this of course includes the tutelage of the King” (242). The account that I have been following suggests that the (Lockean) concept of person, presumably through a certain reading of Hume, is recruited to account for the noumenal nature required to “carve out a realm of freedom.” See also Étienne Balibar, “Citizen Subject,” in *Who Comes After the Subject?*, eds. Eduardo Cadava, Peter Connor, and Jean-Luc Nancy (New York/London: Routledge, 1991).

The philosophy of the subject derives from a plot provided for thought. “For Kant as for Descartes, it is the identity of the Self in the ‘I think’ which grounds the harmony of all the faculties and their agreement on the form of a supposed Same object,” Deleuze writes. If he then goes on to raise the question of the faculties under conditions where they lose their harmony and agreement, it is because the perspective of genesis deprives thought of the plot of the image of thought. Deleuze’s main charge against the Kantian transcendental, in “The Image of Thought,” has been that it is “traced” from the empirical. It is traced from the empirical because the exercise of a faculty is not sought in what exclusively concerns that faculty (for sensibility, say, that which can only be sensed; not a “sensible being” but “the being of the sensible”) but rather in a general object = x for whose recognition all the faculties collaborate under the aegis of a given common sense. This is the source of the multiplication of the common senses in Kant as logical, practical and aesthetic. Recognition here is the tool of the image of thought and carves out a transcendental model (“the agreement on the form of a supposed Same object”) that merely duplicates the empirical.

Thus when the faculties are freed from common sense through their genesis within thought, the nature of the transcendental field becomes once again a problem. Here is Deleuze’s characterization: “The transcendental form of a faculty is indistinguishable from its disjointed, superior or transcendent exercise. Transcendent in no way means that the faculty addresses itself to objects outside the world, but on the contrary, that it grasps that in the world which concerns it exclusively and brings it into

the world.”⁷⁹ Deleuze continues by suggesting that the transcendent exercise must not be traced from the empirical since what it grasps is that which the empirical exercise cannot. The transcendent exercise refers to that apprehension which is “exclusive” to the faculty in question; this is the only sense in which it is said that what it grasps is the ungraspable for the empirical exercise. This is finally why the transcendental is answerable to “a superior empiricism,” the “exclusive concern” of a faculty is a good image here, which alone is capable of mapping its domains. As we saw above, something that “can only be sensed” addresses itself to sensibility and awakens it through the violence that carries it to its transcendent exercise, being simultaneously the imperceptible (*insensible*) from the empirical perspective. Not a sensible being but a being of the sensible, not a quality but a sign. And the same with other faculties: that which can only be remembered which is simultaneously the immemorable within the memory, etc.

Echoing the opening remarks, we can say that the transcendental field thus defined, insofar as it eludes the transcendence of the subject and object, coincides with a pure plane of immanence, “were it not for consciousness.” The *raison d’être* for such a reservation is now clear to us, since it is “the cogito [that] makes it possible to treat the plane of immanence as a field of consciousness.”⁸⁰ Yet we have seen that cogito itself is coterminous with the pre-philosophical presupposition that constitutes the image of thought.

⁷⁹ Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 143.

⁸⁰ Deleuze and Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, 46.

Arriving at such a determination of the transcendental field is crucial for my argument, since the element of this field are affects, degrees of power, or intensities.⁸¹ “Transcendental empiricism” is answerable to the immanent forces of existence and allows us to say, along the lines of Deleuze’s prized Spinozian dictum, that “we don’t know what a body can do.”

* * *

Beyond the inadequacies of the theory of conditioning, the philosophical problematic of the *Critique of Judgment* is a theory of genesis. This is not surprising because Kant here thematizes feeling. Yet in his account it is accommodated to judgment rather than being theorized as force. Not capable of being the true element of a transcendental field without a subject (the plane of immanence itself) in this form, the Kantian feeling designates a somewhat transcendental dimension immanent to the subject. The themes of the discovery of a free play of faculties as the “ground” of all the other common senses and even the violence encountered with the sublime, whose discordant accord provides a genetic model for the aesthetic common sense, attest to this view. Guided by such a conception of feeling, it then becomes tempting to argue that “the aesthetic overall, and literature and poetry more particularly, reconstitute the at once emotive and evaluative foundation of the Kantian subject inasmuch as they are *not* geared toward discrete, analytical object-knowledge but instead draw attention to a

⁸¹ “Not qualitative opposition within the sensible, but an element which is in itself difference, and creates at once both the quality in the sensible and the transcendent exercise within sensibility. This element is intensity, understood as pure difference in itself, as that which is at once both imperceptible for empirical sensibility which grasps intensity only already covered or mediated by the quality to which it gives rise, and at the same time that which can be perceived only from the point of view of a transcendental sensibility which apprehends it immediately in the encounter” (Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 144).

holistic and evaluative a priori ‘mood’ on which discrete intellectual acts and articulations inadvertently rest. The ‘voice’ (*Stimme*) of such an ontological mood (*Stimmung*) takes the temperature of conscious historical existence.”⁸² This is in essence a phenomenological position. One could equally cite Merleau-Ponty, who provides a concise account of the program of Kant’s third *Critique*, in which the Kantian subject acquires a communicable nature:

Kant himself shows in the *Critique of Judgment* that there exists a unity of the imagination and the understanding and a unity of subjects *before the objects*, and that, in experiencing the beautiful, for example, I am aware of a harmony between sensation and concept, between myself and others, which is itself without any concept. Here the subject is no longer the universal thinker of a system of objects rigorously interrelated, the positing power who subjects the manifold to the law of the understanding, in so far as he is to be able to put together a world –he discovers and enjoys his own nature as spontaneously in harmony with the law of the understanding. But if the subject has a nature, then the hidden art of the imagination must condition the categorical activity. It is no longer merely the aesthetic judgment, but knowledge too which rests upon this art, an art which forms the basis of the unity of consciousness and of consciousness. (xix)⁸³

These passages usefully accentuate the problem that Kantian feeling addresses. They show that the communicative function of feeling is in fact the counterpart of the function of reflection through which the transcendental subject is located, however “inadvertent” this communication might be. There is no escape from a “voice.” One can see how such a model can inspire a certain Freudo-Marxism as well as ground a theory of ideology: a tacit “evaluative mood” from which representations cannot separate

⁸² Thomas Pfau, *Romantic Moods: Paranoia, Trauma, and Melancholy, 1790-1840* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 12-13.

⁸³ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (London and New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962).

themselves, but also (in Kant's account) by which they are even invigorated. This script may all be very pertinent even today; it even seems to inspire the better critical writing. Would it not amount to defining another common sense, however, this time through feeling rather than recognition?

Be that as it may, I am seeking to construct a problematic that is philosophically different, and the trajectory I have so far followed already could have intimated the way in which the present issue will be specified from that perspective. We have just seen the coordinates within which the philosophy of the subject can possibly emerge, and we also have witnessed the exteriority in which they disappear. What if we give primacy to such an exteriority and calibrate our concepts to the difference of such an undertaking? Beyond the pair "reflection/communication," this would lead us to elaborate the problem in terms of a "constructivism" with which the account of genesis provides us, and whose counterpart would be a specific "expressionism." Moreover, why celebrate Kant for finally confronting the unconscious that complements his subject of reflection? One can also read in the *Critique of Judgment* the stubborn will to persevere in the script of the transcendental subject and his critical project in general. Indeed, this work has never been cleared from such an ambiguity. Yet the presence of the theme of judgment can certainly provide enough substance for the latter alternative. And beyond even these, from a different perspective on feeling now, there is the question of the legitimacy of extending the concept of the subject to the domain of affectivity, about which one is nevertheless tellingly told by Kant that it should be qualified as both intellectual and "disinterested."

How different this landscape looks, however, once we see it with Spinozian eyes. Deleuze and Guattari's description of a "nomadic subject" in *Anti-Oedipus* provides a good opportunity for such an observation. It is not difficult to recognize the elementary principles of the Spinozian theory of affect or feeling that subtends this concept.

Deleuze and Guattari describe the consumption of a series of intensive states, through which "the subject is born of each state in the series [and] reborn of the following state that determines him at a given moment." They add that, in this process, "in relation to the subject that lives it, the lived state comes first." How should we take this claim, that "the lived state comes first in relation to the subject," if not to mean that all life of the subject is a posthumous life; that life comes to pass between material sensations and the events of thought to which they give rise (the subject being now dead then alive from one perspective to another which it comes to occupy throughout a process of consumption); that it is the perspectives which constitute the centers of life, and the subject is "on the periphery, forever decentered"?⁸⁴

We could try to approach this paradox in terms of another one that must have haunted every reader of Spinoza on the finite modes. Now, for Spinoza feeling is force. It is an event of thought which involves the idea of an increase or decrease of power. And because the order of the body and thought is one and the same, the feeling affirmed of an individual signifies the simultaneous affirmation of the bodily diagram of the same individual. It is desire, determined at any moment by *conatus*, that constitutes the

⁸⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 20.

actual essence of an individual, which means that the theory of feeling in Spinoza is linked to the problem of essence. One could even claim that the entire originality of the Spinozian theory of feeling lies in the fact that it offers a theory of the “variation” or “modification” of essences in their “continuity.” The essence of a finite mode is defined as a degree of power or intensity. Feelings, any of which, Spinoza tells us, can be derived from pleasure, pain and desire, and which designate an increase or decrease in the power of acting, together with the perseverance in the continuation of this same power, are the variations of power. Essence is always a determined singularity; therefore, feelings as continuous variations of the power of acting that correspond to the essence are themselves singularities. In Spinozian existentialism, existence does not precede essence. Essence is not like that in Spinoza. It does not stand in a relation of preceding or succeeding; it is, qua degree of power, eternal. Such a view is confirmed by the indispensable requirement of Spinoza’s metaphysics, which states the impossibility of any power in Nature that is or can be withheld. All power is actual; that is why the essence of God or Nature involves necessary existence.

This defines a paradox from the perspective of finite modes. The paradox, however, is not at all that what is necessary from the perspective of nature or substance will be fortuitous from the perspective of the mode. Spinoza has a perfect explanation for this fact, in which he sees more of an inevitability than anything else. The paradox is that that which necessarily constitutes the “being” of the mode simultaneously posits the fortuitousness of its “identity.” To put it more precisely, the destiny or the process of

the subject of feeling is necessary, but its identity is fortuitous. The nomadic subject has found itself in a similar situation.

If one likes, then, the paradox is also related to the metaphysics of the part and the whole. Let us remember, however, the originality of Spinoza on this point, too. It is he who teaches us how an individual can be conceived to be more complex than the whole of which it is a part. The individual can be more complex because from the perspective of existence laid out on a single analytic plane, it is inevitable that the individual has among its ideas the idea of something that is much more complex than the whole composed by the individuals with whom it happens to form a whole. In this sense, the idea from which the feeling derives is always a multiplicity.

The way *Anti-Oedipus* articulates the question of the part and the whole is noteworthy in this respect. Deleuze and Guattari write, “the body without organs is produced as a whole . . . alongside the parts that it neither unifies nor totalizes . . . The whole not only coexists with all the parts; it is contiguous to them, itself a product apart from them, and applies itself to them.”⁸⁵ A univocal ontology cannot conceive this relation otherwise. The only way a unique substance can constitute a “beyond,” while it escapes the hierarchy of analogy, is by coming at the end of a process through the striving of the individuals that constitute it. As Kenneth Surin succinctly writes, “the Scotist axioms that reality is to be approached by the will guided by love, and that reality is constituted by worlds of singularities, events, and virtualities, and not of

⁸⁵ Ibid., 43; translation modified. See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Capitalisme et Schizophrénie: L’Anti Oedipe* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1972/1973), 52.

subjects and objects, allows all these items to be ‘expressively’ distributed: all kinds of possible worlds, extending to a potential infinity, can express the same singularity, event, or virtuality, so there is from the beginning a complete preemption of any bureaucratic administration of these ‘expressive’ distributions and the worlds in which they are located.”⁸⁶

What we have been saying about the individuating and real movement of affect or feeling and the conception of a whole that does not stand in a relation of unity or totality with its parts goes far toward explaining the paradox of the finite mode. All power being actual, how is it that the mode is all powerful in its being but powerless in its identity? Well, this is actually the reason why the being of the mode can only be constituted by “becoming,” why feeling must necessarily be understood in terms of becoming, and why “there is no fixed subject unless there is repression.”⁸⁷ Everything points to the truth that we find our being in escape and becoming. So, methodologically, we must attribute a constitutively and positively defined priority to an exteriority in relation to the individual. As Deleuze and Guattari maintain, a structure is defined through its lines of flight, whether the structure in question is social, artistic, psychic or of any other kind.

⁸⁶ Surin, “Rewriting the Ontological Script of Liberation,” 262.

⁸⁷ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 26.

1.6 Kant And Spinoza

Likewise in philosophy, Kant's *Critique of Judgment* is an unrestrained work of old age, which his successors have still not caught up with: all the mind's faculties overcome their limits, the very limits that Kant had so carefully laid down in the works of his prime.⁸⁸

The Kantian taste for the demarcation of domains was finally freed, allowed to play its own game, in the *Critique of Judgment*; we learn here what we had known from the start, that the only object of Kant's critique is justification, it begins by believing in what it criticizes.⁸⁹

Kant did not invent a true critique of judgment; on the contrary, what the book of this title established was a fantastic subjective tribunal. Breaking with the Judeo-Christian tradition, it was Spinoza who carried out the critique . . .⁹⁰

I have been proceeding in terms of a primary, albeit implicit, opposition between judgment and force. This opposition acquires its sense in the context of a confrontation between Kant and Spinoza, not least because in Kant judgment designates thinking as such. This correlation is crucial for the main tenet of the *Critique of Pure Reason*: we can only talk about cognition in terms of "objects" by which we are referred to nature as the totality of appearance, which itself constitutes the universal (i.e., lawful) domain of all possible experience. Within this framework, to think is to judge or to subsume intuitions under pure concepts (the "functions of judging"), and this operation reveals a

⁸⁸ Deleuze and Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, 2.

⁸⁹ Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson (London: The Athlone Press, 1983), 90.

⁹⁰ Gilles Deleuze, "To Have Done with Judgment," *Essays: Critical and Clinical*, 126.

transcendental unity. For example, by even an empirical judgment such as “Bodies are heavy,” Kant argues that

I do not mean that these presentations belong *necessarily to one another* in the empirical intuition. Rather, I mean that they belong to one another *by virtue of the necessary unity* of apperception in the synthesis of intuitions; i.e., they belong to one another according to principles of the objective determination of all presentations insofar as these presentations can become cognition –all of these principles being derived from the principle of the transcendental unity of apperception. Only through this [reference to original apperception and its necessary unity] does this relation [among presentations] become a *judgment*, i.e., a relation that is *valid objectively* and can be distinguished adequately from a relation of the same presentations that would have only subjective validity – e.g., a relation according to laws of association . . . Therefore everything manifold, insofar as it is given in one empirical intuition, is *determined* in regard to one of the logical functions of judging, inasmuch as through this function it is brought to one consciousness as such. The *categories*, however, are indeed nothing but precisely these functions of judging insofar as the manifold of a given intuition is determined in regard to them. (184-85)⁹¹

What he designates in this passage as a relation having “only subjective validity,” and refers back merely to “laws of association,” Kant will fundamentally recast in the *Critique of Judgment* as a type of judgment that is as universal as the one which is “objectively valid” but is “subjectively” so (what we would have called a “subjective objectivity” in the vocabulary of the first Critique). The second half of the passage, on the other hand, frames what Kant will address within the rubric of the well-known question of *Darstellung*, the schematic *and* symbolic exhibition of pure concepts. Kant maintained an insurmountable gap between intuition and knowledge through concepts, although confronting the problem of the genesis of the harmony of

⁹¹ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Werner S. Pulhar (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1996).

the faculties, he attributed a productive power to imagination. This productivity lies precisely in “the formal whole, the figure of a whole that represents the minimal condition of the mind’s life,” which the imagination achieves in its unrestricted exercise through aesthetic judgment.⁹² Judgment cuts a deeper ground in Kant’s work than it may be imagined. As Gasché’s remark makes clear, what is at stake is nothing less than the “life” of the mind, as though the mind did not have a life before, which is “felt” thanks to the “formal” apprehension of existents through aesthetic judgment, as/in a totality that is precognitive. It is as if things were duplicated “within” us prior to their cognition, as if we already have a familiarity with them. In fact, the feeling of pleasure encountered in the aesthetic judgment coincides with such interiority. It *is* that communication of the powers of the mind, its life. This, in turn, is related to the idea of the “purposiveness” of nature: the feeling that we were, so to speak, awaited where we find ourselves, which entitles us to expect an ordering our understanding cannot find.

Therefore, everything now hinges on imagination in Kant’s philosophy. Gasché shows that the problem of exhibition concerns both the schematic and symbolic activity of imagination: “Both types of presentation result in figural, formal syntheses that are precognitive in both a theoretical and a practical sense, and that actualize an operation of the power of judgment without which no theoretical or practical cognition would be possible.”⁹³ Hence, the problem is not restricted to the third *Critique*, but extends to the first as well. This description, which involves in abbreviated form Gasché’s main thesis

⁹² Rodolphe Gasché, “Hypotyposis,” in *The Idea of Form: Rethinking Kant’s Aesthetics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 217.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 215.

in his essay, shows why judgment-feeling constitutes the ground of the whole edifice in Kant. It is not for nothing that Kant mobilizes a notion that originally belonged to rhetoric, namely “hypotyposis,” to designate the sensible exhibition of pure concepts accomplished by the imagination, since if the imagination appears in this way to be draped in rhetorical qualities, as its “poetic” depiction would have it, it is equally true that the rhetorical notion is appropriated to serve exclusively for “the philosophical understanding of the life of the mind.”⁹⁴ This makes all thought “figural”; thought now rests on “figural, formal syntheses that are precognitive.”

With Kant, therefore, we witness a series of transitions: judgment / imagination / feeling-interiority / figural thought. One might be tempted to see an ambiguity, a vacillation between condemnation and celebration, in the opening remarks by Deleuze on the *Critique of Judgment* coming from his different works. In fact, they are very precise. Transgressions and problems of containment are common observations about Kant’s late work. But strangely the same eyes did not more often catch the circulation of the same set of problems in Kant’s work, and did not inquire into its significance. Richard Mason, for instance, provides a brilliant demonstration of the persistence of a problem of “intelligibility” of nature in Kant.⁹⁵ Kant never ceased to grapple with the question of how the understanding we have of nature is “possible,” given that we certainly do understand it, and the question thus not being whether we understand it or

⁹⁴ Ibid., 218.

⁹⁵ In what follows, I draw on Richard Mason, *Understanding Understanding* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), and “Intelligibility: The Basic Premise?,” in *Iyyun: The Jerusalem Philosophical Quarterly* 50 (July 2001), 229-244.

not. Looking at the problems in the third *Critique* that I have just outlined from this vantage point, we can ask what progress really made through them. Kant set out taking the Cartesian possibility of “absolute falsity” seriously. A radically different point of view than ours is conceivable; hence it is a mystery that we understand anything at all. He went on to turn nature into the totality of appearance, the domain of possible experience where universality reigns, and define freedom in opposition to nature. In this way, it was explained both that we are prone to “inner illusions” (transgression of boundaries) and that the mind could not function in any other way than it does. The latter posit, in particular, renders the concept of “condition” a truly Kantian creation; it carries Kant’s signature, to speak like Deleuze. There are conditions of experience and thinking says Kant. The third *Critique*, lest these constraints be forgone, seeks a final refuge in the imagination. It ends up condoning the irreducible figurality of thought and turning feeling into a strange state of suspension or fascination, which “makes meaningful without making intelligible.”⁹⁶ So much so that in this way pleasure appears as what it really is: a striving to linger a little longer, which is why it “interrupt[s] the immanent process of desire.”⁹⁷

If we turn to Spinoza, he reserved no comparable power for imagination but maintained something much more striking concerning affects/images, namely, that they derive from the substance with the same “necessity and virtue” as any other thing in

⁹⁶ Gasché, “Hypotyposis,” 214.

⁹⁷ Gilles Deleuze, “Desire and Pleasure,” in *Two Regimes of Madness: Texts and Interviews 1975-1995*, trans. Ames Hodges and Mike Taormina (New York: Semiotext(e), 2006), 131.

nature.⁹⁸ This makes up his response to the Cartesian account of two substances. It also involves a commentary on the issue of “intelligibility.” As Mason puts it, “surprise that we understand anything at all has its roots in a feeling that we could have it all wrong.”⁹⁹ So, for Spinoza, before we even have the question of the intelligibility of nature, there would be such questions as “who” has or can have such a “feeling,” “how” and within “which” situation. The unintelligibility that derives from a certain feeling’s “understanding” of nature is not necessarily a significant problem. Instead one could ask, how must nature be, so that it can fit into the visions prompted by such feelings and images although its explanation cannot be found in them? What must be the nature of a thought that can have a Descartes or a Kant as its “modifications” but cannot coincide with the nature they ascribe to it, which follows by definition if they constitute its modifications? It is, therefore, worth asking which one is a better alternative. To posit the necessary derivation and substantial nature of affects, thus turning them into veritable events of thought (and body), or to willy-nilly invite them into the system of judgment to make of them a pre-cognitive thought? These tell us why, as we have implied above in the discussion of feeling as force, there cannot be an analogous problem of *Darstellung* in Spinoza.

Once again, it was not Spinoza who ascribed any productivity to imagination. We need to assess well the meaning of the alternative posed through Kant and Spinoza. Although imagination has no power of synthesis in Spinoza, we see that a much more

⁹⁸ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 164.

⁹⁹ Mason, *Understanding Understanding*, 64.

stringent quality, a substantial force of necessity, holds sway on it. Similarly, Spinoza feels no need to posit a gap between intuition and concept, and yet makes an even more categorical distinction between imagination and reason. In short, if Spinoza's philosophy cannot have a problem of *Darstellung*, it is because only a single modification traverses being, which can only be necessity.¹⁰⁰ I have been arguing that the dimension of this necessity must be conceived in terms of intensive parts, degrees of power, the continuous variation of conatus, and so on. The reason why the problem of a gap –through which imaginative figuration and, one would think, inevitably an ethos of finitude enters thought– cannot arise on this terrain derives from the fact that the break or “the absence of a link” specific to the level of variation appears under a “positive” sign.¹⁰¹ We have already seen this in the context of the concept of the other: the lack of

¹⁰⁰ As Deleuze writes, “Necessity everywhere appears as the only modality of being” (Gilles Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, trans. Martin Joughin [New York: Zone Books, 1992], 212).

¹⁰¹ *Anti-Oedipus* attributes a great importance to this point. As I have already cited them, Deleuze and Guattari think that “a non-figurative and non-symbolic unconsciousness,” whose figural dimension would be “purely abstract” as in “abstract painting,” is what distinguishes schizoanalysis from psychoanalysis.

On the absence of a link that is positive and is said to constitute the “underside” (*l'envers*) of the structure: “This reverse side is the “real inorganization” [*l'inorganisation réelle*] of the molecular elements: partial objects that enter into indirect syntheses or interactions, since they are not partial (*partiels*) in the sense of extensive parts, but rather partial (*partiaux*) like the intensities under which a unit of matter always fills space in varying degrees . . . depending on one another only by the order of the random drawings, and holding together only by the absence of a link (nonlocalizable connections)” (Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 309; and *L'Anti-Oedipe*, 368).

A footnote on the same page praises Serge Leclair writing on this “disorganization proper to the real” and, not surprisingly, refers back to Leibniz and Spinoza for the criterion of a distinction that will be attributed to the real in such a case: “In desire he sees a multiplicity of prepersonal singularities, or indifferents [*quelconques*] elements that are defined by the absence of a link. But this absence of a link – and of meaning –is positive . . . Leclair uses the exact criterion of real distinction in Spinoza and Leibniz: the ultimate elements (the infinite attributes) are attributable to God, because they do not depend on one another and do not tolerate [*ne supportent*] any relation of opposition or contradiction among themselves. The absence of all direct links guarantees their common participation in the divine substance. Likewise for the partial objects and the body without organs: the body without organs is substance itself, and the partial objects, the ultimate attributes or elements of substance” (Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 309; and *L'Anti-Oedipe*, 369).

“resemblance” between the terrified face as the expression and the terrifying world as the state expressed in it is the reason why difference is univocal or being is expressed differentially. It is worth emphasizing that the alternative is, therefore, not simply to move to the opposite and claim that there is no gap but a continuity between intuition and concept, but to establish the sense in which a differentially constituted continuity grasps gaps or breaks positively rather than as the absence of presence (i.e., an absence figuring presence). Thus, the problem changes when it is posed in terms of power/desire and when power/desire also serves as the level on which the problem of production is posed. Evidently, the notions of the imaginary, illusion, or limitation cannot be sustained here.

This idea of the necessary derivation of affects could explain what appealed to Althusser, thinking about ideology, in Spinoza. It allows for the systematization of illusion according to a systematic articulation of positions: the system of the “imaginary relationship to real conditions,” as clearly provided by the famous Althusserian formula. Althusser was emphasizing the so-called first kind of knowledge (imagination), in Spinoza, in its difference from especially the second.¹⁰² A more ontological interpretation might posit, however, the “coexistence” of the so-called three types of knowledge. The idea of coexistence underlines the necessarily durational nature of affects, the continuous variation of the capacity of an individual as the formula of its essence, and the part-whole relation. In this way, instead of the lexicon of breaks and transitions, we have a lexicon of the “simultaneity” of perspectives coalesced within an

¹⁰² See Louis Althusser, *Essays in Self-Criticism*, trans. Grahame Lock (London: New Left Books, 1976).

ontological event. This is a very difficult problem. We are forced to think an ontological event –since feeling is such an event – that can appear in different temporal syntheses because of its simultaneity with other events.

I think that Deleuze and Guattari's position on the question of ideology is conditioned by the idea of expressivity, and here they differ from Althusser. As I have said, it leads them to pose the problem in terms of power/desire. This is such a crucial point that it even determines their objection to Althusser's reference, in *Reading Capital*, to the concept of *Darstellung* in his attempt to theorize a "structural causality" to arrive at "a mode of presence of the structure in its effects."¹⁰³ Althusser condemns what he calls "expressive causality" (Leibniz, Hegel) as the only seriously developed rival to "structural causality" (Spinoza, Marx). For him, Marx's theoretical revolution would be unthinkable without the latter. And here is Deleuze's vindication of "expressivity." It is a long paragraph, but Deleuze is virtually responding to Althusser: he sets Spinoza's procedure apart from Leibniz's and shows that we are still within the problematic of expression without falling prey to "expressive causality":

Modal essences are, then, parts of an infinite series. But this in the very special sense of intensive or intrinsic parts. One should not give Spinoza's particular essences a Leibnizian interpretation. Particular essences are not microcosms. They are not all contained in each, but all are comprised in the production of each. A modal essence is a *pars intensiva*, and not a *pars totalis*. As such, it has an expressive power, but such expressive power must be understood in a way very different from the way it is understood by Leibniz. For the status of modal essences relates to a strictly Spinozist problem, concerning absolutely infinite substance. This is the problem of passing from infinite to finite. Substance is, so to speak, the absolute ontological identity of all qualities, absolutely infinite

¹⁰³ See Louis Althusser, "Marx's Immense Theoretical Revolution," in Louis Althusser and Étienne Balibar, *Reading Capital*, trans. Ben Brewster (London/New York: Verso, 1997), 182-194. Compare, Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 306.

power, the power of existing in all forms, and of thinking all forms. Attributes are infinite forms or qualities, and as such indivisible. So the finite is neither substantial nor qualitative. But nor is it mere appearance: it is modal, that is, quantitative. Each substantial quality has intensive modal quantity, itself infinite, which actually divides into an infinity of intrinsic modes. These intrinsic modes, contained together as a whole in an attribute, are the intensive parts of the attribute itself. And they are thereby parts of God's power, within the attribute that contains them. It is in this sense, as we have already seen, that modes of a divine attribute necessarily participate in God's power: their essence is itself part of God's power, is an intensive part, or a degree of that power. Here again the reduction of creatures to the status of modes appears as the condition of their essence being a power, that is, of being an irreducible part of God's power. Thus modes are in their essence expressive: they express God's essence, each according to the degree of power that constitutes its essence. The individuation of the finite does not proceed in Spinoza from genus to species or individual, from general to particular; it proceeds from an infinite quality to a corresponding quantity, which divides into irreducible intrinsic or intensive parts. (198-99)¹⁰⁴

This passage clearly shows how the intensive parts are distinguished from substance itself, and, to that degree, why they cannot be “bureaucratically administered” or their reality be preempted. Modes are not appearances. It also shows that the modal essence is quantitative and that this quantity is “determined” as a degree of power (within “an infinite series”). As we said above, it is the originality of the Spinozian theory of feeling that feelings become variations of essence. Finally, it shows that, by virtue of being the quantitative parts of a substantial quality, they are expressive of the power of substance, “each according to the degree of power that constitutes its essence.” In short, their distinction from the substance is the condition of the expressivity of the modes. All these culminate in the amazing conclusion that finite modes are constitutive of an exteriority –an exteriority, since they *are not* substance yet

¹⁰⁴ Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*.

still express it. This means that we can posit a movement –this being an intensive movement –that traverses and goes beyond imagination just as it does any other faculty.

The phrase “the life of the mind” that has emerged in the context of the Kantian problem of exhibition is revealing. In the sensible exhibition of the concepts or “hypotyposis,” in which, as Gasché says, there is a gathering of the manifold into a whole as in a “tableau,” in accordance with the rhetorical senses of hypotyposis as vivid, lifelike, forceful presentation, the mind is animated and is affected by its own animation. No exterior movement traverses this tableau; the only movement is internal to it and designates the “minimal interconnectedness” of the faculties of the mind made possible by this tableau to begin with. Several components of the Kantian philosophy can be found here. Feeling carves out an irreducible interiority within the space that the judgment of taste opens up, and this contributes to the problem of the intelligibility of nature. Similarly, the question of the purposiveness of nature revealed in reflective experience (i.e., under those conditions where we have to move from a singular case to find its law) contributes to the problem of freedom defined against nature as phenomena. We have just seen with Spinoza, on the other hand, that it is the broken line of the movement of life that traverses the faculties of the mind. The mind does not have a life of its own; therefore no *de jure* distinction between the inside and the outside is warranted.

We begin to understand what Deleuze could have meant when he suggested that it was Spinoza, not Kant, who carried out the critique of judgment. This has to do with both the image of thought that derives from the model of judgment and the theory of

feeling it conditions. And both converge on the erasure of the body as a possible site for broaching these problems, it being the domain of the pathological for Kant. Deleuze, therefore, seems to imply that this purported theory of feeling may also just be the absence thereof. Indeed, as it was the case with imagination (“either the gap or the continuity between intuition and concept”) the alternative forced by Kant regarding nature seems to be “either the transcendental possibility or being guilty of ascribing what belongs to phenomena to nature in-itself.” In fact, this was what Spinoza was found guilty for by him. Here too, however, the response to Kant’s challenge “need not be unconditioned, direct experience (of things-in-themselves). It might as well be a changed or developed framework of concepts, giving us a different world. Even if you cannot see without spectacles, that is hardly a constraint if an open-ended number of pairs of spectacles will be available. If concepts of space, time, and causality have changed since 1800 in ways that Kant thought inconceivable, what justification can there be to regard any particular set of concepts as limiting?”¹⁰⁵ The concept of concept must change for this to be possible though; it cannot continue to define the logical functions of judging.¹⁰⁶

Let me return to “genesis,” the problem from which we moved to this section. In his essay “The Idea of Genesis in Kant’s Aesthetics,” Deleuze interrogates the *Critique*

¹⁰⁵ Mason, *Understanding Understanding*, 64.

¹⁰⁶ Indeed the problematization of the supposed primacy of logic is the subject matter of Richard Mason’s *Before Logic* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000). In his “Concrete Logic” (in *Spinoza: Metaphysical Themes*, eds. John Biro and Olli Koistinen [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002]) he shows that the construal of the causal relationship as a “relation of logical consequence” is indefensible in Spinoza: “My argument will be that, if anything, Spinoza made logic more like physics, rather than making physics into logic. However, the real point is that the dichotomy between the metaphysical and the physical –even a dichotomy only to be denied –is inappropriate in thinking about his work” (74).

of Judgment with a question that is rarely, if ever, posed: Why does the first part of the book have the sequence that it has, and in particular why is the analytic of the beautiful interrupted by the analytic of the sublime? What is the significance of its placement between the analytic and the deduction of the sense of the beautiful?¹⁰⁷ Deleuze observes that the analytic of the beautiful illuminates the free accord of the imagination and the understanding, as this is expressed in the universality of an aesthetic pleasure communicable in principle, as the deeper “ground of the soul.” Yet the analytic only presupposes this common sense. Since we are confronted with a free accord between the faculties, and not the subjection of an object to a faculty, the deduction must consist in showing how this new common sense comes into being, that is its “genesis.”

Deleuze suggests that it is the task of the sublime to provide such a “model of genesis” for the deduction of the aesthetic common sense. This explains its place in between the analytic and the deduction. The sublime can do this because it brings reason into the picture. There is no transition between the imagination and reason, the sensible and the ideal. It was at least possible to presuppose a schematic activity as the commerce between the imagination and the understanding, and the reflection of the form in the beautiful was something like a “schematization without the concept.” We saw above how hypotyposis, the exhibition of the Idea in both the schematic and symbolic modes, speaks to this problem. Would not this mean that the accord between the imagination and reason could only be “discordant?” In the case of the sublime, there

¹⁰⁷ See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987), 43-207.

is no object whose form can be reflected in the imagination; it is the moment of the “deformed” or the “formless” in nature. As Deleuze notes, even this turns out to be the result of a “projection”: it is imagination succumbing to its powerlessness faced with the power of reason and the inaccessibility of the idea. However, this also means that the imagination, almost dialectically, “learns” about its supersensible destination, salvaged from the constraint of the understanding. It sees that it was reason forcing it to limits. Therefore the pain of the imagination conditions its pleasure; we witness a “discordant accord.”

This account of an “internal genesis” serves as the “model” for the account of the genesis of the aesthetic common sense, the free play as the ground of the soul. It does this by adding reason –so to speak, after the imagination’s affair with it – into the equation in the case of the accord between the imagination and the understanding. Reason has no interest in the beautiful in nature, but the aptitude nature betrays to produce beautiful objects defines a rational interest, because this concerns the harmony between the harmony of the faculties among themselves and nature. In the sublime, there was no need for a deduction, because the object itself was lacking. We were presented with an internal genesis. But since there is an object in the beautiful, whose *form* we reflect although we are disinterested in its existence, this reference to a purposiveness without any aim serves as an “external principle” of genesis for the aesthetic common sense and its deduction *a priori*.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ Deleuze asks, “How is the genesis of the sense of the beautiful produced? It is because the *idea* of the purposeless accord between nature and our faculties defines *an interest* of reason, a rational interest connected to the beautiful. It is clear that this interest is not an interest for the beautiful as such, and it is

The important thing here is that Kant is led to conceive a moment of genesis “before” the account of hypotyposis, which follows it in the third *Critique*. Deleuze noted in *Difference and Repetition* that the sublime provides the only instance, in Kant, where a faculty is freed from the logic of common sense. This refers to the “transcendent” exercise of the imagination, in the sense we saw Deleuze means this term. Imagination’s being forced to its limit and to think that which can only be imaginable (which at once equals the unimaginable), the reciprocal violence that both the imagination and thought undergo, and the discord that conditions an accord all herald a different model of thought: a thought without an image.¹⁰⁹

In the same article I mentioned above, Kenneth Surin suggests that the sublime, through the “discordant accords” it brings to light –and we can add the perspective opened up by genesis to this – opens a way to Scotus/ Spinoza/ Deleuze, with whom we must acknowledge that “it is not reason which leads us to the real, but rather the will guided by eros, so that reason is produced as an effect that emerges from the will’s striving.”¹¹⁰ “Feeling and the passions have supplanted the imagination at the level of faculties,” as Surin puts it, although Kant failed to draw this conclusion. We could add that Kant failed in this because of his conception of feeling.

completely different from the aesthetic judgment. If not, the whole *Critique of Judgment* would be contradictory. The pleasure of the beautiful is entirely disinterested and, the aesthetic judgment expresses the accord of the imagination and the understanding without the intervention of reason. It is a question of an interest that is connected to the judgment synthetically” (Gilles Deleuze, “The Idea of Genesis in Kant’s Aesthetics” *Angelaki* 5.3 [December 2000], 65).

¹⁰⁹ Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 320-21; note 10.

¹¹⁰ Surin, “Rewriting the Ontological Script of Liberation,” 262.

The Spinozian framework develops outside the problem of judgment. He presents us with the following sequence: force/feeling-sign/immanence and thought without an image. Following the explanation of why it is consistent to talk about “laws” that depend on “human will” while holding that “in an absolute sense, all things are determined by the universal laws of Nature to exist and act in a definite and determinate way,” a striking sentence in *The Theological-Political Treatise*, reads as follows: “We plainly have no knowledge as to the actual co-ordination and interconnection of things – that is, the way in which things are in actual fact ordered and connected– so that for practical purposes it is better, indeed, essential, to consider things as contingent.”¹¹¹ Richard Mason, who also cites this sentence in his essay on intelligibility, prefaces it by saying that Spinoza “did not believe that nature is transparent to reason. Reason was not like that.”¹¹²

Spinoza seems to be saying here that we do not know the process of production of things on which their order and connection depend. Since nature is that infinitely stratified productivity, it can neither be transparent to reason nor prescribe an image for thought. Reason does not stand in such a relation to nature because it is not a subjective power for Spinoza as it is for Kant. Spinoza collapsed reason and cause into a single thing; to understand how nature is (caused) and why it is as it is refer to the same act of thought. Thus, reason corresponds to a certain type of understanding *and* existence, to a certain structuring of ideas or causes. In Kant’s eyes this would be the mistake of

¹¹¹ Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, in *Complete Works*, trans. Samuel Shirley, ed. Michael L. Morgan (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 2002), 426-27.

¹¹² Mason, “Intelligibility,” 243.

attributing to nature what is really a product of thought. But then Kant's necessity was a logical function and his nature was phenomenal, and this nature was transparent because the necessary laws *with* which we understand it was ultimately the laws of *our* understanding. This was preceded by a problem of intelligibility since how these laws are possible was itself a (logical) question. For Spinoza, on the other hand, to be necessary is simply to have a cause. The laws of nature are the interconnection of causes, which we do not even know the forms of in the infinity of other attributes than extension and thought.

Necessity, therefore, pertains to the productive process of nature, and the arrangement that it has is a contingent matter. In any case, Spinoza's above statement can not be taken to mean that what is necessary in-itself is contingent for-us. If that were the case, contingency would be an ontological alternative next to necessity, but Spinoza maintained that necessity is the sole affection or modification of being. The objects of encounter in such a nature are signs, which are determinate events of thought, and not an object of recognition x whose condition of possibility must be determined. Whereas Kant introduced values of the determined and the undeterminable into thought, for Spinoza the line of individuation was a line of determination. Contingency cannot mean the lack of determination, which is not an alternative. We thus have to take what Kant saw as rational and necessary nature to be a contingent arrangement and put our

trust in the necessary process of the productive nature. This also would be one of the senses in which reason is produced contingently as an effect.¹¹³

* * *

It is best to confront the problem that is at the heart of what I have been discussing directly and in its most naked form. In Spinoza, we have the impression that the substance is defined by a great indifference and serenity, and this remains the case even if it is possible to conceive that the striving of the modes participate in or even constitute its structure. The substance appears as a virtual differential structure. However, it is also valid that the “movement” of this virtual structuring or its process – and it is movement that pertains to thought’s transcendental structure, as we have seen – is “determinate”; so that what I have been trying to characterize as the only modification of being, the “necessary,” expels any indifference or possible form from this movement. Thus, while it is true that the virtual does not lack reality, “the event considered as non-actualized (indefinite) is lacking in nothing.”¹¹⁴ writes Deleuze, it does not remain indifferent or withheld in its actualization either. One can sense the importance of this scenario for the spirit of Spinozism. It tells us that the world is both complete and unfinished. There is no power out there which, if it were only released, would make things different. The integration of the individuals is complete at the level of desire; there is not a moment that passes without being desired. God is not a despot.

¹¹³ Mason goes on to refer to Spinoza’s *Letter on the Infinite* on the “predictability” of nature: “he wrote that we cannot deduce from the present existence of individual things ‘that they will or will not exist in the future or that they did or did not exist in the past’” (Ibid., 243-44).

¹¹⁴ Deleuze, “Immanence: A Life,” 31.

Let's call this integration actualization. But why should the non-actualized virtual be complete and real outside it? For this to be the case the traits of the *agents* of actualization must be those of the virtual, so that the action they undertake can truly be said to be "creative" or metamorphosing –which is why we talk about the actualization of the virtual rather than the realization of the possible: no "resemblance" and "identity" here– and the result, the creative idea, displays *once and for all* the "difference" between itself and the virtual *on the same plane*. If the virtual were not complete and lacked reality, actualization would not be genuinely creative or metamorphosing; it would be the realization of a possible which the agent would have "identified" assuming its resemblance. On the other hand, the actualized world is at once unfinished since the virtual event is preserved on the plane of actualization (in an image of thought). 1917, say, has lost nothing of its virtual reality; something of it is held in reserve for different agents to reappropriate it and make their bodies the field of its embodiment.

We have dealt with this problem above: the important point is that thought is without image, and it is the idea's clash with this thought that gives birth to a creative image of thought. Thus the virtual is complete without an image, "distinct and obscure," but at the same time becomes perceptible on the same plane with the actual. This is what Deleuze calls the "plane" of the event: "What we call virtual is not something that lacks reality but something that is engaged in a process of actualization following the plane that gives it its particular reality . . . But however inseparable an object and a subject may be from their actualization, the plane of immanence is itself virtual, so long

as the events that populate it are virtualities.”¹¹⁵ These explain how “The Plane of Immanence,” in *What Is Philosophy?*, can treat the image of thought as historically “creative” when it is associated with the proper names in the history of philosophy, since if the in principle “genetic” nature of thought is affirmed, one must be able to image creative actualizations even though one can discern “the” image of thought, whose function as a moral presupposition we have discussed.

Carsten Henrik Meiner, in a fine essay with extremely productive conclusions, asks what this “plane” or “image,” as that which remains on the side of the virtual in the actualization, can tell us about the question of *style*. The pertinence of the inquiry comes from the fact that poetics has always conceived style in terms of the “individuality” of a text sought in its “deviation” from forms that may be linguistic, figural, or narrative. But as Meiner shows, in this way the concept of individuality is expected to be found in the deviation from the transcendental form itself, which results in nothing else than the subsumption of individuality under a chosen model, so that the individuality of a text can never really be exhibited at all. If we follow Deleuze, however, it appears that style can be called the image or the plane insofar as it registers the *manner* in which the virtual is actualized and itself remains virtual. Or as Meiner puts it,

The image of thought is an image of how thought handles an *idea* that is by definition problematic. It is an image of the *way* in which thought struggles with an idea, in no way resembling this idea, the latter provoking thought to think. It is the style that actualizes the shock between idea and thought by presenting it in a formal textual context in no way rendering the

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 31.

notion of deviation, for example new forms, rare tropes, strange narratives, pertinent for the discussion on style. (167-68)¹¹⁶

Meiner compares many statements by Deleuze on style, in which it assumes functions as different as syntactic, para-syntactic, or existential and always with an accompanying disregard for the notions of rhetoric, metaphor, or genre and so on, which is untypical for a discourse on style. His above conclusion about the status of style in Deleuze, capable of synthesizing Deleuze's diverse points of view, allows him to derive two important conclusions. Firstly, if style is found in the virtual image of thought actualized in linguistic, narrative, or figurative forms, then stylistics must stop seeking it in the latter; on the contrary, it must "dissolve" what pertains to language, narrative or figuration and "rinse" language to reach again the "struggle" between the idea and thought that has passed "into" the words.¹¹⁷ Secondly, the philosophy of difference which subtends these formulations reveals Deleuze's unique conception of difference that goes, not surprisingly, counter to those of a certain textualism: "Contrary to other theories of difference, such as those of de Man and Derrida, the concept of difference in Deleuze also implies *a sort of annulment or naturalization of the differences in an image where all the differences between idea and thought can be seen*

¹¹⁶ Carsten Henrik Meiner, "Deleuze and the Question of Style," *Symploke* 6.1 (1998).

¹¹⁷ Further: "Style is in language but opposed to the conception of language making style a function of syntax, of figurality, of narrativity. On the contrary style is the naturalistic or cleansing aspect of language, dissolving its imaginary typologies, its syntactic invariables and rinsing from it all sorts of linguistic customs and norms covering it. The fact that the image of thought is actualized in a linguistic context, in a socially coded environment covering the specificity of the thought, means that stylistics needs to look, not between the words and certainly not between the lines, but *into the words, into the names to see the perplexed thought liberating itself by becoming an image of its own struggle*" (Ibid., 170-71; my emphasis).

at the same time, the same imaginary heterochrony. Cleaving the structures, the rules and the words the style makes us see the image of thought intertwined with ideas, *an image which does not let itself to be reduced to a general irony of tropes or a general metaphor bearing a provisional loss of meaning within itself.*¹¹⁸

Insofar as the actualization of the virtual is a question of the relation between the transcendental and the empirical, which was also at stake in the problem of *Darstellung*, we can ask what is different in Deleuze and Guattari's treatment of the problem, especially since Deleuze writes that the virtual idea is "dramatized." We can at once delimit the difference from Kant's conception: as opposed to the "figural, formal, precognitive" synthesis of *Darstellung* that exhibits images for cognition, we find the "metamorphosing" temporal synthesis of feeling/force that actualizes the idea. Style is nothing other than this dramatization of the virtual idea through which it is actualized. It preserves and "exhibits" the "way" in which thought struggles with an idea; it does not resemble the idea since it actualizes it in qualities and gives it extension, and is that through which the disturbed thought without image finds its liberation by "becom[ing] an image of its own struggle."¹¹⁹ We must recall here all the components of the genetic account: the Idea becomes problematic and confronts an amoral thought without image, which bans any common sense and allows no harmonious distribution of the problem between the faculties, and the violence of the problematic gives birth to thinking as though for the first time. Therefore, the style according to which the idea is actualized

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 172; my emphasis.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 171.

and the problem is led to its determination in the states of things, is like the movement (itself transcendental) that lies between the transcendental and the empirical. Deleuze's insight is that the elements of dramatization must be transcendental themselves. He writes about the Idea taken outside the coordinates of identity and resemblance that "it is no longer a question of knowing whether the Idea is one or multiple, or even both at once; 'multiplicity,' when used as a substantive, designates a domain where the idea, of itself, is much closer to the accident than to the abstract essence, and can be determined only with the questions *who? how? how much? where and when? in which case?* – forms that sketch the genuine spatio-temporal coordinates of the Idea."¹²⁰ Affects *are* these questions, the cases of a problematic idea. They are the link between the spatio-temporal dynamisms and actualization. Deleuze calls these actors of dramatization the "dark precursors." They determine the particular style in which a problem is actualized since they enable the communication between the intensive parts that underlie qualities and extensive parts. Finally, since actualization "repeats" the virtual determination complete in itself, its immanent stylization implies a temporal synthesis, "a stylistic heterochrony, the time produced in the struggle between idea and thought," as Meiner puts it. A "drama of abstract lines" rather than a "picture," this is perhaps how we can sum up the difference introduced by Deleuze's account.¹²¹

¹²⁰ Gilles Deleuze, "The Method of Dramatization," in *Desert Islands and Other Texts 1953-1974* (New York: Semiotext(e), 2004), 96.

¹²¹ In the same essay Deleuze writes, "Dynamisms, and all that exists simultaneously with them, are at work in every form and every qualified extension of representation; they constitute not so much a picture as a group of abstract lines coming from the unextended and formless depth" (Ibid., 98). On the "stylistic heterochrony," compare the fine passage from *Dialogues II* which is also commented on by Meiner: "A

In “Spinoza and the Three ‘Ethics’,” Deleuze writes that affects as signs of augmentation of strength are the “dark precursors” of the common notions, because they respond to the question which otherwise remains unanswerable: “how,” at which interval, which time and space, could we manage “forming” adequate ideas, when our encounters condemn us forever to inadequate ideas? This is why, he adds, although they remain passions and derive from inadequate ideas, affects configure a “form of expression” on their own in the *Ethics*, constituting a “book of signs” that “co-exists” with the others. I take this to mean that the ontological co-existence of affects, which we tried to theorize under the themes of “necessary derivation” and the “simultaneity of emotion and feeling,” is indispensable for the point of view that makes genesis a necessary dimension of thought. In a sense there is no epistemological problem of “transition” from the first to second or the third kind of knowledge in Spinoza; the question is that of a “selection” which the ontological simultaneity or co-existence of all types of knowing and being makes possible. Similarly, a “choice” between affects is possible only if they coexist in the simultaneity of affection.¹²²

work of art must at least mark the seconds. It is like the fixed plane: a way of making us perceive all that there is in the image. Absolute speed, which makes us perceive everything at the same time, can be characteristic of slowness or even of immobility. Immanence. It is exactly *the opposite of development, where the transcendent principle which determines and structures it never appears directly on its own account, in perceptible relation with a process, with a becoming*” (Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, *Dialogues II*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam [New York: Columbia University Press, 2007], 33; my emphasis).

¹²² Deleuze tells us that, “The *Ethics* cannot dispense with this passional form of *expression* that operates through signs, for it alone is capable of bringing about the indispensable selection without which we would remain condemned to the first kind” (Deleuze, “Spinoza and the three ‘Ethics’,” 145).

Spinoza's distinct-obscure nature, which, not being transparent to reason, discards any problem of intelligibility and whose virtual idea is complete without lacking in reality, is nevertheless not a dark night. In the same essay, Deleuze writes that all is "light" in Spinoza. Affects, dark precursors, are the "values of chiaroscuro." The dark night of the compound of forces forms a "symbol," that will be illuminated by the "lightning" created by the genesis of thinking, which marks a "decision," since "a decision is not a judgment, nor is it the organic consequence of a judgment: it springs vitally from a whirlwind of forces that leads us into combat. *It resolves the combat without suppressing or ending it.* It is the lightning flash appropriate to the night of the symbol." A symbol, writes Deleuze, is a "center of metamorphosis," it is not a meaningfulness achieved despite the absence of intelligibility that it was in the Kantian exhibition of concepts. Deleuze tells us that this is what D. H. Lawrence, the last of the critics of judgment in the Spinozian genealogy, called a *symbol*: "an intensive compound that vibrates and expands, that has no meaning, but makes us whirl about until we harness the maximum of possible forces in every direction, each of which receives a new meaning by entering into relation with the other."¹²³ Must this not be the real basis of aesthetic composition: not a resonating hollow interiority, but an entire geography of the spatio-temporal synthesis of forces?

¹²³ Deleuze, "To Have Done With Judgment," *Ibid.*, 134.

1.7. The Work of Art: The Being of Sensation and The Existence of the Possible

The problem of aesthetics, in its Kantian origin, primarily serves to expound neither fine arts nor even taste, but through the concept of feeling, the interior life of the epistemological subject and the figurative conditions of thought as such. We have seen that Deleuze's philosophical program, also passing through the concept of feeling, attempts to frustrate both. This has the effect of rearranging the space of aesthetics. In Deleuze, we observe that the notions of possibility, otherness, and expressivity (as the problematique that envelops these two notions) are reserved for delineating the aesthetic dimension. A theory of the continuous variation of affect underpins this script. It is this Spinozian theory that warrants a univocal ontology, in which the singular being is expressed by singularly determined modes, whose expressivity constitute the singular being as the beyond for all modality. This singular body, being the only "plane" available, then must also be the plane of the work of art.

Indeed, we see in Deleuze and Guattari a combination of these notions as the elements of the problematique of the work of art. The chapter on art in *What is Philosophy?*, "Percept, Affect, and Concept," defines the work of art as the "being of sensation," composed or "compounded" by "blocs of percepts and affects." No less important is the counterpart to this definition, which suggests that the "monument" which the work of art erects with the being of sensation, the monument that it is, is a "possible universe," and, in a related argument, that it is as such "otherness caught in a matter of expression."

Even a precursory synthesis of these two statements with what I have been discussing so far concerning the other and the nature of affects would suffice to elicit a series of deductions. And, indeed, I will keep returning to the framework of this chapter throughout this study. Remember, for example, that the other is expression of a possible world, and it also “envelopes” the forces of individuation that turn it into a “representative” within the perceptual field, by which it becomes an operator of becoming. The other has presented zones of intensities in a field that covers them with qualities and extensions. And now Deleuze and Guattari tell us that the work of art brings about a possible universe through materials that are capable of enveloping otherness –because they envelop it. Considering that the other envelops forces of life, namely affects, which are the variations of strength within the passage between sensations (one can therefore say that their being consists in being “varieties” of forces), an immediate conclusion would be that aesthetics, contra Kant, can neither designate a separate realm nor correspond to an “alternative” channel of cognition. Art, then, appears as the “becoming expressive” of these forces. This is the idea developed fully in “Of the Refrain,” another pivotal text, in *A Thousand Plateaus*, where it is argued that this expressivity coincides with the “territorialization” of the forces, in which case art appears as the territorial organization of the functions of life.

It is in this spirit that Deleuze and Guattari write that art begins with the “animal” in its territory or house and not with the “lived experience” and the “flesh” that is supposed to harbor the materials for art. Since they pose the problem in terms of the territorialization of forces and functions of life, Deleuze and Guattari’s discussion of

art always contains a polemic against phenomenology and its notion of the “lived,” which pivots its discussion around human subjectivity. Deleuze and Guattari will not, of course, delete the question of human form *tout court*, but take stock of it in view of the becomings that affect the “inhabitant” through the forces that come upon the territory. In fact, Deleuze claimed, in a beautiful essay which seals the centrality of the thematic of “becoming” that literature, rather than impose forms on the matter of the lived, moves toward the “ill-formed or the incomplete”: no better reason to write than the shame of having the form of man.¹²⁴

What are the implications of this conception of art and literature for literary criticism? It appears that literary criticism must aim at investigating, finding, naming, and differentiating the forces composed by the work of art. The critical indeed coincides with the “clinical,” as Deleuze writes. Another point concerns the specificity of Marxism that one can introduce into literary criticism through the perspective we gain from Deleuze and Guattari. There is a single process within whose flows the writer or the artist cannot but work, which provides him with his only material, and this process is world historical. This process provides the forces with which the territory or the house is built and it is at once social, political, historical, sexual, ethical, aesthetic, and so on. Immanence commits the writer to this world before everything else. Therefore, adjectives attached to an analysis such as “social” or “sexual” etc., are no sign of radicalism, as if it is possible that the work of art could have done without these forces and have not already included these forces into its expressive composition. The point

¹²⁴ Deleuze, “Literature and Life,” 1.

must rather be to define them in the manner in which they are composed. What about the author in this paradigm, for example? But, as Deleuze and Guattari say, the author is a “shadow,” a “seer, a becomer.” There is no “psyche” here, either. “How would he recount what happened to him, or what he imagines, since he is a shadow?”¹²⁵ At the zero degree of interiority that this framework offers, Deleuze and Guattari’s Marxism can claim that the writer composes with the very same flows that traverse the social *and* go beyond its organization: literature competes with the economic mode of production.¹²⁶ Interiority as a semiotic regime and its “crystallizations and orchestrations” would, of course, also fall within the purview of this criticism. But this time it acquires its sense from the primacy of a positive exteriority within which it has to be organized.

We observed several times how “resemblance” ceases to be functional in Deleuze’s theorization. The possible appeared to be related not to resemblance but to envelopment: the terrifying world does not resemble the terrified face. That is why it is not the “representations” of a work of art but its “body,” its territory, its framework – with its sections and planes in their points of intersection and distancing, as Deleuze and

¹²⁵ Deleuze and Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, 171.

¹²⁶ In an essay on the concept of “force” in Deleuze and Guattari’s work, Kenneth Surin makes the following observations: “As Deleuze and Guattari would have it, it is desire, which is always social and collective, that makes the gun into a weapon of war, or sport, or hunting, depending on extant circumstances. The mode of production is thus on the same level as the other expressions of desire, and it is made up of stratifications, that is, crystallizations or orchestrations of ordered functions, which are these very expressions of desire. Here Deleuze and Guattari bring about a reversal of the typical Marxist understanding of the mode of production: it is not the mode *per se* that allows production to be carried out (as the traditional account specifies); instead, it is desiring-production itself that makes a particular mode the kind of mode that it is” (Kenneth Surin, “Force,” in *Gilles Deleuze: Key Concepts*, ed. Charles J. Stivale [Montreal/Ithaca: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2005], 26).

Guattari say – that must become the object of the criticism. The work dismantles the world of representations through the forces which it harbors in its body.

Non-resemblance must be at the basis of expression; this is indispensable for the entire system. Deleuze and Guattari point to a difficult connection between the concept and sensation, which designates the “event” as their common denominator. We are told that the work of art “does not actualize the virtual event but incorporates or embodies it: it gives it a body, a life, a universe.” This is what makes this universe the “existence of the possible,” whereas the events brought by philosophical concepts “are the reality of the virtual, forms of a thought-Nature that survey every possible universe.”¹²⁷ Given its immanence, it is not surprising that the event should be the common denominator of the concept and sensation. It is more difficult to understand the implication of the concept’s survey of every possible universe. Especially because Deleuze and Guattari go on to write that both concept and sensation still have to be created with their own means. We could, however, refer to an earlier passage from “The Plane of Immanence” for more clarification. It reads as follows:

Such a plane [of pure immanence] is, perhaps, a radical empiricism: it does not present a flux of the lived that is immanent to a subject and individualized in that which belongs to a self. It presents only *events, that is, possible worlds as concepts, and other people [des autres] as expressions of possible worlds or conceptual personae*. The event does not relate the lived to a transcendent subject = Self but, on the contrary, is related to the immanent survey of a field without subject; the Other Person [*Autrui*] does not restore transcendence to an other [*autre*] self but returns every other [*autre*] self to the immanence of the field surveyed. (47-8; my emphasis)¹²⁸

¹²⁷ Deleuze and Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, 176-77.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

This dense text identifies the philosophical concept with the “expressed.” It identifies “expression” as such, the expressor, as conceptual persona, who are beings of the philosopher as well the philosopher as the product of his creations. Finally, that which “expresses itself,” and thereby comes to be expressed, would be immanence as such. Deleuze and Guattari have written that resemblance always haunts the work of art because “sensation refers only to its material.” Art uses this resemblance as a pretext. It “furnishes” or “composes” with sensible materials the possible world that the philosophical concept is content to survey from above. Perhaps philosophy finds this too attached to the finite. The philosopher would want to use a diverging lens to survey the possible world made visible by a Zarathustra or an Idiot, as in Nietzsche and Descartes, but also the Proletariat and the Bourgeoisie, and the Nomad as in Marx and Deleuze, personae who are defined through the affections they undergo, the forces they condemn and celebrate. Aesthetic figures, on the other hand, are sensations themselves, “percepts and affects, landscapes and faces, visions and becomings.”¹²⁹ A smile that is inseparable from the oil and brush that puts it on the canvas; a character that comes alive only through the words in a novel. Art is fully prepared to give us the world in the absence of the human, to put it like Cavell in his great book on film.¹³⁰ Deleuze and Guattari seem to argue that this is essentially what every art does or is capable of doing. Affect and percept, whose blocs are said to compose the being of sensation, are defined

¹²⁹ Ibid., 177.

¹³⁰ See, for example: “Photography maintains the presentness of the world by accepting our absence from it. The reality in a photograph is present to me while I am not present to it; and a world I know, and see, but to which I am nevertheless not present (through no fault of my subjectivity), is a world past” (Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed*, enlarged edition [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979], 23).

respectively as the “nonhuman becomings of man” and the “nonhuman landscapes of nature.” In any case, in art the “expressed” is made into a whole universe by means of diverse materials, and the dimension of “expression” becomes sensation as such and its figures. This is how we can finally understand the very first sentence of Deleuze and Guattari in this chapter: “art preserves, and it is the only thing in the universe that is preserved. It preserves and is preserved in itself.” Art can do this because it harnesses resemblance only to the materials with which it creates that particular universe, that sensation. Finally, this is why Deleuze and Guattari write that “perhaps the peculiarity of art is to pass through the finite in order to rediscover, to restore the infinite.”¹³¹

One could say that three main lines of argumentation is presented in “Percept, Affect, and Concept”: the independence of sensation, the function of becoming that is related to this, and the necessary condition that sensation is composed.¹³² And all these are set against the rule of “opinion” as the function of the “lived.” It is as if the lived distances us from life. Indeed, talking about “indeterminate zones” which affects force us to approach, Deleuze and Guattari affirm that “life alone creates such zones where living beings whirl around, and only art can reach and penetrate them in its enterprise of co-creation.”¹³³ Here too, however, the indeterminate zone does not refer to the undifferentiated. And art’s “enterprise of co-creation” indicates that the question of the independence of sensation cannot be resolved in favor of its “pre-existence.” Sensation

¹³¹ Deleuze and Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, 197.

¹³² “Composition, composition is the sole definition of art. Composition is aesthetic, and what is not composed is not a work of art” (Ibid., 191).

¹³³ Ibid., 173.

exists in life and the blocs of affects and percepts are those of the zones of indetermination, but they are “simultaneous” with our world. We do not descend into them as if into a non-individuated matter of “a bestial or primitive humanity,” to which we would nevertheless “resemble.” What *precedes* the “natural differentiation” of things comes *after*, just as the emotive bodily movements which preceded feelings have signified the status of “co-existence” of the latter within a single process, because of which becoming is a matter of determination. Deleuze and Guattari write:

It is within our civilization’s temperate surroundings that equatorial or glacial zones, which avoid the differentiation of genus, sex, orders, and kingdoms, currently function and prosper. It is a question only of ourselves, here and now; but what is animal, vegetable, mineral, or human in us is now indistinct –even though we ourselves will especially acquire distinction. The maximum determination comes from this bloc of neighborhood like a flash. (174)¹³⁴

In this way the co-existing independence of sensation calls for composition as its condition. With this, we attain two methodological insights approaching the work of art, concerning the issues of temporality and the territoriality. In a path breaking book Jay Lampert demonstrates the theorization of history in Deleuze and Guattari in terms of temporal syntheses, which requires taking the temporality of an event not in terms of its moment of occurrence but in terms of its levels of co-existence. He thus goes on to explain, given an event, how must one take into account the imbrications of temporal dimensions: the present of present, the past of present, the future of present, and the same permutations within the past and future. His

¹³⁴ Ibid.

conclusion is that time is irreversible, and that history is made by those whose apprehension of an event repeats it as a singularity that has never been repeated before, since only they know the secret that time is irreversible. If we agree with Spinoza that being is as it is or that history could not have been otherwise than it is, then we should be able to answer the question “why this now (rather than some other thing),” which is not the Leibnizian “why this rather than nothing.” I take Lampert’s work be a response to this.¹³⁵

The animal in the house or territory gives the most general schema for Deleuze and Guattari’s reflection on art. This is why their model of affect is ethological; it depends on an explanation of the expressive transformation of organic functions issuing from the composition of forces. The territory is backed on milieus which receive its transcoding action (which brings about the territory) and is itself open to the deterritorializing forces of cosmos. This is the schema of “Of the Refrain”: “rhythmic milieus,” “territory,” and “cosmic” opening of the territory, with which Deleuze and Guattari even put into relation the three epochs of art as classical, romantic, and modern. This schema is rewritten in “Affect, Percept, Concept”: the rule of opinion is deterritorialized by the “composite sensation,” which reterritorializes on a “plane of composition” where it erects its monuments or houses, and is in turn deterritorialized itself following the “deframing” lines of the plane that open onto the infinite “cosmos.”

These schemata are resonant with or are perhaps variations of the triptychs of “habit-memory-death drive,” which correspond to the temporal syntheses of the

¹³⁵ Jay Lampert, *Deleuze and Guattari’s Philosophy of History* (London: Continuum, 2006).

“present-past-future” in *Difference and Repetition*, and “primitive-despotic-capitalist” in *Anti-Oedipus*. Under these conditions, the work of art, insofar as it is a composition of sensation and sensation is a bloc of space-time, would exhibit “temporal” and “geographical” syntheses. The composition of space-times is also the repetition of the event of which they are the blocs. Could one then provide the temporal and territorial map of a given work? What are its dominant time zones; what is the territory it inhabits and the others that it marks as inhibited for itself?

The category of the event is capable of mapping even the most rigid subjectivity on a spatio-temporal system of coordinates, by means of which even the most private concern, say survival, can be shown to be world-historical. This is then what I will attempt to do in the following with Wallace Stevens. It may seem strange that a study so adamant about dissolving interiority in favor of the forces of the outside, should choose Stevens, often portrayed as the most prominent poet of privacy and interiority. As I said, however, the challenge they pose is part of the concern of this project.

2. STEVENS'S POETICS OF THE OTHER

I.

Stevens develops a poetry of the other, a poetry animated by a poetics of the other. I believe that the elements in the preceding presentation of the Deleuzian notion of the other make such a thesis possible and plausible, which may not otherwise be clear at first sight. Let us remember the implications of this concept at different levels. First, from the point of view of individuation, the other as the expression of a possible world implies that the self is not defined through identity but is already another since it *is* the realization of the possible. Second, epistemologically, the other as the structure of the perceptual field shows that the real dualism is not that of the subject and the object but (the effects of) the presence or absence of the other-structure: simply put, its presence guarantees the world and its perceptual categories, while its absence brings about their dissolution. Hence, the corollary: the condition of possibility of perception is not the ego but the other. Third, from the perspective of a theory of time, as based on the non-contemporaneity of the subject and the object that derives from the two previous points, that the other is a “possible” world means that the “I” is a “past” world. And finally, from the perspective of a theory of language, the other appears to dwell on the other side of the boundary from the direction of which the “I” receives language as from its source, since language is the means that the other has at its disposal “to endow the

possibles that it expresses with reality, *independently* of the development we cause them to undergo.”¹

In the poetics of the other, the self experiences a real loss of authority. But this situation must be distinguished from alternative accounts of the impoverishment of the authority of the subject. We are not confronted here, for example, with the scenario of the subject who recognizes that it depends on the other for its own identity. Nor is it the existential situation which defines the other under the double determination of a particular object and another subject, in such a way that “I” make the other an “object” of my gaze without thereby being protected from becoming an object under his gaze, who now turned into “another subject.”² The second point above stipulated that the field of perception is devoid of the correlates of the ego. It is the other that defines the structure of the perceptual field or the possible. Therefore, if things are seen from the perspective of the other-structure, other persons do not constitute other selves; rather, every other self is the index of a field of expression.

In a situation where a world of expression can replace selves –whether selfhood is attributed to the “I” or the other subject– nothing would be gained by investing the self. It is in this sense that the poetics of the other indicates a shift that makes it invest the structure of the field of perception. We could say that in this regime the human or the person disappears into the landscape of which it is a part.

¹ Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 260; my emphasis.

² The first scenario can be associated with various caricatures of the Hegelian master-slave dialectic. The second is Jean-Paul Sartre’s theory of the other in *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press, 1956), 340-400.

The poetics of the other is fascinated by the multiplicity of the possible worlds which are like the postulates of the others. Stevens elaborates this idea in a speech as late as 1951. After arguing that the modern poet desires to “find” the poetry of his time and “disclose” it to the readers and that he achieves this through “his own thought and feeling,” he suggests the following:

I say that he is to find it by his own thought and feeling; and the reason for this is that the only place for him to find it is in the thought and feeling of other people of which he becomes aware through his own thought and feeling. Becoming aware does not always mean becoming consciously aware. His awareness may be limited to instinct. *There is about every poet a vast world of other people from which he derives himself and through himself his poetry.* What he derives from his generation he returns to his generation, as best as he can. His poetry is theirs and theirs is his . . .³

The first sentence establishes a necessary link of derivation between the self and the other: the self is the only place to look for the poetry of the present because the other is the only place to look for the self. The order of genesis proceeds from the “other people” to the “self” to “poetry.” The other is the condition of the emergence of the poetic self. However, poetry itself also designates a pre-existing entity; somewhat miraculously it already exists. The poet is to “find” and “disclose” it by “becoming aware,” if he ever becomes aware. And this is why Stevens talks of it as something held in “common.” It is not the property of the poet; rather, what is his is theirs, thanks to which what is theirs is his.

³ Wallace Stevens, “On Receiving the National Book Award For Poetry (1951),” in *Opus Posthumous*, ed. Milton J. Bates (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 254; my emphasis.

What is important here is the place reserved for poetry. It comes at the end of the series. But the fact that it also pre-exists the series reveals that it is the “expressed” of the existence of other people. It subsists in itself, as though it is independent of both the self and the others. This means that other people are not the possessors of poetry either: they are its “expression.” According to what we gather from Stevens’ language, poetry seemingly does not need to be composed or perfected: the poet has to become aware, find, and disclose. In this way, his object situates him within a past temporality; or perhaps, the dimension of the past opens up and starts to coexist with the present.

My point is that without any subject being involved we are presented with a universe (or with expressions that make up a universe) that nevertheless gathers everything together, that is common to all. It is in this sense that the subject is disinvested in favor of what becomes the condition of perception: the other.

It must be the case that a universe like this, which is an endless intersection of expressions or beckoning possible worlds, is never indifferent. And the self who is realized in such a world, because it cannot remain indifferent, must be situated in a system of difference, not one of identity. The self is individuated through the other, as Stevens says of the poetic self, because the other envelops individuating elements. The other, itself not being an identity, cannot grant an image of identity. That is why it is not even correct to say of this self that it does not exist prior to the other, since an identity through which the self exists is still conceivable despite the fact that it may be derived. But what is in question here is precisely the thesis of identity, which does not hold. The

self is inherently dissolvable; it is metastable, which is what situates it in a system of difference.

II.

Now the sense of the loss of authority that we attribute to the self in the poetics of the other becomes clearer. We should find in it a complex condition. For the disinvestment of the self (the renunciation of the subject) does not simply designate a negative moment but points to the gathering of new and unforeseen powers, since it opens onto an entire realm of expressivity, which the poet can now hope to appropriate as his material. What is the structure of this capacity gained through loss? How can one theorize it?

Laura Quinney's delineation of what she calls the "poetics of disappointment" seems to be a good place to start, perhaps because she would object to my characterization, "capacity gained through loss." Quinney detects in disappointment not a frustration that can serve as the occasion for a renewed perspective by the self on itself but precisely a loss so irretrievable as to annul the "general promise of selfhood" and the hope for the "destiny" of the self. One not only does not shift to a new angle, one is now "cast away" and, therefore, the self lacks the support of a position or place for the renewal of its self-regard. This is indeed how she distinguishes between disillusionment and disappointment, which change their customary valence in her framework since the compensation promised by disillusionment due to the clarity and detachment of

perspective that it still holds in reserve for the self is no longer found in disappointment.⁴

Quinney's analysis focuses on disappointment more insofar as it falls within the problematics of the "linguistic representation of psychological states." As she herself suggests, it is more difficult to write a poem of disappointment than one of disillusionment; it takes great rhetorical subtlety to be convincing about disappointment. Quinney's analysis almost uncovers a new genre, what may be called the poetry of "continuing sadness." Clearly, therefore, the slightest sign of strength, pleasure, or pride over sadness, even if this be of a tragic kind—in short, any sense of power in reserve, heard in the poem—will undermine the authenticity of the representation of disappointment. Writing of Stevens's "The Comedian as the Letter C," for example, she detects an "evasion of identification" sustained by the poem's rhetoric, which sets apart the speaker who pretends to "command" the persona of the poem, Crispin, and makes the poem "thematically" a poem of disappointment but "rhetorically" a poem of disillusionment. "For neither psychological experience nor psychological understanding are at issue, but rhetorical skill," she adds.⁵ According to her reading, Stevens's poetry will gradually transform into a poetry of disappointment.

One can, therefore, certainly acknowledge Quinney's assertion that the representation of "self-effacement" is not incompatible with self-representation in

⁴ Laura Quinney, *The Poetics of Disappointment: Wordsworth to Ashbery*, (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1999), 98, 2.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 115-116.

general (the first person poem).⁶ The portrayal of disappointment is not automatically annulled merely because it is being represented, on the grounds that the act of representation itself would be a display of enough strength to negate disappointment. In fact, here we have the “condition” of the poetics of disappointment rather than its impossibility: there must always be surplus power but it should remain “disoriented,” not be crowned in representation.

However, Quinney also argues that in her construal disappointment applies to the poet as person. In other words, the loss or crisis indicated by disappointment is “psychic” rather than “vocational.” This is how she distinguishes her account from Harold Bloom’s, who allows for a resolution of the crisis indicated by disappointment since he sees it as primarily vocational (the poet’s trial within the tradition and its personae). She also distinguishes her position from, as she sees it, another strong reading of Stevens. Helen Vendler’s account of Stevens as a poet of disappointment, which focuses on emotional loss, taking it primarily as the failure of romantic love, cannot account for, according to Quinney, precisely that aspect of disappointment which makes it a relinquishment of the general promise of selfhood. For Vendler, Stevens grasped and wrote the poetry of (the putatively) common emotional experience and the human misery it conditions. Then, the common element becomes the vicissitudes of inner life, and what the good reader and critic should do is to recognize it

⁶ Ibid., xiii.

as they recognize themselves in the poem.⁷ As Quinney puts it, Bloom's Stevens is "content in his transumptive solipsism"; Vendler's Stevens is "settled in his tragic apprehension."⁸ Each of these formulae envision for the self a profit from the loss. If for one the vocation of the transcendental self inevitably turns affective variation into mere accidents, in the other an affective tone, however rightly detected it might be, exerts such a mastery that one does not know what can distinguish it from the authority of the epistemological subject. One can say that for these authors the self outlives the event, which is taken to "relate the lived to a transcendent subject = Self"; whereas Quinney tries to account for disappointment as an event that constitutes the subject as unable to benefit from his loss, deconstitutes it so to speak, which marks selfhood itself as an unresolved crisis.⁹

This second qualification of disappointment as personal or psychic has implications that have not been traced in Quinney's account. Although it is said that disappointment applies to the poet as person, our only access to it is through its representation by the poet (in the poem) whom we take for granted to be disappointed. Yet what can be the sense of the disappointment of the poet as a person, his renunciation of selfhood? We understand why the linguistic representation of disappointment should not evince power in reserve if the poem is to work as a poem of

⁷ Helen Vendler, *Wallace Stevens: Words Chosen Out of Desire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984). On these see especially chapter 1.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 98.

⁹ I am referring to a formulation of Deleuze and Guattari in *What Is Philosophy?* who, in the course of writing about the plane of immanence and the event, suggest that "the event does not relate the lived to a transcendent subject=Self but, on the contrary, is related to the immanent survey of a field without subject" (48).

disappointment at all. However, we cannot claim the same for the poet as person since it is not clear what it would mean to argue that he must not betray any sign of power if he is to be disappointed. In fact, given that existence entails *conatus*, such an argument sounds plainly wrong. Disappointment refers to a paradox: the renunciation of the general promise of selfhood or finding fault with the condition of being a subject is a momentous event indeed, yet the strength which it takes to accommodate it must be even more momentous. And the self cannot find this strength within itself since it is by definition disappointed, yet this energy must somehow be coterminous with the disappointed self.

I am suggesting that insofar as the self is concerned, disappointment must depend on, as it were, a new-found capacity. The subject (the poet as subject) may be disappointed, but this does not preclude the possibility that the affect of disappointment opens up the vision of a life which, lying beyond the reaches of the subject as it were, will reveal new powers. It is on the basis of such a perception that the subject will be experienced as a block, a limitation, a state of being half dead or inert. In this sense, we can even suggest that such feeling of power comes to be the condition that sustains the disappointed self, without ceasing to fulfill the conditions set by Quinney for a poetics of disappointment as such.

This is not necessarily meant, therefore, as a criticism of Quinney. On the contrary, I find her account of the eclipse of the self quite plausible. Yet her presentation also gives the impression that it is as if the self, or the sense of self-regard, was an obstacle in the way of a certain economy of representation and, thus, its

disappointment makes something available that would not have gained visibility otherwise. Disappointment can be related to precisely that affect which brings about the renunciation of the general promise of selfhood *and* the feeling of power that sustains such renunciation. The contradiction disappears if one considers that such a feeling is not dependent on the self but, on the contrary, correlated with its disappointment.

What is this capacity or feeling of power, and why does it express itself or is dramatized in the form of the representation of disappointment delineated by Quinney? Quinney herself provides the reasons why disappointment should be or indicate a power. As opposed to Bloom's belief that Stevens's native soil was an Emersonian idealism and disappointment constituted its accidents, she argues that it was rather the "pressure of disappointment that cradled Stevens back into poetry, in early middle age, and he toyed with idealism only in reaction to his underlying dejection."¹⁰ In defining her alternative to both this "transcendental" Stevens proposed by Bloom and the "melancholy" Stevens proposed by Vendler, she suggests that "the language and tone of Stevens's late poems follows from a disheartenment of self that turns him back, uncertainly, upon an irredeemable world."¹¹ Just as idealism is not the motive for poetry but, on the contrary, an accident that befalls what really motivates it, this power posits a world on which the image of redemption is no longer or not yet imposed since it is beyond good and evil, and in which transcendence is an illusion. It is in this sense "irredeemable." "Disheartenment" makes one turn to, rather than away from, the world.

¹⁰ Ibid., 96.

¹¹ Ibid., 98-99.

Lastly, in demarcating disappointment from disillusionment, Quinney remarks that disillusionment may be seen as a form of self-deception about finally having no deceptions and the supposed arrival of the “solid clarity of negation.” If this should be a deception it is because “our *capacity for investment remains undaunted* and picks its nimble way to a new love.”¹² In this way, the poetics of disappointment becomes indistinguishable from a poetics of *conatus*.

The capacity preserved in disappointment is related to the vision or intuition of a life without redemption, teleology, or resolution: that is to say, a life in which these are not values; a life of “complete power, complete bliss,” as Deleuze would say. At least in the case of Stevens, if disappointment functions as the machinery of the poetry, this is because a life of immanence is glimpsed through it. Immanence grants the disappointed self the vision of a life whose richness and univocity is obscured or falsified by the subject. As we will see, this is the reason why the self always appears “equivocal” in Stevens’s poetry. This vision is a source of joy; this capacity or power can also be called joy.

If I return to the second question above concerning why this power, the feeling of immanence, must be expressed in the form of disappointment, the short answer seems to be that a glorious self cannot project an image of the powers of immanence. Singing its own glory, it would not, for example, show that our capacity of investment is, for better or worse, never daunted. It is in disappointment (and not in

¹² Ibid., 117; my emphasis.

disillusionment) that the unvanquished life makes itself felt; it is as if the self must appear downtrodden in order for this to happen.

I have suggested that the poetics of disappointment can be seen as theorizing a poetry of continuing sadness. Continuing sadness, similar to disappointment itself, indicates a paradox. As Spinoza perceived, sadness cannot continue; it would have to reflect itself infinitely if it could, but that would have meant for the subject to be affected by an infinite sadness that corresponds to an infinite decreasing of capacity, otherwise known as death. To that degree, it cannot be represented either. But this paradox defines the most intimate act of art and literature; it defines their space essentially. Literature constantly transgresses the boundary of that which cannot be represented. Let us look at the example offered by Quinney.

In Stevens's "The Planet on the Table," which is often read as his judgment on his collected poems, she detects a "genuine pleasure in a limited accomplishment" where this affect finds its counterpoint in both the absence of a "despairing stance" and the refusal to "brusquely dismiss" the achievement.¹³ Yet, genuinely having it reveals why such a pleasure is in truth sadness; it reveals how sad Stevens really is. This is what Quinney characterizes as, in Fitzgerald's formula from his unforgettable *Crack-Up*, developing a sad attitude towards one's sadness. The terrain of continuing sadness is existentially untraversable because it signifies the absence of strength or the condition of living one's own death, living as already dead. Yet the poet habitually ventures into this space and brings about representations of it. He achieves this not through the

¹³ Ibid., 101.

representation of sadness as such but, say, through the representation of pleasure in a limited accomplishment. Whereas the representation of sadness, violating the nature of sadness as absence of strength, would be a display of the strength of the subject, the representation of pleasure in a limited accomplishment displays precisely the absence of strength in sadness. The subject is powerless; if he can still go on, this must be due to the hold of a life on him that goes beyond his individual strength. Perhaps we can say that this is a regime in which we pass from the subject to life, where we leave behind the subject as paradigm. An immanent life becomes the new paradigm, in which we find the possibility of traversing the realm of the dead. This is finally why disappointment can be a relevant device for the feeling of power related to an anonymous life.¹⁴

At a deeper, more theoretical level, however, this problem has to do with the virtual events or singularities of immanence, and their process of actualization. As we will see, pure immanence, “*a life*” as Deleuze calls it, must be distinguished from *the* life of the subject and the object in which it is actualized –from both internal and external life, although it is actualized in an object and attributed to a subject. Perhaps

¹⁴ Recently, David Trotter in his *Cinema and Modernism* (Malden/Oxford/Victoria: Blackwell Publishing, 2007) suggested that the modernist writers were interested in the example provided by cinema because they realized, in its wake, that only “disproportionality” will make existence as such appear in its neutrality: “Their literary modernism was an acknowledgment that existence as such (the only topic left for literature, they felt) would never appear otherwise than out of proportion: at once personal and impersonal; at once impossibly close (too much presence), and marked indelibly by remoteness, by what has been left out of the picture, by what has gone missing (too much absence). Cinema’s defining drama of exclusion and inclusion showed them the way to existence as such . . .” (10). Trotter is writing about Eliot, Joyce, Woolf, and Lewis. I find his framework important because it does away with the cliché that explains the rapprochement between literary modernism and cinema in terms of photographic fidelity or lifelike representation. It also opens the way for an argument that it is not technology but the “desire” plugged into that technology which determines a given productivity. “For literary modernism should not be regarded as the product of the machine age” (10). I will return to the absence-presence, inclusion-exclusion effects in the language of Stevens.

what makes disappointment a beneficent device for the dramatization of immanent events has to do with the fact that it corresponds to the moment of the eclipse of the subject as such.

III.

Despite all her exhibitions of the disappointment of the subject, Quinney does not leave behind the framework of subjectivity. Her argument gravitates to the thesis that the frustration of its hopes of transcendence leads the self, in Stevens, to a rhetoric of disappointment.¹⁵ The main reason for this is that transcendence, the subject's "hope" for it, is posited as a spontaneous and determining feature of experience.

Disappointment then registers the specific attitude adopted in the wake of the disintegration of this hope, through which the subject appears to develop a sad attitude toward sadness rather than (say) protesting this fate or attempting to derive a benefit from it.

But transcendence is a concomitant of the subject, and, as I have suggested, there is something that exceeds the framework of the subject in disappointment. In that case, a different scenario must be introduced. If disappointment defines a real condition, one can claim that it is essentially defined by the yearning for a life in relation to which the subject, Stevens, feels himself "out-of-field." It must be a very disappointing but

¹⁵ For example: "The most elemental romance for Stevens is the romance of the self, or mind, with its inflated view of its being and destiny. Its deflation is a painful, many-layered surprise." And, "many of his late poems share the strange, equivocal tone of unassuming accommodation. They pay homage to the mind's ambition, the last refuge of transcendental hope, while confessing its failure" (Quinney, *Ibid.*, 98, 100).

also an intense feeling indeed to fully see or have a sense of a life in the process of unfolding and yet finding oneself excluded from it without any seeming fault of one's own, that is, without any seeming subjective solution to remedy the situation being available. Stanley Cavell, whom I have already cited, saw in this our condition in relation to the world in film due to the photographic medium of the latter: finding oneself absent when the present becomes the presentness of a past world. Hence, we arrive at a peculiar form of presence reduced to and defined through knowing and seeing without inhabiting. (It may be equally suggestive to think of Stevens being closer to photography than painting in this sense, insofar as "to maintain our presentness, painting accepts the recession of the world. [Whereas] Photography maintains the presentness of the world by accepting our absence from it."¹⁶) Thus one cannot absolutize subjective loss. A loss in one register could also be seen as a gain in another –if one wants to speak in these terms.

We do not, then, have to continue to believe that the essential moment in disappointment is the failure of transcendence and the mood correlated with it. After all, what could be the legitimacy of upholding transcendence when everything points at a frustration with it? Why should the choice be defined as either a successful transcendence (whatever this might be) or the failure of transcendence that nevertheless continues to attest to its truth? Finally, returning to the case of Stevens, why should we not think that the pivot of his thinking, the real source of intense emotion, is the desire for absolute immanence rather than the lack of transcendence?

¹⁶ Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 23.

Before I continue, I would like to recapitulate the topology in which the differentiation implied here becomes comprehensible. Deleuze opens his final essay, “Immanence: A Life,” with the question: “What is a transcendental field?” Although he produces an immediate response, his argument takes a turn that qualifies this response. We are first told that a transcendental field can be described as “a pure stream of a-subjective consciousness,” having no reference to an object and not belonging to a subject –insofar as the first question that pertains to the transcendental is what is going to distinguish it from experience. Immediately following this, however, comes the statement that a pure immediate consciousness cannot “define” the transcendental field. I find it illuminating how and why Deleuze goes on to argue this.

The decisive thing here is not that one may not evoke a pure consciousness co-extensive with the transcendental field. It consists in the point that such a consciousness is revealed and becomes a “fact” only with the emergence of the subject-object pair, which are located outside the field as “transcendent” terms. They are out-of-the-field. So we still maintain the consciousness that pertains to the field, but say that the plane is not defined by it since its concomitants are the subject and the object and their transcendence. Said shortly, “the relation of the transcendental field to consciousness is only a conceptual [*de droit*] one.”¹⁷

Hence a second move follows this first turn: “*were it not for consciousness*, the transcendental field would be defined as a pure plane of immanence.”¹⁸ The argument

¹⁷ Gilles Deleuze, “Immanence: A Life,” 26.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, my emphasis.

here is that it is “the plane of immanence” which effectively eludes the subject and the object and their transcendence. Therefore, it is what we must turn to for a definition.

The conclusion Deleuze wants to reach is summed up in the proposition: “The transcendental field is defined by a plane of immanence, and the plane of immanence by a life.”¹⁹

Between this conclusion and the second move lies the equation of immanence with “*a* life.” Immanence is finally the notion that is capable of supplying an in-itself, being absolute and not dependent on either a subject or an object. The choice of this phrase, “*a* life,” can be abstractly understood by reflecting on what it is that may constitute *a* life. *A* life unfolds (if it is not lived then is perhaps felt, for as Spinoza said we “feel” that we are eternal) as concurrent with but also separate from subjective biography. The fact of living a life, exactly that life whose events will have been recorded as though independent of the individual, cannot be contained by the individual –“event” here signifies not what happens externally or internally, but that which makes what has happened internally or externally precisely those things and not others. An individual lives and dies, it will have lived and died; however, this life and death themselves can only be the events of *a* life, the only things that survive *the* life of the individual since as events they are distinguishable from what has happened externally or internally in *the* life of a subject. In short, just as consciousness has not pointed the right direction for the definition of the transcendental field, immanence, *a* life, can no more

¹⁹ Ibid., 28.

be defined by a subject and an object in which it would be contained. On the contrary, *a* life “co-exists” with the accidents of the objectivity and subjectivity of what happens.

Hence the topology of the differentiation into subject–object–transcendence, on the one hand, and *a* life–plane of immanence-transcendental field, on the other. But this with the proviso that “*a* life is everywhere, in all the moments that a given living subject goes through and that are measured by given lived objects: an immanent life carrying with it the events or singularities that are merely actualized in subjects and objects.”²⁰

The subject may be disappointed by a life that coexists with his “own” life. He may come to experience his absence while being simultaneously intoxicated by the feeling of the presence of a world. Stevens’s poetry is informed by a series of problems that resonate with what becomes audible in these statements. Since I have used Quinney’s exposition of disappointment to define the status of the subject in such a regime of existence, we can return to her one more time to see what difference one can introduce into her readings of poetry with this further variation on the concept of disappointment. Her reading of “The Auroras of Autumn” might offer a good occasion, since it is not only the most extensive reading of a poem in her book but also because she sees the poem as Stevens’ “only long poem that concentrates on the anatomy of disappointment.”²¹

Quinney’s careful reading of the cantos of the poem reveals why she should have found it relevant to claim that we are presented here with an “anatomy.” For canto

²⁰ Ibid., 29.

²¹ Laura Quinney, *The Poetics of Disappointment*, 119.

by canto she follows how the poem alternates between the possible solutions it can conceive against the fateful condition of the subject and the inevitable impasses with which these solutions are confronted. Thus, for example, Stevens's attempt to imagine a remedy for the malaise in an experience that is not "ordered toward a transcendental aim"²²—and this is a consequence of the frustration of the "family romance" that is central to Quinney's reading, the object of the poem's "farewell"—through the mastery that "tragic apprehension" may offer, is countered in the next canto, once its inherent contradictions made it impossible to maintain it, by an antithetical recourse to the possibility of the "innocence" of experience. This last proposal will also collapse under its own weight, and the following canto will evoke the malice of fate and the thought of death enhanced by the luxuriously indifferent nature. Quinney's main argument in the context of "The Auroras of Autumn" is that the lyric speaker is "abandoned in mid-disaster" and no compensation offered for the inventory of losses that the poem itself introduces. For such is the economy of disappointment: something grows obsolete without being superseded.²³ Stevens recognizes the family romance as a worn out wish to which he bids farewell, and yet he does not have any new position that would enable him to abandon or transcend this idea; it remains a loss without profit. The elegy owes its poignancy to the continuing affection for the idea although Stevens now recognizes

²² Ibid., 124.

²³ Ibid., 130.

it as a “psychic atavism.”²⁴ This is what leads her to read the last canto of the poem merely as an “effervescent jeu d’esprit” against the lack of compensation or resolution.

Quinney’s reading, therefore, hinges on the separation of the affective value of the last canto of “Auroras” from the rest of the poem, in which the anatomy of disappointment is embodied. She argues that in the last canto Stevens “recovers his verve and authority,” which coincides with the abandonment of the “first-person perspective.” In the persona of the “rabbi” and within a language of “impersonal generalization,” we witness a reflective commentary on the “larger movement of the poem.”²⁵

The emotional tone in the last canto is indeed different. It is also true that there is something like a commentary on the movement of the poem. Stevens postulates here that his parable of unhappiness and emotional misery necessarily depends on the fact that people are “unhappy in a happy world”:

An unhappy people in a happy world—
Read, rabbi, the phases of this difference.
An unhappy people in an unhappy world—

Here are too many mirrors of misery.
A happy people in an unhappy world—
It cannot be. There is nothing there to roll

On the expressive tongue, the finding fang.
A happy people in a happy world—
Buffo! A ball, an opera, a bar. (X. 1-9)²⁶

²⁴ Ibid., 15.

²⁵ Ibid., 128-129.

²⁶ Line numbers in parentheses always refer henceforth (unless stated otherwise) to *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens* (New York: Knopf, 1954).

Necessarily, since the combinations that are tried out simply do not work: “an unhappy people in an unhappy world,” “a happy people in an unhappy world,” and finally “a happy people in a happy world.” The first and the third are hopeless, but the justification offered for the improbability of the second proposition (“It cannot be”) is revealing. Circling back to the figure of the “serpent” that opens the poem in the first canto, Stevens writes that “There is nothing there to roll / *On the expressive tongue, the finding fang.*” An unhappy world is inexpressive because the happiness of its people must be built on precisely the presupposition of that inexpressivity. In an unhappy world happiness is gained at the expense of the expressivity of the world and has to be bolstered subjectively, which makes it by definition incommunicable although it takes itself to be communicable by rights, despite its conceit of legislating its own happiness. A happy world, on the contrary, is happy for the neutrality of its expression and not for any subjective projection; it is a world beyond good and evil. If people are unhappy in a happy world, it is only then that their unhappiness acquires an expressive value. This vision of unhappiness in a happy world, let alone canceling the reality of unhappiness, is the only one that can highlight the poignancy of the strength that even unhappiness possesses in a life. The poem ends with one of the acutest images of such strength: “Like a blaze of summer straw, in winter’s nick.”

The last canto, then, exhibits the plane on which the drama of unhappiness, despair, and loss unfolds in the previous cantos. For one could equally ask, against Quinney’s presupposition, why the last canto was necessary, why did not Stevens end the poem with the ninth canto? The disproportion is not only marked by the tone of

emotion, but also with the figure of collectivity (“people”) and its impure language (“In hall harridan, not hushful paradise”) that emerge in this canto. Here is the secret reserve of the scenes of disappointment. It is this inexplicable, anonymous joy of immanence that underlies the never ending equivocity of the subject:

In these unhappy he meditates a whole,
The full of fortune and the full of fate,
As if he lived all lives, that he might know,

In hall harridan, not hushful paradise,
To a haggling of wind and weather, by these lights
Like a blaze of summer straw, in winter’s nick. (X. 19-24)

IV.

The ultimate sign of immanent life is found in the equivocity of the self. Thus, I will proceed with the hypothesis that it is not the self’s yearning for transcendence and the failure of this hope that make up the cause for disappointment. It is because the subject is disappointed that it approaches the conception of a life of impersonal bliss. Equivocity, then, can be taken as the index of a transcendental field that is not correlated with subjective experience and is non-problematic in the sense that it is not traced from the empirical but is defined by becoming.²⁷

²⁷ Gilles Deleuze, “Immanence: A Life”: “There is something wild and powerful in this transcendental empiricism that is of course not the element of sensation (simple empiricism), for sensation is only a break within the flow of absolute consciousness. It is, rather, however close two sensations may be, the passage from one to the other as becoming, as increase or decrease in power (virtual quantity)” (25).

“Of Mere Being,” Stevens’s late (or to be exact his last) poem, offers us a case study of the transcendental under the conditions where it is separated from the movement that defines it –or when this movement is interrupted:

The palm at the end of the mind,
Beyond the last thought, rises
In the bronze decor,

A gold-feathered bird
Sings in the palm, without human meaning,
Without human feeling, a foreign song.

You know then that it is not the reason
That makes us happy or unhappy.
The bird sings. Its feathers shine.

The palm stands on the edge of space.
The wind moves slowly in the branches.
The bird’s fire-fangled feathers dangle down.²⁸

“You know then that *it* is not the reason / That makes us happy or unhappy,” is the response prompted by the confrontation with the bird of being that sings a foreign and inhuman song. The entire pathos of this poem hinges on the obscurity of the “it,” and it is intensified in what follows because the verbs that express the event of being –to move, to shine, to sing, etc.– serve to recapitulate this obscurity of the bird-being. However, it is the “song” that is the crucial element here. The ear is the organ that discerns the boundary or the threshold,²⁹ since the realization that “our” happiness or unhappiness does not depend on this being comes exactly when (“then”) “you” hear the “foreign” song. Conversely, the song must have been heard not only as foreign but also

²⁸ Wallace Stevens, *Opus Posthumous*, 141.

²⁹ “Mere” has an older meaning of “boundary.”

simultaneously familiar or intimate for it to concern matters of happiness and unhappiness. The ear discerns the difference between the inhuman and the human, and therefore the inhuman origins of the human. As Mutlu Konuk Blasing would argue, “our” happiness or unhappiness requires the resounding of a personal and collective history: “the inhuman making choice of a human self.”³⁰

The bird’s song, however, is indifferent, and it does not initiate any movement or becoming. “Of Mere Being” is a dramatization of the interruption of transcendental movement or of becoming, which defines the space of a communication between the human and the inhuman –the human and its inhuman history. Concomitant with this interruption, the foreign and despotic transcendence of mere being erects itself. It should, therefore, be emphasized that the focus of the poem cannot be framed as the indifference of a transcendent being toward human existence. According to this formula, the poem would posit and rely on the thesis of a communication between the human and the transcendent, albeit in a negated form: there is an internal relation between human existence and a transcendent being (the transcendent self or god), but by negating the link Stevens posits the indifference of being. This framework, however, is far from being relevant to the poem. Rather, the poem focuses on transcendental movement as such, which involves neither the human subject nor the transcendence of being. The “song” gains all its importance at this juncture: it *would have been* the medium of the transcendental movement. Therefore, such a focus is grounded on a very

³⁰ Mutlu Konuk Blasing, *Lyric Poetry*, (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007), 62. I will return to this important work, whose subtitle perhaps gives the best idea about its argument on lyric poetry: “The Pain and The Pleasure of Words.” “The inhuman making choice of a human self” is from Stevens’s “Of Ideal Time and Choice.”

different thesis: there is no internal relation between the human and the transcendent, whether this is affirmed as communication or negated as indifference; rather, transcendental movement is determined as that which constitutes the plane on which the human and the inhuman communicate. The poem focuses on this movement insofar as it is interrupted, the act that conditions the emergence of a transcendent being.

We can locate the moment of interruption in “Of Mere Being” precisely. It takes place in the third stanza. The first stanza introduces the bird in its “decor.” Then the second stanza introduces its song. It is the third stanza which announces, bringing about an enormous end, the consequence of the foreign song: “you know then that...not” –full stop. This is the moment, as it were, in which hearing is granted and revoked simultaneously. It is as if the “I” is stunned by this knowledge that the song imparts about “our” fate in this setting. It causes no reverberation or communication. On the contrary, starting with the last line of the third and in the fourth stanzas, there is a return to the bird and its decor. The scene now rises like a fascinating placard (hence the apposite word “decor”) with a song emanating from it: a scene with bound spatial movement, which itself is perhaps only an illusion animated only by the foreign song that emanates from the bird in the picture. In the absence of any temporal index, this is a marginal space outside movement: the “edge” of space and the “end” of the mind, where the subject and the transcendent being are confronted face to face. One is almost tempted to associate the “decor,” given its paraphernalia of bronze, birds, feathers and leaves, and gold, with emblems of an archaic despotism. Perhaps the last line, “The

bird's fire-fangled feathers dangle down," responds to the pathos brought about in the third stanza: "down," the final direction in this last poem intimating death.

It is revealing that most readings of the poem present it as if its topic were human "happiness," and try to associate happiness with "indifference" although Stevens is clear that here it is not a matter of being "happy *or* unhappy." The reason is that they implicitly or explicitly maintain the plot of subjective experience and transcendent being –and the correlation of the transcendental with the subjective. For example, Helen Vendler concludes her article on Stevens and the lyric speaker with a reading of "Of Mere Being." She suggests that:

As the speaker contemplates the bird's "foreign song," he learns from it (as he tells himself in the second person) that happiness is not a product of the philosophical reason, but of the delighted senses as they contemplate "mere being": "You know then that it is not the reason/ That makes us happy or unhappy." . . . The ecstatic quiet of seeing and hearing, of contemplating the intransitive motions of the inexhaustible iconic components of being –tree, bird, song, wind, fire – is sufficient for happiness. . . . The fascination of the ever-present foreign song of abstract being guarantees the perpetual antiphonal responsive voice of Stevens' poems . . . (147-148)³¹

Simon Critchley also exploits the association of philosophical reason with the "it" in the first line of the third stanza and its putative relation with happiness to reach nevertheless the opposite conclusion on the role of imagination. According to him:

Stevens suggests that it is not human reason or even unreason that makes us happy, but something else, something foreign and real that we cannot even

³¹ Helen Vendler, "Stevens and the Lyric Speaker," in *Cambridge Companion to Wallace Stevens*, ed. John N. Serio (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

imagine, something that gives life as it is, that we live from and which is not the transfigurative sorcery of the imagination. (74)³²

As I have already suggested, the poem does not advance a proposition about happiness; neither does it establish a relation between happiness and “abstract being” or “something foreign.” In fact, to read the poem as if it never mentions “unhappiness” is quite astonishing. Vendler takes even one more step to declare that the concluding lines of the poem announce what is “sufficient for happiness.” It seems to me that even if it were a matter of a choice between the two, one must rather confess that the poem’s topic is “unhappiness.” To repeat one more time, however, the poem pulls into its focus the fact of not being either happy or unhappy. The question is why it should seem so natural to assume that what is at stake here is happiness. I think that this conclusion appears obvious when all the dimensions are organized around the human subject, whose pathos is supposed to be recharged by the realization of the indifference of the transcendent, and the tragic apprehension of the pathos itself might somehow become an occasion for happiness. The “ecstasy” of the quiet and the “fascination” with the foreign: Vendler is at least correct in her choice of words for such a relation. It is in ecstasy and fascination that a liturgical communication (the “antiphonal” voice) is expected to take place. Crichtley’s vocabulary of the “gift” is no less revealing: we should presumably be thankful to “something that gives life as it is.”

³² Simon Crichtley, *Things Merely Are: Philosophy in the Poetry of Wallace Stevens*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2005).

This recalls more or less the Kantian position on the transcendental, as Deleuze describes its mechanism succinctly: “Transcendence is an empirical fact; the transcendental is what makes transcendence immanent to something=x. Another way of saying the same thing is this: *something within thought transcends (dépassera) the imagination without being able to do without it (s’en passer)*: the *a priori* synthesis of the imagination sends us over to the synthetic unity of apperception which encompasses it.”³³ Therefore, insofar as human experience serves as the cornerstone for both, it does not matter much if the positions of Vendler and Critchley on the role of the imagination are directly opposite. Critchley can afford to disqualify imagination to put the emphasis on what transcends experience, insofar as he defines the imagination trivially as “transfigurative sorcery.” Vendler, on the other hand, grants imagination its rights by bringing back to its domain what escapes it. And this by rights, since that which escapes it escapes imagination without being able to do without it. As a last point, I would like to point out that the reading of the “it” in the third stanza as referring to “reason” (which I think is not the case since the stress falls on the “it”: “then that *it*”) does not, I think, force me to leave the trajectory of the reading that I suggest here. For, reason would simply be one more term, such as imagination and transcendence, added to the topology of this subjective idealism that formulates an internal relation between the human and the transcendent, which is precisely what, I argued, the poem itself does not sustain.

³³ Gilles Deleuze, *Empiricism and Subjectivity*, trans. Constantin V. Boundas (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 111.

“Less and Less Human, O Savage Spirit” is interesting when juxtaposed with “Of Mere Being” in that it presents the “human” as the only “alien” in contradistinction to the foreign and despotic transcendence of “Of Mere Being”:

It is the human that is the alien,
The human that has no cousin in the moon.

It is the human that demands his speech
From beasts or from the incommunicable mass.

If there must be a god in the house, let him be one
That will not hear us when we speak: a coolness,

A vermilioned nothingness, any stick of the mass
Of which we are too distantly a part. (11-18)

The significant thing about this poem is precisely the repudiation of any internal relation between the human and transcendent being. A transcendent god who “hear[s] us when we speak” would be the main example of such internal relation. But it is firmly stated that god must not be transcendent. Therefore, by the same token, the “indifference” of god is also eliminated. The emphasis, then, falls rightly on the human: “*the alien.*” For the human being, to be alien means to be intimate with its axis of alienation, with its own inhumanity, or with the movement through which it has become human. The other pole involved here is registered exactly in the title of the poem: “less and less human, o savage spirit” is an invocation; it invokes the spirit of the movement through which the human has become itself and in which it drifts away from itself. I think that the condition of being alien is framed best in the lines, “It is the human that demands his speech/ From beasts or from the incommunicable mass”: the bond with

animality and materiality designates the medium of becoming of the human, its history before humanity, and shows “speech” as its distinction.

Yet one must also account for the image of the “house” in this poem in conjunction with the question of speech. It seems that a god is desired in the house, or rather, a god is co-implicated with the house; for the poem starts with the repeated conditional “if there must be a god in the house.” In Stevens’s presumption of a polytheism here (“a god”) we can observe another aspect of the repudiation of the transcendent god. The same thing holds for speech, which seems equally possible only in the structure of the house: at a distance from the “beasts” and the “incommunicable mass.” Blasing suggests that the “incommunicable mass,” which has both religious and material resonance in the context of the poem, indicates that “the metaphysical and the physical are equally alien” to poetic speech.³⁴ God proves to be an obstacle for human “speech” insofar as the god that is is a transcendent god. That is why the poem imagines a god that will be “incapable of speaking,” who “will not hear us when we speak”. The god at the end of the poem is figured against the background of the immanence of matter (which is not without its own spiritual hymn however) that takes us outside the house: it is reduced to a “stick of the mass”—a dismembered god with which we can claim to share a part. Then, a god in the house that would be “a coolness”, “a vermilioned nothingness” preserves something from the history of the human like a memory trace or anecdote, which might be inexplicable but nevertheless intimate in its strangeness. This is a god which befits the human status of being an alien. The title’s

³⁴ Blasing, *Lyric Poetry*, 140.

demon of becoming is, therefore, not god. It is rather the only spirit that the alien human being can have: the savage spirit of becoming. And it is different from the “closed” forms imagined for a god in the house mentioned in the first half of the poem:

If there must be a god in the house, must be,
Saying things in the rooms and on the stair,

Let him move as the sunlight moves on the floor,
Or moonlight, silently, as Plato’s ghost

Or Aristotle’s skeleton. Let him hang out
His stars on the wall. He must dwell quietly.

He must be incapable of speaking, closed,
As those are: as light, for all its motion, is;

As color, even the closest to us, is;
As shapes, though they portend us, are. (1-10)

In this poem, “speech” is marked as the distinction of the human insofar as it is “alien”; it appears as the index of transcendental movement. If god must be “incapable of speaking,” this is because the human is not made in the image of god. Rather, the capacity for speech is correlated with the condition of being alien. Things like “light,” “color,” “shapes,” although they may be “close” to us and “portend us,” do not put us in communication with our alien being – they are “closed.” Speech, on the other hand, marshals a movement, which posits it as the medium that makes possible a discourse that can harbor sensations such as “vermilioned nothingness,” and can talk about it as if it is the most familiar thing. It puts the human in touch with the beasts and the incommunicable mass, and separates it from them.

V.

It is tempting to imagine “The Auroras of Autumn” as a soliloquy that would be delivered by the “alien” inhabitant of the house in “Less and Less Human, O Savage Spirit.” If it were necessary to say what “Auroras” is about, one could say that it is about dehumanization that follows from this condition of being the only alien. In fact, two very different readings of the poem have commented on this “dehumanization” in Stevens in their own ways. What makes juxtaposing Laura Quinney’s and B.J. Leggett’s readings so productive is that they formulate the *raison d’être* of dehumanization in opposite, even contradictory, but somehow still complementary ways. For Quinney, as we have already seen, it is the loss or collapse of the transcendental destination for the experience of the self that explains dehumanization. Leggett explains it, surprisingly, in terms of the emergence of an “inhuman” or “cosmic” imagination or principle of meditation and transformation. Quinney ultimately bases her reading on the identification of the psychology that animates the poem. “Linguistic representation of psychological states” has been the formula she followed for her own procedure of reading. Leggett bases his reading, with textual evidence, on Stevens’s source for “Auroras.” He not only documents how Stevens borrowed extensively from Henri Focillon’s *The Life of Forms in Art* for his imagery in the poem, but also attempts to show how the main idea of Focillon’s work, i.e., a living world of forms as the principle of metamorphoses, shaped Stevens’s idea of an “external,” ultimately inhuman imagination affirmed as a source and principle of meditation in general in his late poetry. He suggests that in this Stevens is distancing himself from his

previous idea of the individual imagination, which is at the center of an ordering fiction, confronted with a chaotic outside.³⁵

The complementarity of these two readings might be said to be that of the “dehumanized” and the “dehumanizing.” Quinney’s focus is on the dehumanized agent: she turns the “absence” of what Leggett would see as an external principle of thought into the condition for the disappointment of the subject. Leggett focuses on the dehumanizing cause: he suggests that an external, inhuman principle is “attained” at the expense of the centrality (even if not resulting in the disappointment) of a subjective or individual imagination. Thus we can also say that the complementarity is due to the two poles of the subjective and the objective, the former developed by Quinney’s reading while Leggett’s develops the latter.

My main argument here lies in the acknowledgment that while both Quinney’s account of the subject and Leggett’s account of the emergence of a dimension of exteriority involve some truth, their theoretical presuppositions undermine their truth and prevent it from providing the direction that, I think, their arguments should have had. By theoretical presuppositions, I mean the framework of the subject of experience who processes the lived in Quinney and the framework of an objective reality, which envelops the immanence that the subject possesses secondarily in Leggett. Neither of the authors considers the possibility of defining dehumanization in a process of becoming (they rather take it something like a condition), which would require

³⁵ For B.J. Leggett’s reading see particularly the last chapter of his *Wallace Stevens and Poetic Theory* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1987).

formulating the transcendental as the passage of a life that places the subject and the object out of field. The problem with their accounts is that they start with centering on what falls outside the plane, which misleads them on the question of immanence and the transcendental. For, “when the subject or the object falling outside the plane of immanence is taken as a universal subject or as any object *to which* immanence is attributed, the transcendental is entirely denatured, for it then simply redoubles the empirical (as with Kant), and immanence is distorted, for it then finds itself enclosed in the transcendent.”³⁶ Thus, the complementarity of the two readings reveals some information about the topology that they presuppose, and it behooves us to look elsewhere for a new space. I argue that an impersonal or non-subjective transcendental, which is defined by immanence, is capable of both restituting the truth in Quinney’s and Leggett’s accounts and providing a different account of the “I” of the poem, the subject in lyric poetry, or simply the lyric subject.

One important consequence of the inability to reach an impersonal transcendental in these accounts is observed in their situating the lyric subject at the level of the speaking subject in relation to an object-scene in the poem (the so-called “lyric speaker”). I follow Mutlu Konuk Blasing in identifying a “triangular relationship,” which requires distinguishing the “I” of the poem from the speaking subject in the poem.³⁷ Writing about Stevens’s “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a

³⁶ Deleuze, “Immanence: A Life,” 27.

³⁷ “The poet is concurrently arranging the sound of words and articulating a natural object/scene and a speaking subject in relation to it. In this triangular relationship, the subject and the object are termini

Blackbird,” she distinguishes between two levels: the self encounters itself as an object under the gaze of the blackbird, which is what looking at a blackbird is, and yet “the I’s very words are also objects, his ‘others’ that shape his subjectivity.”³⁸ Words as the “others” of the lyric “I”: this means that words encompass possible worlds, which themselves already involve speaking subjects and objects-scenes. The “I” must find or “encounter” itself with these words and in their worlds. As we have said, the I is already another through its status as the realization of the possible, but it is the peculiarity of language to give possible worlds a reality independent of their realization. This means that as a linguistic being the lyric “I” itself, concurrent with finding itself out in words, can envelope or arrange possible worlds; it can stage a subject who speaks in relation to a scene in the medium of a voice.

Developing Stevens’s own terminology, Blasing defines this space in which the “I” is determined as the “sounds of words.” Words are acoustic phenomena and they carry out referential operations, functions from which they are inseparable. However, sounds of words mark another zone in excess of both sounds and significations: they “eke out something from the physical, something that is other than physical but less than metaphysical.”³⁹ It is like the “song” of the mouse singer Josephine in Kafka’s story, which is indistinguishable from the common squeaking of the mouse people but

written by the words. The word-objects shape the subject himself in the same way that the word ‘blackbird’ shapes the parameters of his discourse” (Blasing, *Lyric Poetry*, 147-148, note. 15).

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid., 135.

in which one also hears something of “our poor, brief childhood,” “lost, irretrievable happiness,” but also the “small measure of incomprehensible but nonetheless enduring and irrepressible cheerfulness” of the present.⁴⁰ What is heard in the zone marked by the otherness of the sounds of words, since we “hear something in or through them,” is a “voice.”⁴¹ Thus, apprehended from the perspective of a non-subjective transcendental, the lyric subject is already an emotion, a rhythm, a voice. It is what “arranges” the object-scene and its speaking subject. It is not *in* the poem as such. It is the architectural principle of the poem.

This “I” cannot be traced from the speaking subject in the poem. This is what Quinney does when she focuses on the “sensations” indexed to the experience of the subject who is frustrated with the family romance. But the source of feeling in the poem is attached to the house before being attached to the family. She reads the famous “farewell” to the mother and the father in “The Auroras of Autumn” as the sign of relinquishing an idealization without the possibility of a replacement, which is therefore ripe with poignancy. But what precedes this is the poem’s delineation of a universe with an inhabitant of its own, with which it starts:

This is where the serpent lives, the bodiless.
His head is air. Beneath his tip at night
Eyes open and fix on us in every sky.

⁴⁰ “Josephine, the Singer or The Mouse People,” in *Kafka’s Selected Stories*, trans. & ed. Stanley Corngold (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2007), 103. Kafka’s passage reads as follows: “Something of our poor, brief childhood is in it; something of lost, irretrievable happiness; but something of the active present-day life is in it as well, its small measure of incomprehensible but nonetheless enduring and irrepressible cheerfulness. And all this is really proclaimed, not in a booming voice, but rather lightly, in whispers, intimately, sometimes a little hoarsely. Naturally, it is squeaking. How could it be anything else? Squeaking is the language of our people...”

⁴¹ Blasing, *Lyric Poetry*, 135.

Or is this another wriggling out of the egg,
Another image at the end of the cave,
Another bodiless for the body's slough?

This is where the serpent lives. This is his nest,
These fields, these hills, these tinted distances,
And the pines above and along and beside the sea. (I. 1-9)

This universe, a territory, a "nest," which houses the incorporeal within the corporeal, is a universe that "we" arrive late. It makes us equivocal beings and forces us to live a life which is simultaneously the life of something else:

These lights may finally attain a pole
In the midmost midnight and find the serpent there,

In another nest, the master of the maze
Of body and air and forms and images,
Relentlessly in possession of happiness.

This is his poison: that *we* should disbelieve
Even that...

(my emphasis, I. 14-20)

The main question in relation to the poem is why has it been necessary to pass through the figure of the "house" and its correlates ("nest," "cabin," "throne," et cetera). The house is the figure in relation to which the "I" gains its determination: it is because one starts with the house (not despite of this) that the feeling that constitutes the "I" is "dispossession," *Unheimlichkeit*. Disappointment presupposes dispossession, just as the house precedes its inhabitants, the subject and the family romance. "The Auroras of Autumn" is more of an elegy of the territory than of the family romance. This is what conditions the repeated opening lines ("Farewell to an idea...") in the three cantos (ii-

iv) that follow the first. Quinney argued that its “full blooded” nostalgia is what makes the “farewell” of the “Auroras” different, together with the fact that the idea (of the family romance) is bidden farewell without being superseded.⁴² We can argue similarly for the territory. The poem is an elegy for the territory –the house (canto iii), work (ix), benevolent forces, the meeting of “truth and beauty” (viii), security and fraternity (ix), the power of poetry (the territorial refrain) (viii), et cetera– but an elegy sang at the precise moment of the dissolution or decoding of the territory.

Leggett comes very close to the constitutive or transcendental feeling of the poem with the idea of an “external imagination,” which he sees as the principal figure of the poem’s “argument” –which “is devoted to the consequences of this principle [of metamorphosis as the principle of an external, inhuman imagination] on a person who is forced to acknowledge its presence.”⁴³ I find the idea of an “exteriority” promising since one can argue that the intensity of Stevens’s poetry lies in its capacity to make the exteriority to which it is a response felt. His poetry is always the poetry of a native, but, as Deleuze and Guattari remind us, the native turns out to be someone who has its center outside its territory. In this sense, the native is eccentric –the only alien in the house. Hence the affinity of the problematics of “exteriority” with the *Unheimlichkeit* that is constitutive of the lyric “I.”

However, the tone Leggett detects in “Auroras” is far from this. He finds in the poem an “innocent acceptance,” which “follows from the speaker’s acknowledgement

⁴² Quinney, *The Poetics of Disappointment*, 131.

⁴³ B.J. Leggett, *Wallace Stevens and Poetic Theory*, 178.

that the principle of metamorphosis represented by the auroras is, as in Focillon's aesthetic, a principle necessary to the continuing life of all natural forms."⁴⁴ In fact, Leggett is forced to this conclusion not only through the authority of Focillon's book as Stevens's source, he is also responding to what he takes to be a typical misreading by several critics: the reading which sets the freedom of the poet/speaker against the necessity symbolized by the auroras and thereby makes the subjective imagination the focus of the poem. However, as Stevens's textual source confirms, the poem takes as its central concern the objectivity of an external principle. The seventh canto of "Auroras" is at the center of the poem for Leggett, and he draws on it to demonstrate why any reading, which serves to make room for the subjective, based on the supposed opposition between law and caprice (necessity and chance) must be misguided. According to Leggett, the imagination in this canto signifies the principle of metamorphosis that Stevens appropriated from Focillon:

Is there an imagination that sits enthroned
As grim as it is benevolent, the just
And the unjust, which in the midst of summer stops

To imagine winter? When the leaves are dead,
Does it take its place in the north and enfold itself,
Goat-leaper, crystallized and luminous, sitting

In the highest night? And do these heavens adorn
And proclaim it, the white creator of black, jetted
By extinguishings, even of planets as may be,

Even of earth, even of sight, in snow,
Except as needed by way of majesty,
In the sky, as crown and diamond cabala?

⁴⁴ Ibid., 189.

It leaps through us, through all our heavens leaps,
Extinguishing our planets, one by one,
Leaving, of where we were and looked, of where

We knew each other and of each other thought,
A shivering residue, chilled and forgone,
Except for that crown and mystical cabala.

But it dare not leap by chance in its own dark.
It must change from destiny to slight caprice.
And thus its jettied tragedy, its stele

And shape and mournful making move to find
What must unmake it and, at last, what can,
Say, a flippant communication under the moon. (X)

First, Leggett shows that the “cosmic principle” taken as “an originator of transient forms manifest through metamorphosis” does not have to be understood as a lawfulness that cannot tolerate, and is therefore contradicted by, any instance of caprice: “it is not that forms obey no law, but that they obey their own *secret law*, the ignorance of which renders their action capricious to the observer.” The line “It must change from destiny to slight caprice” summarizes what takes hold in the context defined by the auroras. How should one understand it? As Leggett argues, what is in question here is not a “principle” that used to apply to lawful necessity but has shifted to become another principle, which now applies to caprice as freedom from any law. For caprice here is “not lawlessness but an *inexplicable law* –a change that is impossible to explain or to predict for those who observe it from outside.”⁴⁵ In other words, the force represented by the auroras does not change principle (from lawfulness to lawlessness). We are

⁴⁵ Ibid., 187; my emphasis.

confronted here with the “result” of *its* movement, whose principle is the metamorphosis of forms.

This reading reveals the shortcomings of the reliance on the opposition of lawfulness and freedom from law, since the (external) transformation of forms associated with a principle can be shown to be the consequence of the principle following its own “secret” and “inexplicable” laws. Harold Bloom, for instance, subscribes to the version of necessity versus caprice, and he identifies the latter with “disorder, which is the dependence of any hypostasis upon our wildness, our light caprice of freedom, if there is to be meaning of any kind.”⁴⁶ This attempt to supplant the law, however, runs into a paradox, since in this way “we” (that is to say “I”) becomes the source of the law. (The statement with which Bloom concludes his reading confirms this: “All that the flash reveals to Stevens is change and ourselves as the origin of the meaning of change.”)

The second point has to do with the “making” and “unmaking” in the last tercet. The common misreading on this point, according to Leggett, has a double motivation. It is due to both formulating another agency (the “flippant communication,” presumably of the poet/subject) for the unmaking than the auroras themselves and concluding thereby that the auroras are destroyed, which in a sense is wrong. The reading that takes the auroras to be destroyed is related to the previous point according to which they have been taken to signify necessity or destiny. Since necessity is contrasted with caprice,

⁴⁶ Harold Bloom, *Wallace Stevens: The Poems of Our Climate* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1977), 275.

itself associated with freedom, the agent of destruction, for Bloom for example, would be the observing poet. Leggett to the contrary, following his reading of the principle of transformation of forms, suggests that (as “stele” and “shape” indicate) what is unmade is the formal organization. And thus the agent of unmaking is the auroras themselves. The “tragedy” for the observer lies in the knowledge of the formally inaccessible creative principle. This also explains why the principle which sustains the life of forms should seem as “say, a flippant communication”: “since this form ‘leaps through us’ and all our universe, ‘Extinguishing our planets, one by one,’ we and our world are the forms that now manifest it and that it must escape in its relentless pursuit of its own renewal in new forms.”⁴⁷

In this way, Leggett reaches the idea of an exteriority, whose value lies not least in the demonstration that it can circumvent dualisms such as that of chance and necessity. However, in his account the lyric “I” bears no relation to this outside; rather, exteriority is defined solely in reference to the presentation in the poem, what is sometimes also called its “fiction.” This results in equating exteriority with a transcendent objective reality whose life envelops the subject. The problem with this view is that in this form exteriority cannot be distinguished from a mind or subject, albeit a “greater” one. If Leggett related his external principle to the lyric “I” he could provide a different account in which exteriority would signify immanence as such and the poem itself would be the result of a response to immanence. In other words, it would

⁴⁷ Leggett, *Wallace Stevens and Poetic Theory*, 188.

define the transcendental space in which the “I” is determined as feeling or voice, which in turn arranges or envelopes the speaking subject and the object-scene in the poem.

Leggett shares the same definition of the space of poetry with the critics he disagrees with. It is an “interiority” that corresponds to the mind which externalizes itself, and the mind inevitably designates the consciousness of the poet. For example, Harold Bloom, whose reading Leggett has found most problematic, suggests, in describing the general problematics of “The Auroras of Autumn,” that “watching the auroras, Stevens reenacts the central Romantic confrontations between the power of a poet’s mind and the object-world or the universe of death.”⁴⁸ Leggett is not outside the paradigm implied here. Taking the “fiction” of “Auroras” as the continuation of Focillon’s text, which he demonstrates to be its source, he contests the idea that what is exhibited in the poem is the poet’s mind against a chaotic universe. Rather, reversing the relation and its values, he argues that a greater and coherent cosmic principle of life is in display here, of which the persona in the poem is an “observer.” But the idea that the poem embodies the “interiority” that is attributed to the poet (that the lyric “I” refers to the person “Stevens”) remains intact. Since what he questions is not the status of the “I” as the person but the “fiction” that it brings about. The alternative would be to conceive the poem without any interiority of its own. It must also be pointed out that neither can the force of identifying textual sources be any greater than any other context relevant for the poem once the question is posed at the level of the lyric “I,” which is not a prior interiority or identity. In fact, that Leggett’s reading sounds at odds with the

⁴⁸ Bloom, *Wallace Stevens*, 254.

tone of the poem should be seen as a symptom. Quinney's account, on the contrary, sounds more convincing because her focus is on the subject as disappointed, which brings her closer to the tone of *Unheimlichkeit*. And her formula, "linguistic representation of psychological states," gives her some margin of freedom from the presentation or "fiction" of the poem –although her position on the lyric "I" is still inadequate.

I would like to systematize and recapitulate what I have been saying on the question of exteriority since it refers to a broader methodological problem, rather than having to do with the reading of a poem. It seems possible to conceive of Stevens's poetry as a "response" to a virtual exteriority, which functions as a center due to its obscure coherence and at the periphery of which the poem forms itself. This means that the poem does not have or *is* not an "interiority." It forms itself as a response to an exteriority, which does not inform it. Thus we cannot take the poem's presentations as if the poem is informed by a mind. For, that which is responded to is not a subject but immanence as such. The most common practice of criticism, however, sees in the poem the institution of some interiority. It does this because it adheres to a model according to which the poem is formed by the mind confronting the world or the subject facing the transcendent reality. Bloom's above explanation of the romantic plot of "Auroras" is a good example. From this perspective, the mind can inform the poem because in this relation the poem appears as the externalization of the mind, of the interiority that is attributed to the subject. Thus one can read the poem as about the vicissitudes issuing from the subject's "confrontations." Such a conclusion is available to this model

although it remains necessarily external to the poem and its presentation. It is external because, say, the fact that in a poem the mind appears to confront the fascinating, terrifying, or awe-inspiring auroras cannot of necessity lead anyone to assume that this then constitutes the model that the poem embodies or expresses: the subject confronting the world, facing the transcendent reality.⁴⁹ All one can say is that the poem implies a determination which brings about the presentation of a mind confronting the auroras, which does not make the poem embody or express that presentation as a model or, ultimately, any model at all. The response, which will be formulated as a determination that belongs to a different moment than the presentation, must give us the meaning of such a presentation: what kind of response is this an effect of?

This argument is particularly revealing in the context of the “Auroras” since, as Quinney’s reading attempts to demonstrate, if we follow the “movement” of the poem we find that it does not allow for but rather annuls the formation of a contemplating subject. The subject is in perpetual crisis, having to concede that whatever it can envisage has to meet with disaster eventually. However this observation would remain incomplete without the complementary dimension of exteriority, intimated by Leggett’s reading, which does not contradict this fate of the subject but, on the contrary, could

⁴⁹ The ideas of “application” in literary criticism (phenomenology or deconstruction applied to Stevens, et cetera) must find their legitimacy in the recognition of such externality of any model to the object of application. Since, say, subject-object defines just one epistemological model among other possible ones, why not try a different one? My point is rather that what I called the virtual exteriority, which may function as a center of orientation for poetry (just as Stevens said the others do for the poet), forbids the formation of a model because it forbids the poem to have an interiority. Interiority is the *sine qua non* for a critical model; it is what the model will claim to identify from its external position, in a correspondence that will have legitimized it.

provide an explanation for its crisis through the relation that the lyric “I” entertains with the outside.

“Dispossession,” which is produced in relation to a virtual exteriority, does not inform the content as something that can be deduced from the poem; rather, it functions in the poem to produce the dissonance that accompanies the idea of the “house” and its correlates (“family,” “work,” “innocence,” “fraternity” and so on). I would agree with Quinney insofar as she assigns disappointment a similar disjunctive, rather than informative, function in the poem. But I would insist that dispossession marks a positive and architectural determination referring to an outside in relation to which the lyric “I” acquires its voice, rather than indicating a negative subjective condition.

Leggett’s account, on the other hand, ultimately falls short of portraying a virtual exteriority. Instead it gives us a transcendent interiority, which may be external in relation to the subject. Here the subject is not so much in crisis as it is passive, an “observer.” For example, Leggett argues that “the paradox of the poem is not that we imagine this presence [i.e., the external imagination] but that it imagines us, not that we live its life vicariously but that it lives ours fully and completely.”⁵⁰ While it is true that an exteriority that we imagine is not the paradox, it is not true that therefore it imagines us; rather, it puts up a resistance to our attempts to imagine it, but our attempt also becomes a means for it to repeat itself. While it is true that we do not vicariously live the life of an exteriority, it is not true that therefore it lives ours fully and completely; rather, it pushes us to an eccentric life, splits us, and turns us into equivocal beings.

⁵⁰ Leggett, *Wallace Stevens and Poetic Theory*, 193.

Leggett does not conceive an outside for the subject (i.e., immanence); rather, he detects in Stevens's mind the "fiction" of an external imagination or life principle.

I argue that this was no fiction of Stevens's mind, but a reality he was confronted with, the response to which gave him his poems and, to his surprise, an explanation for the reason for poetry. Because it is determined as a response, the poetry itself can offer us the conclusions that derive from the preceding arguments: the repetition of difference and the subject caught in the circles of equivocity. The seventh canto of "Auroras" that I have cited above is indeed central to the poem. It concerns the nature of poetic creation. The last two tercets establish a link between the "enthroned" imagination that "dare not leap by chance in its own dark" and the "flippant communication" as that which "can" unmake it, owing to what "must" be unmade in it: presumably the capacity of unmaking is prefigured by an intrinsic tendency in the imagination. The "enthroned" imagination must repeat itself, "leap," in response to the shock of the poem, a "flippant communication." If it cannot leap "in" its own dark, however, this is because it does not have "interiority". That is why this outside which the poem puts into its perspective, *pace* Leggett, is not a "presence"; one cannot exit "into" it. It is an exteriority. This is in fact why poetry must be radically metaphoric, just as the self is irredeemably equivocal for Stevens. The poem cannot occupy this outside; rather, it "can" repeat this difference indicated by its exteriority. It has been noted that for Stevens, elsewhere as at the beginning of this canto, the conception of a dual or "black-and-white" poetic process "defines imagination as the faculty that

‘broods’ –both contemplates and generates– its own absence.”⁵¹ In this canto, the black is “jetted” or created by “extinguishings” of the white, just as “the white creator of black” is extinguished, “jetted” itself. Jetting, like brooding, refers to the double nature of the poetic imagination: metaphor’s jetting makes a being for the contemplation of the poet, but it is an extinguished, darkened being.

What is important here is that the “absence” of the flippant or capricious poetic creation responds to the “exteriority” of the sovereign imagination: since the poem too is devoid of interiority, it must generate itself as an absence of the exteriority that it repeats, the exteriority that makes a “leap” in response to this flippant communication. It does not (cannot) fix exteriority. Rather, the poem is a “passage” as “the change from destiny to slight caprice,” in which the “mournful” movement of the outside in a “flippant communication” is displayed. To be absent other than a passage defines the authority of the poem. Thus, “caprice” and “flippant communication” are the figures for the movement of the poem, and they indeed need not designate the poet as subject. But neither do they have to refer to the effect of a principle of change on a presumed “observer,” as Leggett has it. In fact, what Leggett needed to theorize was an “eccentric” position for the poet. Anxious to remove the centrality of subjective imagination, he introduces a hypothetical observer of the objective movement. He even had the vocabulary for the identification of an eccentric poet as the consequence of the immanent movement of a virtual exteriority. For, correcting the critics’ faulty

⁵¹ Mutlu Konuk Blasing, *American Poetry: The Rhetoric of Its Forms* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1987), 94. Blasing is referring to Stevens’s “Metaphor As Degeneration,” which relates ‘brooding,’ which refers first to a “white” man and then a man in a “black” space, to the conclusion that “being/ Includes death and the imagination.”

impression of the lack of obeying laws, he has suggested that one could instead think of obeying one's own "secret" laws. Against the impression of lawlessness, he has suggested considering "inexplicable" laws. If there is, however, a position of observation from the outside, as he hypothesized, it would correspond to the "explication" of the "secret." But such an explication must necessarily designate an eccentric position, and with eccentricity we also leave behind "laws" and enter the regime of "chance," since destiny does not exclude chance.

VI.

"Linguistic representation of psychological states" is the formula Quinney uses to characterize her own procedure of reading. Who is representing whose psychological state? If the self presupposed by this formula seems to preexists the language in which the lyric "I" must come into being, this is because it asserts that the linguistic material is not already emotionally charged. Then the affect must be attributed to a self; it becomes the emotion of a subject. This remains Quinney's position although her account itself involves the best demonstration of the difference between a subjective feeling and an affect that refers to an assemblage. For the subjective feeling of disappointment does not necessarily have such an effect as "relinquishing the general promise of selfhood" or "finding a fault with the condition of being a subject." This being the trait through which disappointment is defined. One must even admit that it *cannot* have such an effect since it is attributed to a "subject." As part of an assemblage, however, we have seen how disappointment functions as a force precisely when the subject loses ground.

If we maintain, on the other hand, that the linguistic material itself is emotionally charged, we must affirm that the subject who “chooses” the words in a poem cannot exist before and outside language. For what makes the lyric subject an individuated “I” who possesses or brings about an “audible” difference in language while it does not cease to be the generic “I” of language –thus being nobody in particular or anyone who says or reads “I”– is its formation in response to an emotionally charged linguistic material. And the linguistic material is emotionally charged because it preserves the lived but forgotten history of a subject who “intended” to mean words in the process of learning to utter them and, therefore, at a moment in which they were also mere sounds. This defines a moment or crossing that cannot possibly be fixed: hearing sounds as words. In other words, the materials of language are emotionally charged only because language has to be learned and the subject does not come equipped with it. In Deleuze’s terminology we could say that the event of the acquisition of language defines “an empty time where one sees the event yet to come and already happened.” This history, therefore, is itself an indefinite life that cannot be attributed to the subject and the object, although it is actualized in them: it corresponds to a life which “does not itself have moments,” but presents an empty time as the time of the event.⁵²

Blasing makes this argument convincingly against de Man’s assertion, in his famous meditation on the question of the translatability of Hölderlin’s “bread,” that the word cannot be intended since it is already given in language:

⁵² Deleuze, “Immanence: A Life,” 29.

Yet I have *already* intended to say “bread”; I have a history of desiring and learning to produce the sounds of that word out of random noise and muscular activity. “I” am *constituted* as one who has inaugurally intended the word “bread” –and thus did “my” part to make sure that it stays a “given.” The word in its materiality is not just “a device of meaning,” and the way we use language is not “purely formal,” because we are historically bonded to the physical materials of words.” (8)⁵³

The “I” and “my” are in quotation marks in this passage because they refer to a history through which “I” became what “I” am, and yet in which “I” also was not yet present as the person who can say “I.” “I” come into being in the experienced gap or crossing that separates the sound from the word, and this lived history which I forgot, which remains like the immemorial in memory, makes possible someone who will say “I.” Words carry, because they preserve it, the emotional history of the subject –perhaps even better, its pre-history that co-exists with its history. Thus, I can choose words because this choice presupposes being already chosen by them. I find, reencounter, and choose myself returning to that site of the pain and pleasure of words, the condition of possibility of which is the process of learning the mother tongue. The poetic “I” does not exist outside this loop or retrograde movement. Therefore, the construction of the lyrical “I” in language can be understood in the most literal sense. The poet first hears himself and speaks to himself within the word that he puts down. Before this he does not exist. If he is to recognize himself and see if he can continue, it is going to be there: with the word, in the word. The mother tongue constitutes an outside to which the poet responds (or in response to which he comes into being).

⁵³ Blasing, *Lyric Poetry*.

With this description of the mother tongue as affectively charged material, Blasing's theory of lyric poetry identifies a genuine plane of immanence for the lyric. The mother tongue constitutes the virtual dimension since it preserves the events or singularities of the history of language acquisition, which are actualized with the subject of poetry. Since the non-actualized events do not lack any reality, the lyric subject is simply not an "a priori, nonlinguistic entity, with a given 'nature'."⁵⁴ The statement that the subject must be actualized can be understood in this way: it emerges in the crux of a communication with a virtual center. This is the equally unavoidable answer to the apparently unavoidable question of how the fact that poems are written by a definite person with full-blooded intentions can be possibly ignored. For example, Helen Vendler elaborates in response to a criticism directed at her suggestion that "Le Monocle de Mon Oncle" is about Stevens's "failed marriage" –after affirming that it is "normal to begin with the life-occasion as we deduce it from the poem; it is only an error when one ends there"– in the following manner:

To my mind there is no lyric poet who does not have the aim of "self-expression," from Sappho to Ashbery. Of course, only "fantastic and wonderful" self-expression can qualify as interesting literature. But to deny that poetry is the projection of fact (e.g., a failed romantic endeavor) onto the plane of language is to deny Stevens' own sense of poetry: "The real is only the base. But it is the base" (OP, 160). Are we not to think of Whitman's Civil War poems as about the Civil War, as well as activities of the imagination? The historical and cultural bases of poetry are important to it; it is not an exercise of disembodied "imagination." (80; note 7)⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Ibid., 22; note 20.

⁵⁵ Helen Vendler, *Wallace Stevens: Words Chosen Out of Desire*.

It is evident from what Vendler says in defense of her position, to which the above passage is the footnote, that she is targeting mediocre attempts to unearth the so-called philosophical discourse in Stevens's poetry, an endeavor against which she proposes to turn to Stevens on "human feeling."⁵⁶ One might sympathize with Vendler's doubts about the value of some Stevens criticism; however, her choice of words might equally be said to register the anxiety felt for an alternative economy of a poetic subject whose coordinates are described by Blasing: a somehow "disembodied" imaginative function that would nevertheless be capable of sounding "ghostly" realms with *real effects*. The irony is that although Vendler wants to dispel the "disembodied" to leave room for the "historical and cultural bases of poetry," the subject of an experience that is apparently equally "deducible" from and "projectable" to the language of poetry without remainder can only be a disembodied subject who is ultimately outside historical and cultural bases, which remain inconsequential for the formation of the subject. I will propose below the term "lyric assemblage" in order to account for the dimensions implicated by the question of the subject in poetry. The power of the idea of a lyric assemblage will be recognized if one reflects on the capacity of, say, the poetry of Stevens to transmit its effects. For, how could a criticism like Vendler's, which is among the most sophisticated, register the effects of Stevens's poetry despite its limiting ideology of the subject, if it were not due to the effects of the Stevens assemblage? As for "self-expression," that the poet may be expressing herself

⁵⁶ She writes: "To tether Stevens' poems to human feeling is at least to remove him from the 'world of ghosts' where he is so often located, and to insist that he is a poet of more than epistemological questions alone" (Ibid., 6).

does not change the fact that she must first find herself out as she has been expressed on “the plane of language” as such. One can even say that the possibility of self-expression depends on a first order expression, which constitutes the space of organization of something like a self. Furthermore, even though shifting the focus to “feeling” might ultimately prove to be more productive, how can one circumvent the possibility that feeling will reveal epistemological problems proper to its own nature, problems that might even dissipate the falsity of the “epistemological questions”?⁵⁷ In any case, a position such as Vendler’s, which is not without some mystery perhaps the most common position on poetry, must recognize its criticism in Blasing’s schema: “The subject of poetry, the “I,” is “human” only insofar as she is able to maintain and communicate an intimacy with the inhuman linguistic code by which she became “human.” This is why the subject in language is not “human” in any ordinary sense of the term, and we need to think poetry outside humanism.”⁵⁸

VII.

In the most literal terms, Stevens conceived the fact of existence of the others as the occasion for poetry. Poetry emanates from their existence; they (their lives) are *its* expressions. In 1942 he writes to Hi Simons:

⁵⁷ Quinney (*The Poetics of Disappointment*) has also questioned the implicit separation between the epistemological and the affective in Vendler’s approach. In fact, this was her starting point: “These disappointments occur in what Vendler calls the (putatively remote) ‘epistemological’ field. But it is crucial to recognize that for Stevens epistemology is tied to “human feeling”; that is, the loss of hope for the self and its knowledge is as dispiriting as any more tangible erotic loss” (98).

⁵⁸ Blasing, *Lyric Poetry*, 9.

When a poet makes his imagination the imagination of other people, he does so by making them see the world through his eyes. Most modern activity is the undoing of that very job. The world has been painted; most modern activity is getting rid of the paint to get at the world itself. Powerful integrations of the imagination are difficult to get away from. *I am surprised that you have a difficulty with this*, when the chances are that every day you see all sorts of things through the eyes of other people in terms of their imaginations. This power is one of the poet's chief powers.⁵⁹ (402; my emphasis)

This letter is an earlier statement of what Stevens recapitulates much more forcefully, in 1951, in the passage that I referred to at the beginning of this chapter. How could the same person who wrote these about other people and their existence in relation to poetry (and the "I" of the poet) also write the much commented "Adagia" entry: "Life is an affair of people not of places. But for me life is an affair of places and that is the trouble."⁶⁰ This statement is usually taken to signify Stevens's famous "reticence" and his indifference toward the social and the worldly. More interestingly, it has been suggested that it implies his recognition of the gregarious life and its comforts with full knowledge of his own inability to participate in them, however he may wish to do so. And in direct opposition to the thesis of this view, it has also been suggested that the statement is a confession of Stevens's poetic strategy to silence the voice of the other by converting it into a discourse of the self.⁶¹ But the statement can simply be an

⁵⁹ In *Letters of Wallace Stevens*, ed. Holly Stevens (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1966).

⁶⁰ Wallace Stevens, *Opus Posthumous*, 185.

⁶¹ Respectively, Quinney in her *The Poetics of Disappointment* and Gerald L. Bruns in his "Stevens without Epistemology" (in *Wallace Stevens: The Poetics of Modernism*, ed. Albert Gelpi [London and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985]). Quinney writes that "for life to be an affair of places means for it to be a life of solitary self-consciousness, divided longing, and nostalgia. The tranquility of

explication in poetics considered in relation to the other. The “trouble” is that subjectivity ceases to be restricted to the ego; places start to assume faces. The poetics of the other invests the structure of the field of perception, which transcends the selves that actualize it –the reason why persons disappear into the landscape and other people become expressions of possible worlds. To appreciate the significance of what the above passage from Stevens’s letter suggests, imagine what would happen to the world it describes if the others suddenly disappeared from it. Because the I itself is another, the world itself would simply disappear. The I does not survive the dissolution of the world. As a poet, Stevens firmly situates himself within the dimension of expression that is correlated with the other.

In her excellent study of American poetry, which analyzes individual poets from Emerson to Ashbery according to the structural tropes that function in each *oeuvre* as its productive machinery, Mutlu Konuk Blasing charts metaphor as the structural trope in Stevens with its consequent world of resemblances and correspondences. Metaphor defines a universe which expands in circles of resemblance or correspondence; therefore, its representations are supposed to be adequate to the reality metaphor itself posits. Blasing shows that Stevens proceeded to shape his own poetics through a dislocation of the Emersonian “alignment of nature with fate and the mind with freedom.” For Stevens, it is nature that is free, but no longer being an external fate it is intimately bound up with temporality. In the same way, time is not an objective measure

‘innocence’ is not for him” (128). Quinney’s view has some truth, while Bruns’ is simply self-contradictory.

but explains the nature of the mind. Time is therefore the element that defines the community of the nature and the mind within the new alignment. If this element appears to be time, it is because being enters time by means of poetic language, given that metaphor is “not simply the change of A to B but the injection of time and change into the static.”

In this thoroughly temporal universe of the mind, nature, and language, the adequacy of representation is not going to be a problem. Thus, in Stevens, the possibility of the knowledge of nature does not constitute a problem. On the contrary, only the mind knows nature, which no longer designates an external law but an internal truth. But this makes for a dimension of depth, which constitutes the mind as a meditation born out of memory and desire, Eros and death. The evil that haunts the mind, in Stevens, is that it never rests. If we return to metaphor itself, we see that this diachronic understanding of metaphor posits a “timeless center,” in relation to which our nature and language become “eccentric.” As Blasing suggests, Stevens seeks to center in eccentricity, and he finds a rhetoric that will be central (will not be opposed to truth) in its eccentricity: “the very eccentricity of metaphor is its ‘truth,’ since the ‘world’ of the human ‘beholder’ is itself temporal and rhetorical in nature.”⁶²

It is possible to argue that Stevens’s poetics of the other is what conditions this metaphoric rhetoric and its world of analogies. Perhaps the main effect of the other lies in the fact that the “I” finds itself situated in a past world in the face of the possible world that the other expresses. And it is perhaps this trait that explains best Stevens’s

⁶² Blasing, *American Poetry*, 88, 93, 87.

insistence on the others in relation to poetry. The other functions as the “timeless center” in relation to which a temporal and eccentric universe constitutes itself, which is nevertheless central in its eccentricity since the other is no one in particular. The essential temporality of such a universe is the past, because the past is the dimension in which everything becomes available in its representability. The past is the dimension in which the before and the after become possible. The lyric “I” is co-extensive with the past, and the world it claims is an eccentric world, since eccentricity is “the temporal passage in which humans and their discourse are made and unmade.”⁶³ So finally, for Stevens, a poetry that can speak about the world (virtually everything under the sun), if the poet can situate himself in the perspective of the other. Thus it is no wonder that poetic language becomes a worthy subject on its own in Stevens’s poetry, since poetic language is the expression adequate to the other. It “expresses” the (past) world in its constant generation and degeneration, and is therefore capable of revealing the poetry of the subject and the nature, which is simply people living their lives. Hence the role of the poet: “to help people live their lives.”⁶⁴ Language must always be the language of the other in Stevens, in the sense that it speaks about “all sorts of things [seen] through the eyes of other people in terms of their imaginations.” Perhaps the limit of Stevens’s poetry is the world in the absence of others, an elemental world of depths, a world without the possible. Hence its profoundly aesthetic commitment. It requires the existence of the others to legitimize the lyric “I” and the world in which everything

⁶³ Ibid., 85.

⁶⁴ Wallace Stevens, “The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words,” in *The Necessary Angel* (New York: Vintage Books, 1951), 29.

passes as though “things in some procession of the dead” (“Sunday Morning,” I. 10). It is on this language and rhetoric that we must now focus.

3. THE LANGUAGE OF THE OUTSIDE IN STEVENS

I.

Here is Stevens on the possible in "Prologues To What Is Possible":

I

There was an ease of mind that was like being alone in a boat
at sea,
A boat carried forward by waves resembling the bright backs
of rowers,
Gripping their oars, as if they were sure of the way to their
destination,
Bending over and pulling themselves erect on the wooden
handles,
Wet with water and sparkling in the one-ness of their motion.

The boat was built of stones that had lost their weight and be-
ing no longer heavy
Had left in them only a brilliance, of unaccustomed origin,
So that he that stood up in the boat leaning and looking be-
fore him
Did not pass like someone voyaging out of and beyond the
familiar.
He belonged to the far-foreign departure of his vessel and was
part of it,
Part of the speculum of fire on its prow, its symbol, whatever
it was,
Part of the glass-like sides on which it glided over the salt-
stained water,
As he traveled alone, like a man lured on by a syllable without
any meaning,
A syllable of which he felt, with an appointed sureness,
That it contained the meaning into which he wanted to enter,
A meaning which, as he entered it, would shatter the boat and
leave the oarsmen quiet
As at a point of central arrival, an instant moment, much or
little,
Removed from any shore, from any man or woman, and need-
ing none.

II

The metaphor stirred his fear. The object with which he was
compared

Was beyond his recognizing. By this he knew that likeness of
him extended
Only a little way, and not beyond, unless between himself
And things beyond resemblance there was this and that in-
tended to be recognized,
The this and that in the enclosures of hypotheses
On which men speculated in summer when they were half
asleep.

What self, for example, did he contain that had not yet been
loosed,
Snarling in him for discovery as his attentions spread.

As if all his hereditary lights were suddenly increased
By an access of color, a new and unobserved, slight dithering,
The smallest lamp, which added its puissant flick, to which he
gave
A name and privilege over the ordinary of his commonplace—

A flick which added to what was real and its vocabulary,
The way some first thing coming into Northern trees
Adds to them the whole vocabulary of the South,
The way the earliest single light in the evening sky, in spring,
Creates a fresh universe out of nothingness by adding itself,
The way a look or a touch reveals its unexpected magnitudes.

There is something of a celebration of the possible in this poem issuing from its illustration that what depends on the possible is nothing less than the existence of a world. And it chooses to do this by displaying the process of what becomes of the self when the idea of the self itself is made into a hypothesis. I will come back to this passage at which the concept of the self is transformed by the notion of the possible. There is also exhibited in the poem two different movements that correspond to its division into two cantos.

The first canto offers a strange fable, a “metaphor” as the beginning of the second canto will designate it, which portrays, if not exactly a world, then a universe

that may be defined by the absence of possibility: the constant fluctuation of the waves; floating like a vessel (itself part of foreignness) in a foreign voyage seemingly without end; being removed from the shores and without the presence of the others. This is the outside defined by its movement of deterritorialization, whose line one follows as though “lured on by a syllable without any meaning.” As always, the sign of exteriority is sound, which comes from and carries one toward the outside. The second canto will say of this outside that it is beyond “recognition.” It inspires fear too. But it also inspires certainty. Since to feel something with an “appointed sureness” means that the place of the appointment designates the birthplace of this feeling and of whom is having this feeling. It is a “central” place. The birthplace of the poet perhaps who comes into being in that site at the intersection of a syllable without meaning and the meaning “wanted” in that syllable. Hence, a birth which is an event that is retained in memory, although it cannot be remembered and recognized. It is the unforgettable, the “central arrival.” This may in turn explain the “ease of mind” that is nonetheless attributed to the scene. Although it is a foreign place, it is also the place of the sureness of destination in “oneness.” The figure of the “rowers” is interesting in this respect. It is a figure of collective activity, an activity governed by a rhythm, suggesting this as the universe of the language of the poet who is at home in a universe of floating signs and is one with their foreign motion. Yet the center in which he would have observed his own birth, the “brilliance, of an unaccustomed origin,” cannot, as the poem knows, be entered without “shattering” the fable.

All of this leaves us with a limitation. The second canto starts with this idea: the outside cannot be recognized. It is beyond the self; there is the self and the beyond, and the likenesses that can be projected by the self are of little value. But then comes a redeeming thought marked by the “unless.” Unless that which goes beyond is somehow here in the form of “this and that intended to be recognized”; unless, that is, the outside lies “between” the self and “things beyond resemblance.” Although in this way the outside finds a way of slipping into the heart of things, giving “this and that” the potentiality of the beyond, this zone of the existence of possibilities is designated as an “enclosure of hypotheses,” which still indicates a limitation. Indeed, the next line specifies the enclosure as a shadowy place of slumber.

However, there is one more turn with the “for example” in the first line of the second stanza of the second canto. “For example” responds to the call of the preceding idea that ours is an enclosure of hypotheses: “if such is the case, then let us take a look at the self ‘for example’.” This is the moment at which the self is defined through the possible. It also corresponds to a passage from limitation to its undoing by means of the possible. For there is limitation only when the self as an identity confronts a beyond, and the resemblances it can produce of the beyond fall pitifully short of it. But when the being of the self is defined through the possible, the self itself becomes the distance as such; it is no longer a place from which one projects resemblances that go a certain distance. Moreover, by virtue of being defined qua distance the self becomes something that is always already realized or embodied: “What self, for example, did he contain *that had not yet been / loosed, / Snarling in him for discovery as his attentions spread.*”

That is, the self is not an enclosure that withholds; it is not an identity. Stevens's beautiful image for this is the self as a loose dog, patrolling the extremest borders of attention with an instinctive hunger for reality that has to be satisfied, and which is always satisfied, here with the expression of the possible. For the self, the possible is the outside to which it is exposed. Its being is nothing other than the realization of the possible. The possible is in this sense the existence of the beyond in "this or that."

It is no coincidence that from the second stanza on (of the second canto) the poem witnesses a blossoming, a coloration. This is a sign of the effect of the possible. The contrast between the shadowy realm of the slumber in summer that corresponded to the enclosure of hypotheses and the gradual illumination that follows after the revision of the being of the self as the realization of the possible serves to display this: the self is "loosed" now, "attentions spread," lights "suddenly increased," there is an "access of color," all of which reach a climax with a "puissant flick," which, we are told, deserves a name of its own and a privilege over the ordinary because it adds to "what *was* real." A world is being formed, bringing together the North and the South. This marks the second movement in the poem. It is a movement of "territorialization" as opposed to the absolute deterritorialization of the first canto—hence the components of light and color in contrast to the sound in the deterritorialized outside. Significantly, this movement is a gradual "facialization": from the single point in the sky which "creates a fresh universe out of nothingness," we move on to a "look" and a "touch," which reveal "unexpected magnitudes." The last stanza of Stevens's poem is devoted in its entirety to the effects of the "puissant flick," the expression of the possible, that is, the existence of the other.

This is what vitalizes the “hereditary” lights of the self, which itself is not even mentioned anymore but gives way to a world in the process of forming itself.

Fredric Jameson is, thus, entirely right about the presence of a “structuralism”¹ in Stevens, since the other is the structure which transcends the subjects that actualize it, insofar as it “is implemented only by variable terms in different perceptual worlds –me for you in yours, you for me in mine.”² Stevens’s poetics of the other finds its extension in a poetry that invests such a structure. Now, as “Prologues To What Is Possible” suggests, the space that is supposed to lie between the self and the outside itself becomes an outside, which extends without a seeming limit and is divested of the subjects who rather need the other-structure in order to be perceived and identified.³ It is a space that is like an anonymous outside. Stevens’s poetry does not represent a world or worlds; rather, Stevens starts writing amidst a “represented world of perception” that is presupposed.⁴ The other is like the insistence of the implicit or of the values of individuation in this represented (explicated and extended) field. In this sense, one can perhaps say that Stevens’s world is a world of individuations, and to that degree his poetry invests the structure of the possible that makes visible the emergence and disappearance of subjects and objects, as though it functions as a frame.

¹ Fredric Jameson, “Exoticism and Structuralism in Wallace Stevens,” in *The Modernist Papers* (London and New York: Verso, 2007), 207-22.

² Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 281.

³ This shift is captured, in Stevens, less by the “Soldier, there is a war between the mind / And sky” (epilogue, 1) of “Notes Toward A Supreme Fiction” than by the “We live in an old chaos of the sun” (VIII, 5) of “Sunday Morning,” which is perhaps why “Notes” immediately adds: “It is / For that the poet is always in the sun” (epilogue, 2-3).

⁴ Deleuze, *Ibid.*

Yet, as I have argued in this study, the other is both the representative of the values of individuation (hence its powers of individuation) and the structure of the possible (hence its status as the condition of perception). “Prologues” celebrates an expression perceived to be privileged, uncommon, and extraordinary insofar as it brings about a new world, a possible world. This is a function that corresponds to the determination of the other as the structure by virtue of which something becomes perceptible. In its determination as representative, however, the other is the “enclosure” of the forces of individuation, as though imprisoning these intensities waiting to be liberated (the premise of Tournier’s fiction of the world without others). This is why the other-structure functions like the outside in the midst of things; the forces of individuation are the umbilical cords from the outside. Thus, it is as if there are two poles in relation to the other: on the one hand, we demand the possible that gives us worlds, on the other hand, we are tempted to murder the other in order to reach an elemental world, the individuating forces as they would be in themselves without the intervention of the other—even if in this we act like the child who breaks open his toy for the intriguing sound it makes. These two poles are juxtaposed in “Prologues.” A retrograde movement puts the possible world and the universe of the forces it presupposes into relation. In this way, while the sense of a terrestrial world is intensified by the possible (“A flick which added to what was real and its vocabulary”), the feeling for the “shattering” center that is beyond recognition and resemblance is also enhanced (“He belonged to the far-foreign departure of his vessel and was / part of it”).

II.

Jameson's discussion of Stevens also exhibits a general concern with the problematics of the outside. But this time it is theorized in terms of the "referent," which in Stevens must both be displayed and maintained in its exteriority and unknowability as the absent cause. In this way it marks not only an "unresolvable contradiction" but also a "functional necessity" for Stevens's "system," since it makes itself felt in the form of an injunction to preserve the "parallelism" between the space of the symbolic and the space of the real. Jameson sees Stevens's poetry as an incursion into the "symbolic order" which, therefore, betrays a gradual process of "autonomization" in order to maintain its at once "utopian" and "ideological" relation to the real. This is why the referent must be kept in sight and not be allowed to disappear (as it will be the case in postmodernism), since its disappearance would indicate the collapse of the parallelism.⁵

In my construction of the question of the outside, I emphasized its "expression" in the field of representation, which gives it an existence on the "inside" without canceling its ontological status of exteriority. What does this mean in terms of Stevens's poetry though? As I suggested in the previous chapter, his poetry can be seen as a response to a virtual exteriority. This is one way to account for the disappointed rhetoric in Stevens's poetry: like his Penelope in "The World As Meditation," it is eternally frustrated yet cannot help but remain expectant and never loses faith. It derives a power out of what remains external, although this corresponds to a reduction in

⁵ Jameson, *Ibid.*, especially 218-22.

subjective terms. Here is that “syllable” again, from “Prologues,” which “repeats” itself in this poem too:

It was Ulysses and it was not. Yet they had met,
Friend and dear friend and a planet’s encouragement.
The barbarous strength within her would never fail.

She would talk a little to herself as she combed her hair,
Repeating his name with its patient syllables,
Never forgetting him that kept coming constantly so near. (23-28)

Here the “referent” (both given and withdrawn) is the effect of a psychic individuation defined as an unfailing strength that nonetheless does not transcend repetition; it signifies a power that cannot be disowned although it does not belong to the self to begin with. It marks an exteriority which becomes the occasion of an intensification that makes itself felt in the poem. This is not mere longing; the source of the affect is itself obscure, and rather than pleasure or pain, the figure of feeling is traced back to desire, a “barbarous strength.” Or again, take the intensification of the desire for the outside in “Not Ideas About Things But The Thing Itself,” the last poem in *The Collected Poems*: it is dawn announced by “a scrawny cry from the outside” (2) –and “not from the vast ventriloquism / Of sleep’s faded papier-mâché . . .” (10-11)– which, being “part of the colossal sun” (15), “the sun [that] was coming from the outside” (12), proclaims the imminence of a “new knowledge of reality” (18). The poem acquires its tone of poignancy from the idea of a life, impossible to be lived, which is like a constant delirium between the interior monologue of sleep and the anticipation of a “still far away” (17) new reality heard in the sound from the outside. Such a speech that traverses both the interior and the exterior, which is at once intimate and foreign, is what defines

the plane of immanence of poetry. The question of “To The Roaring Wind,” the final poem of *Harmonium*, had been addressed to it:

What syllable are you seeking,
Vocalissimus,
In the distances of sleep?
Speak it.

What haunts Stevens, in other words, is not the exteriority of the referent, it is the simultaneous “interiority” of this exteriority; or rather, since both of these terms are modified by its movement, it is the expression of exteriority that divests one from both an interior life and what would correspond to that interiority as its external object. There is simply no possibility of rest, and the expressive exteriority becomes a problem at the level of affects.

Yet Jameson’s essay uncovers other problems. Its initial observation with respect to Stevens’s poetry –the coexistence of its linguistic richness with an equally conspicuous impoverishment in content– leads to the question of the “historical specificity” of Stevens’s “abstract landscape,” a correlate of the impoverished content. Two related arguments are made in relation to this question. First, the historical specificity of such content must be sought in a certain “culturally marked geography” and a “vocabulary field” of culturally marked place-names. Second, Stevens has to repress this specificity, which would otherwise introduce into his work social and historical issues, and what accomplishes the task of repression is an epistemological “subject-object framework,” whose terms are equally abstract. The transcoding of this epistemological framework through “language” in Stevens provides the reason why

“structuralism” is an apt designation for his poetry. Jameson argues that Stevens taps into a Lévi-Straussian dimension of *pensée sauvage* that provides his language with a seemingly unending proliferation. The formations of this dimension, which are organized *like* a language, render available whatever in the collective cultural storehouse as a nature that is always already there in its abstraction.⁶ This explains the impersonal and collective aspect of language in Stevens (as much as its abstract landscapes) which is somewhat at odds with a modernist notion of “style” as a unique and personal language that seeks to establish itself in its difference from what it perceives as a public and commodified language. Jameson’s useful comparison here is with Flaubert, whose language also retained fragments from the collective or public, but, unlike Stevens, Flaubert condemns them as inauthentic. Finally, one more element, the “place-names,” function as a converter between image and language, since they mark, like proper names, the point of convergence of the cultural universal and the unique particular. As I have noted above, in this scenario Stevens’s poetics is moving towards an “autonomization.” Thus Jameson shows that place-names in Stevens, which mark the presence of a peculiar Third World within his language system, have the function of providing a “closure” for the symbolic, which in this way encompasses the

⁶ Jameson makes this comparison with Lévi-Strauss as a way of explaining the source of Stevens’s “ease of speech” and distinguishes the latter from the surrealists’, which depended on an unconscious free association: “The more appropriate point of reference, as we shall see, and one that anchors Stevens more firmly in our period than has hitherto been done is with Lévi-Strauss’s ‘discovery’ of *pensée sauvage*, of the operation of great preconscious grids and associative systems . . . The indeterminacy in Lévi-Strauss, marked by our designation of such systems as being ‘like’ languages, is not merely present in Stevens also: it marks out an ambiguous space that is the precondition of the ‘ease’ of his discourse, namely a kind of no-man’s land which words and images are not yet radically distinguished from one another” (Ibid., 211).

First and Third Worlds and converts whatever it encounters into a nature/landscape (through the mediation of place and its exoticism).

Jameson's description of the collectivist commitment in Stevens and its utopian implications further elaborate what I have designated as investing the structure of perception, the anonymous space amidst persons and things in relation to which they attain visibility:

This peculiarly unmodern commitment to collective association, to an already systemic cultural storehouse –a commitment that does not in Stevens involve the renunciation of the personal and the private, either, since in a sense it precedes the very emergence of the individual subject and of the latter's oppositions– accounts in another way for what we have called the hollowness or impoverishment of his content. Utopian in that it implicitly insists on the undegradedness of the cultural stereotypes, on their freshness and perhaps indeed their immediate or unmediated relationship to Nature itself, the reliance on collective automatisms, in a fallen society, cannot but constitute somehow, at some ultimate level, the zero degree or average common denominator of a fragmented and atomized *Gesellschaft*; hence the strategic limitation of this material to landscape, where those features may be expected to be least obvious and intrusive. (213)⁷

What is not considered in this account of the structural, this sense of the outside and the anonymous in Stevens, is the possibility that an affective apparatus might be part of its structuralism –what substitutes it in Jameson's account is the abstract subject-object framework, which is ultimately an epistemological determination. For example, can we not say that the material is perhaps limited to the landscape in order to exhibit the disappointment of the subject, something that the subjective revolt against the “fragmented and atomized *Gesellschaft*” (say, within a rhetoric of disillusionment),

⁷ Ibid.

given such a society and culture, is perceived to be incapable of achieving? Stevens's landscapes usually contain disoriented, somnambulant, bizarre characters who undergo intense desires:

He is there because he wants to *be*
.....

Being there is being in a place,
As of a character everywhere,
The place of a swarthy presence moving,
Slowly, to the look of a swarthy name.

(“The Countryman, 14 and 17-20; my emphasis)

This desire to be or rather this way of charging presence with an intensity, as if it is the most impossible thing to attain, emerges in most of the late poems. Landscape somehow foregrounds absence and intensifies the desire for presence.

In fact, when the symbolic becomes the only register that accounts for the possibilities of the poetry, the only place that can be reserved for such affective determinations appears to be the ideological. For example, Jameson writes: “Up till now, what we have described is an objective experience of a certain capacity of language or the Symbolic, which for whatever personal accidents Stevens felt himself impelled to explore, of which he made himself the objective vehicle or recording apparatus.”⁸ It should be emphasized that Jameson's is a redemptive reading, and ideological here does not mean “a theory about language or a choice susceptible of ethical or political judgment.”⁹ The ideological –and this is confirmed by its possible

⁸ Ibid., 220.

⁹ Ibid.

designation, pointed out by Jameson, as “the motivation of the device”– has the function of supporting the inherent instability of the symbolic in Stevens. It is in the service of the construction of the symbolic, and Jameson designates this ideological component as a vague “existentialism,” with all its popular connotations of meaninglessness, abandonment, death and finitude, and so on. What is relegated to “personal accidents” in this way, which are by rights separated from the “experience” of language or the symbolic proper, captures the problem here. Nothing affective is reserved for the symbolic itself, and language is divested of the possibility of emotional charge. Thus objections similar to those raised by Blasing to de Man can be repeated here too: at least in its use in lyric poetry, language is not a purely formal system and the physical materials of words harbor an emotional history. This depth is a constitutive outside with its individuating forces, and it is a site of pleasure and pain that defines a different type of individuation:

The only ground, the only “outside” of poetic language is this lived history of somatically mastering the mechanisms of the linguistic code (mental mastery cannot be in question for creatures who cannot add one and one and get two) and the socializing emotional training that motivates and enables such mastery. Thus the “outside” of poetry constitutes its core, a history that shows the “other” –of both mind and body– to be “me.” Poetry is the discourse of the constitutive alienation of the subject in language –the alienation that constitutes the genesis of the “human.” (13)¹⁰

In this sense, we can even say that the “existential” is at the service of or its themes are a pretext for an affective experience of language itself.

¹⁰ Blasing, *Lyric Poetry*. This “alienation” means that the subject, therefore, has to live with *a* life that coexists with his own life and by virtue of which his events have a dimension of exteriority.

The comparison between Stevens and Flaubert is no less instructive. Flaubert took free indirect discourse to embody the “absolute point of view of style” and questioned neither the author’s “fictional privilege” nor the narrative mode itself.¹¹ But Stevens questions precisely the status of the poet’s “I.” John Dolan writes of “The Emperor of Ice-Cream” that it “dramatizes the failure of the poet’s attempt to animate what has become inanimate, or to light up what is obscure.”¹² This is paradigmatic in Stevens: although the inanimate and the obscure could equally become a stage for it, their affirmation serves as a means of dramatizing the failure of the “I.”

Dolan demonstrated that in “The Man on the Dump,” but also in “The Emperor of Ice-Cream,” Stevens undertakes a critique of the modern elegy form, which can be dated back to Thomas Gray’s “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard.” Gray’s accomplishment was twofold, and it initiated a poetics that was pursued by Cowper and Wordsworth, and, as Dolan argues, even reached up to the American “graveyard” poets of the 1920s, who incidentally enjoyed a far better reception than a poet like Stevens would. First, Gray’s poem redefines the “occasion” for the elegy. A low or vulgar deceased, who is of an obscure origin and is thus unsuitable for the praise of traditional elegy, replaces the illustrious dead subject, whom traditional elegy made it its task to praise. Second, it shifts the focus from the deceased to the poet himself. As Dolan suggests, what is even more innovative than the low origin of the dead celebrated in

¹¹ See Jacques Rancière, “Deleuze, Bartleby, and the Literary Formula,” in *The Flesh of Words*, trans. Charlotte Mandel (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 158.

¹² John Dolan, “A Refusal to Mourn: Stevens and the Self-Centered Elegy,” in *Journal of Modern Literature*, XXI, 2 (Winter 1997-98), 216.

Gray's poem is the poet's avowal that he has no connection with them: "They are, as the poet repeatedly tells us, 'unknown,' 'obscure,' 'lowly,' and anonymous. This facilitates the shift in emphasis from the deceased to the mourner; since the dead invoked are dimly imagined –obscurely imagined– it is inevitable that the scene should shift to the 'I' in the act of imagining them."¹³

As Dolan's scintillating demonstration concludes, Stevens refuses to mourn an obscure subject by giving the center stage to the "I," to set up a scene in which the inanimate can be redeemed, or to light up the obscure. The scene of death in "The Emperor of Ice-Cream," for example, is established as beyond redemption, "and upon which the poet refuses to intrude." In this way, the dead from Gray's, Cowper's, or Wordsworth's staging "lose their assumed dignity and become the real death of a really obscure person."¹⁴ On the other hand, "The Man on the Dump" parodies the device of pilgrimage to a location of shadowy ruins, such as the graveyard in Gray's elegy, by staging a pilgrimage to a city dump. And while the pursuit of the lower and lower objects reaches comical heights and the moment of the supposed communion with the dead is prepared, there comes Stevens's demystifying questions to the elegist: "That's what one wants to get near. Could it after all / Be merely oneself, as superior as the ear / To a crow's voice? Did the nightingale torture the ear, / Pack the heart and scratch the mind? And does the ear / Solace itself in peevish birds? . . ." (38-42) Stevens's attempt

¹³ Ibid., 211. John Dolan's wider discussion of the transformation of the "occasion" in the history of English lyric poetry, especially with respect to the place of Gray, Cowper, and Wordsworth, is the subject of his *Poetic Occasion from Milton to Wordsworth* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000).

¹⁴ Dolan, "A Refusal to Mourn," 216.

here, pointing to the need for solace, is to lift the monopoly on the dead established through “compassion,” since the economy of the genre he critiques consists in “refract[ing] ‘compassion’ for the dead toward celebration of the ‘compassionate’ poet.”¹⁵

Renouncing compassion in Stevens will provide access to a determination like the “poorest,” in whose life there is no solace, no rest, no foreseeable redemption. A distance enters into the life of the people that, it seems, cannot and should not be manipulated, and is an occasion for joy as well as sorrow, for better or worse. This is the source of the inadvertent radicalism of “The Idiom Of The Hero,” its critique of parliamentary democracy and reform within the system:

I heard two workers say, “This chaos
Will soon be ended.”

This chaos will not be ended,
The red and the blue house blended,

Not ended, never and never ended,
The weak man mended,

The man that is poor at night
Attended

Like the man that is rich and right.
The great men will not be blended . . .

I am the poorest of all.
I know that I cannot be mended,

Out of the clouds, pomp of the air,
By which at least I am befriended.

¹⁵ Ibid., 214; note 12.

Although this poem is written in the first person, it is the “idiom” of the “hero,” who is a third person beyond identifiable persona like the “worker,” the “rich,” and the “right.” It marks a species of “great men,” who presumably are beyond the need for the solace of compassion and can endure “chaos.” Here the tone occasioned by the possible exteriority, marked by “the great” and “the poorest” (the hero as those who do not “blend”), is joyful although this is not always necessarily the case. Thus, for example, in “In A Bad Time” the saving poverty inspires nothing to be lighthearted about:

What has he? What he has he has. But what?
It is not a matter of captious repartee.
What has he that becomes his heart’s strong core?

He has his poverty and nothing more.
His poverty become his heart’s strong core –
A forgetfulness of summer at the pole. (10-15)

The description of the abstract subject-object framework, almost a deep-structural element in Stevens in Jameson’s reading, recalls in a way the condition of disappointment or dispossession (finding fault with the condition of being a subject). For example, after noting that the view of the Third World in Stevens finds an analogue in the luxury tourism of the 1920s, Jameson writes: “This impoverished experience reconfirms our notion of the underlying purely epistemological stance of Stevens’s work –*a detached subject contemplating a static object in a suspension of praxis or even rootedness*– and is documented in Stevens’s one autobiographical ‘novel’ or narrative, ‘The Comedian as the Letter C.’”¹⁶ One could equally see this

¹⁶ Jameson, 213; my emphasis.

epistemological stance conditioned by and depending upon an affective determination. In fact, Jameson's example, "The Comedian," reveals both the affective determination that is the condition of possibility of a detached subject and the reason why it could indeed be taken for a purely epistemological stance. As David Trotter suggested, the "spirit of ferocious banter" with which the persona, Crispin, is treated in Stevens's poem derives from its paradigmatic "anti-pathos": "the spirit of ferocious banter involved detachment from other people and a refusal to acknowledge the pathos of their predicament, but also a detachment from oneself (from the pathos of one's own predicament). . . . Our own predicament, like that of most other people, constantly leaks pathos and the spirit of ferocious banter demands nothing less than cauterization: the cauterization of the knock-out punch or the shell fired at dummy men, an extinction of feeling."¹⁷ The impression of an abstract subject derives from the "detachment" that comes out of anti-pathos. However, what is significant is that for the same reasons that led to Trotter's diagnosis, Laura Quinney classified "The Comedian," as we have already seen, as an example of the rhetoric of disillusionment and distinguished it from the assemblage of disappointment, toward which Stevens's poetry moves and in which it is neither pathos nor its "cauterization" but the disjunction that enters into the subjectivity of pathos that becomes definitive—a potentialization coterminous with the barred subject.

Compassion, as Rancière notes, is the Schopenhauerian affect that projects an

¹⁷ David Trotter, *The Making Of The Reader: Language and Subjectivity in Modern American, English and Irish Poetry* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1984), 76-7, also see 81.

equality beyond fraternity as the “sympathy that links together the fibers of the universe,” hence making the free indirect discourse express “the indifferent music of atoms.”¹⁸ It refers to the fictional privilege of the author who stands behind the scene that he offers to the gaze in its impersonality. Disappointment, however, casts the light on the “I” insofar as it is disappointed or barred, which causes the obscure to remain unlighted and incapable of being offered to the compassion of the poet. It thus makes the passion for that which eludes the “I” heard, the outside, which calls the humanity of the poet into question. Stevens does not share the compassion Flaubert offers in equal measure to the beggar as to his lice.¹⁹ He is rather disappointed with the inhumanity to which he finds both himself and his beggar condemned “without [even] understanding” why, and however disproportionate the outcomes are for each:

How mad would he have to be to say, “He beheld
An order and thereafter he belonged
To it”? He beheld the order of the northern sky.

But the beggar gazes on calamity
And thereafter he belongs to it, to bread
Hard found, and water tasting of misery.

For him cold’s glacial beauty is his fate.
Without understanding it, he belongs to it
And the night, and midnight, and after, where it is. (“In A Bad Time,” 1-9)

That is why the muse of tragedy must stop entertaining the “audience” with the cloak of impersonality and step forward from the “gown” behind which she is hiding:

¹⁸ Rancière, *Ibid.*, 158.

¹⁹ Flaubert quoted in Rancière: “Devil take me if I don’t feel just as kindly toward the lice biting the beggar as I do toward the beggar. I am certain that men are no more brothers to each other than the leaves in the wood are alike: they worry together, that’s all” (*Ibid.*, 158-59).

. . . . Speak loftier lines.
Cry out, "I am the purple muse." Make sure
The audience beholds you, not your gown. (19-21)

Rather than a subject-object framework, what functions at the deepest level in Stevens's poetry is a system of exteriority which becomes the occasion for affects, good and bad.

III.

Distinguishing between "first-order" and "second-order" poems, Helen Vendler observes that Stevens wrote mostly second-order poems. However, she identifies the first-order poem in terms of a "first person, narrative base," and defines the second-order poem as a "reflect[ion] on that first order plane."²⁰ Elsewhere, in an analogous way, she treats the third person "he" merely as a way of referring to the "I":

But of all the fashions of saying "I" in lyric, Stevens prefers "he." To refer to oneself persistently in the third person has not been common in lyric; Stevens is the first poet who has made this practice a characteristic of his work. Why would this poet choose to write of himself as "he" rather than "I"? The chief reason is that in doing so he must make an effort to see himself from the outside, as if he were a character in a story. He adopts the novelist's or dramatist's view: what is this character doing, or thinking, or describing now? In separating the described self from the describing voice, Stevens wishes to combine expressive accuracy with the truthfulness of detached observation. (134)²¹

Vendler is trying to align the choice of the third person in Stevens's lyric with the impersonality effect that is often attributed to a novelist like Flaubert. The juxtaposition of "expressive accuracy" and truthful "detached observation" explains well the stakes

²⁰ Helen Vendler, "The Hunting of Wallace Stevens: Critical Approaches," in *The Music of What Happens* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1988), 75.

²¹ Vendler, "Stevens and the Lyric Speaker."

involved in the Flaubertian impersonality: aesthetic disinterestedness and the autonomy of the work of art. Vendler later qualifies “accuracy” as follows: “They [poets] write poetry to be as explicit as possible, to be absolutely accurate, to make a point-for-point map of a mental form.”²² Such a map, embodied as equally distant from the author and the audience, would also indicate an independently existing entity. As Blanchot suggests, the representational form that the formula of aesthetic disinterestedness (an interest from a “distance”) envisages reanimates the ideal of the classical theater (hence confirming the share of Aristotle as well as Kant in the formula). If the impersonal narrator only needs to lift the curtain, this is because “the play is performed down on the stage, from time immemorial and as though without him; he does not tell, he shows, and the reader does not read, he looks, attending, taking part without participating.”²³

The main effect of the impersonality of the narrative, then, consists in the manipulation of a certain distance from the story –a distance to which both the author and the reader participate. With such manipulation, distance is sustained as an object of the gaze, the narration offers something to be seen. Significantly, Vendler will insist that although Stevens “seems to be telling rather than showing . . . [he] is always ‘showing,’ though not by images. Rather, he does his showing through his curious words and syntax.”²⁴ But it is her reference to the concept of “character” in the above

²² Vendler, “The Hunting of Wallace Stevens,” 86.

²³ Maurice Blanchot, *The Infinite Conversation*, trans. Susan Hanson (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 382.

²⁴ Vendler, *Ibid.*, 89-90.

passage that illuminates Vendler's understanding of the third person in the apparently unproblematic substitutability of the "he" for the "I." For, it is not only the visual economy of the narrative mode that is at stake in this specific conception of the third person, but also the status of the "narrative voice" which makes this specific theorization of the third person possible.

The Flaubertian impersonality treats the narrative mode as if it is something that goes without saying: "to tell is to show, to let be or to make exist."²⁵ However, the character has a constitutive role in this theater of impersonality. It is a role that can be observed in the conception of character habitually associated with the name of Henry James, according to which the narrative centers on a certain character in order to secure a point of view for itself. This is the same economy that is echoed in Vendler's description, and it depends on "a privileged 'I,' if only the 'I' of a character referred to in the third person."²⁶ Here is, then, in all its simplicity, the assumption that is by no means self-evident: that "he" must also have an "I" and speak its language.

Taking this into consideration, the notions of expressivity and truthfulness invoked by Vendler can now equally be related with the presuppositions of a "realm of subjectivist formulas in which the authenticity of the narrative depends upon the existence of a free subject."²⁷ It is these subjectivist formulas that finally tell us something about the deep postulate of her formulation, since "on the one hand, they

²⁵ Blanchot, *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 383.

wrongly assert some sort of equivalence between the narrative act and the transparency of a consciousness (as though to tell were simply to be conscious, to project, to disclose, to cover up by revealing), and on the other hand, they maintain the primacy of an individual consciousness that could only in the second place, and even secondarily, be a speaking consciousness.”²⁸ The third person can be inscribed within the economy of the “I” –from which “referring to oneself in saying ‘he’” acquires its sense– only if it proves possible to assume an “I” for the third person character. And this assumption is possible only if one can conceive an individual consciousness that is not obscured by speech in its primary determination, although it can bestow speech to itself, secondarily, as if to a third person. In short, it is argued that “he” can occupy the place that the subject used to occupy; however, the primacy of an individual consciousness is maintained for the same reason, since in order for the substitution to be possible speech must be a secondary determination, rather than being something that is, say, ongoing and primary, and in which “one” says “I.”

With this clue, the main postulate on which the preceding scenario is based, that the narrative voice is subtended by the “I,” can be contested by raising the question of the relation between the narrative voice and the third person. Blanchot shows that it is possible to theorize the third person without the postulate of the subject, since the narrative voice indicates a speech that comes from the outside:

The narrative "he" [or "it," *il*], whether absent or present, whether it affirms itself or hides itself, and whether or not it alters the conventions of writing – linearity, continuity, readability– thus marks the intrusion of the other –

²⁸ Ibid.

understood as neutral— in its irreducible strangeness and in its wily perversity. The other speaks. But when the other is speaking, no one speaks because the other . . . is precisely never simply the other. The other is neither the one nor the other [*ni l'un ni l'autre*], and the neutral that indicates it withdraws it from both, as it does from unity, always establishing it outside the term, the act, or the subject through which it claims to offer itself. The narrative (I do not say narrating) voice derives from this its aphony. It is a voice that has no place in the work, but neither does it hang over it; far from falling out of some sky under the guarantee of a superior Transcendence, the "he" [*il*] is not the "encompassing" of Jaspers, but rather a kind of void in the work . . . (385)²⁹

What happens to the “characters” when the voice comes from the outside as from an other—the outside that is now at the “center” of the circle drawn by the narrative? That the narrative comes to acquire a center outside of itself means that (by rights) the distance can no longer be managed in such a way that it presents an impersonal story to the eye or allows the narrative to take a character to act as its center for looking around. As with Kafka, the distance now migrates into the space of the work as such. That is why the speech of the narrative is neutral; just as it does not show anything, it does not belong to anyone either. And it is as if the characters (or what used to be called that), as though wandering in search of a center that lies outside them, *can no longer say “I.”* As Stevens will ask, “This day writhes with what?,” and reply, “If the day writhes, it is not with revelations” (“The Ultimate Poem Is Abstract,” 1 and 7). It is worth quoting Blanchot one more time on this process in the exemplary case of Kafka:

The narrative "he" or "it" unseats every subject just as it disappropriates all transitive action and all objective possibility. This takes two forms: (1) the speech of the narrative always lets us feel that what is being recounted is not being recounted by anyone: it speaks in the neutral; (2) in the neutral space of the narrative, the bearers of speech, the subjects of the action—those who once

²⁹ Ibid.

stood in the place of characters—fall into a relation of self-nonidentification. Something happens to them that they can only recapture by relinquishing their power to say "I." And what happens has always already happened: they can only indirectly account for it as a sort of self-forgetting, the forgetting that introduces them into the present without memory that is the present of narrating speech. (384)³⁰

The often mentioned strangeness in Kafka, senselessly repeated as a cliché, derives from the activity of the distance that now occupies the center: the aloofness of the subject of action or the bearer of speech from himself and from what happens to him; the strange tone that rises from what nonetheless remains the most rigorous narration, as if one is hearing a million voices in a single voice or listening to another voice simultaneous with the narration. The reader, therefore, is no less affected by this state of affairs: she cannot take a distance from that which took all the distance on itself. Not that she is now concerned with (or, as some argues, *should* be concerned with) what does not concern her in the narrative. The “non-concerning” [*le non-concernant*] enters the work, as Blanchot says, from which the reader can no longer take a comfortable distance. Something disturbing enters into the regime of vision by which it is shaken, although not destroyed.

Thus, we arrive at the conclusion that Stevens’s use of “he,” let alone being a case of referring to oneself in the third person, is the sign of a voice that comes from the outside, the speech of the other. Of course, lyric poetry is not narrative. But lyric poetry has a privilege: it is immediately tied to a voice from outside. It does not even have the “circle” of the narrative; it has “rooms” (stanza) that a voice can go in and out.

³⁰ Ibid.

Moreover, this discussion also pertains to the question of the definition of language as such. For instance, is it necessary to presuppose a personology as the basis of language, as certain linguistic theories of the “shifter” suggest? Deleuze and Guattari have already suggested that Blanchot’s texts on the impersonal third person serve to refute these theories which accord the subjectivity of the first and second person pronouns with the capacity to effectuate all enunciation.³¹ Their own theory of language, setting out from a critique of the “postulates of linguistics,” proposes “indirect discourse” as the only figure of language. One can hear in Deleuze and Guattari’s description of the movement of language the echoes of Blanchot on what befalls vision as an effect of the outside speech that is borne by the “he” or “it”: “language does not operate between something seen (or felt) and something said, but always goes from saying to saying. We believe that narrative consists not in communicating what one has seen but in transmitting what one has heard, what someone else said to you. Hearsay.”³² This is what makes all discourse indirect, and the infinite relay of speech within speech in the indirect discourse – “there are many passions in a passion, all manner of voices in a voice, murmurings, speaking in tongues”³³ – reveals why it should involve the dimension of an outside.

The concept of style in Deleuze is also determined in relation to indirect discourse as the figure of language. Style is not a private or personal language, in that

³¹ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 265.

³² *Ibid.*, 76.

³³ *Ibid.*, 77.

sense it is not a rhetorical phenomenon subordinate to the syntax but is itself related to syntactical production. It is a function inseparable from the definition of language as a system of heterogeneity, which makes it already operative in language “like a foreign language.” Indeed, this is how Deleuze defines style most often: style is like a foreign language within language. But it is the same reason which enables him to say that “style” is therefore also “non-style” since the possibility of a foreign language within language means that “there is always another language *in every language ad infinitum*.”³⁴ This is what indirect discourse indicates: as if every expressing subject contained other expressing subjects, each speaking a diverse language, one contained in the other. These statements both lead to and derive from the idea that language is a “heterogeneous assemblage in perpetual disequilibrium” rather than a “homogeneous system.” “Style (or non-style)” would under these conditions not be a deviation from a given language but the “primary factor” in making a language what it is. For, again, if the hypothesis of heterogeneity holds, then “a language cannot be broken down into its elements; it can be broken down into diverse languages *ad infinitum*.”³⁵

³⁴ Gilles Deleuze, “Preface: A New Stylistics,” in *Two Regimes of Madness*, 367; my emphasis.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 368. See also “Letter to Uno on Language” in *Two Regimes of Madness*, where Deleuze states that “in the last few years, metaphor has been elevated into an operation coextensive with language. In my view, metaphors do not exist. What I mean is that free indirect discourse is the only ‘figure,’ the only one coextensive with language” (202).

IV.

The “distance” that enters into the space of the work by giving it a center outside it; the intrusion of the speech of the other which is kept in the custody of the “he” or “it”; the free indirect discourse which turns style into the force of the outside operative within language . . . These are all figures of a distance that is nonetheless included. We can identify two phenomena in Stevens with analogous effects: the “he,” “it,” or “one” in relation to an unapproachable “center” at the level of figuration, and the effects of a rhetorical strategy which a critic termed the “pareteritic antithesis.”

John Dolan provides an example of the “distance” that must become part of the medium of poetry for Stevens in his impressive critique of the cognitive account of metaphor from a rhetorical perspective.³⁶ The cognitive view of metaphor simply rests on the idea that the function of metaphor is to make a connection, “to show, or link, or clarify” as Dolan puts it. The occasion for Dolan’s polemic is George Lakoff and Mark Turner’s *More Than Cool Reason: A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor*, which, one can say, argues for some sort of neo-Kantian schematism of overarching connective automatisms to explain metaphor. Such a perspective will of course tend to disregard a possible “professional and literary context” in which the metaphor is employed, say, precisely to deny to the existence of a link. Indeed, Dolan shows how the poem Lakoff and Turner themselves choose from William Carlos Williams (“To A Solitary Disciple”) to demonstrate their views discredits the authors’ arguments. For, it happens

³⁶ John Dolan, “‘Today the Mind Is Not Part of the Weather’: Cognitive and Rhetorical Perspectives on the Construction of Poetic Metaphor,” in *Qui Parle* 7.2 (Spring/Summer, 1994); 57-79.

that Williams's metaphor is meant to deny or undo a previous metaphorical convention that belonged to a poetry of landscape rather than displaying cognitive connections, which the authors claim are operative in all metaphors.

Dolan's consideration of a particular rhetorical strategy, what he calls the "praeteritic antithesis," which simultaneously asserts and denies a connection by virtue of its way of bringing the focus on the rejected term in antithesis, is meant to display the power of his rhetorical definition of metaphor.³⁷ For even a theory like Donald Davidson's, which separates cognition and doing in metaphor by declaring what a metaphor does unknowable, so that a connective action cannot be attributed to metaphor in cognitive terms, is disarmed before the "praeteritic antithesis" because although it is true that this rhetorical structure "denies" a particular connection—say, in Williams's poem, between the landscape and the dead tropes associated with it in an older poetic convention—it also "asserts" such associations if only by urging not to make them. That is, for the reader there is no separable previous cognitive meaning and a later rhetorical context, a separation that is implicit in Davidson although he tries to defend against the cognitive conception of metaphor. For, here the rhetorical structure is such that the

³⁷ In a different article co-authored with P. Michael Campbell, Dolan explains "praeteritic antithesis" in the following way: "A praeteritic antithesis would be one in which the ostensibly denigrated or rejected term becomes dominant. We take *praeteritic* from the trope *praeteritio*, traditionally defined as the device of talking about something in the process of promising not to talk about it (the most commonly used example is the politician's promise 'not to cheapen the campaign by mentioning my opponent's felony convictions'). A praeteritic antithesis, then, differs from a typical antithesis in that 'the rejected thing, the thing denied' (to borrow a phrase from Stevens) ends up becoming the focus of attention, with the ostensibly endorsed term fading into the background. Such a device, it may well be imagined, is particularly suited to the depiction of the sort of wistful or embittered ambivalence in which Stevens specialized" ("Teaching Stevens's Poetry through Rhetorical Structure," in John N. Serio and B. J. Leggett, ed., *Teaching Wallace Stevens: Practical Essays* [Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1994], 120).

reader is led in two directions at once. Thus, from Dolan's rhetorical perspective metaphor appears as "an inevitable modification, rather than an unself-conscious revelation, of a previously-negotiated association."³⁸ Dolan's interest, as it appears from a series of studies on the topic, is in the motivation and occasion of the construction of poetic metaphor, and especially in English poetry, which he sees as an extremely crowded context that has always depended on the "manipulation of previous poetic metaphors" and in a sense has never had "original, spontaneous metaphors [that] have arisen as expression of straightforward beliefs about the world."³⁹ However, in what he says about metaphor Dolan reveals something much more important that goes beyond this restricted topic:

Thus my essential argument is that poetic metaphors, rather than being cognitive links, are often products of the poet's desire to make room for his or her own work by *undoing or disrupting an earlier metaphorical system*, and that we should perhaps consider the possibility that even those metaphors used in so-called "ordinary language" share a disruptive function, blurring or softening unpleasant cognitive connections rather than expressing real beliefs about the way we see the world. (58; my emphasis)⁴⁰

This means that metaphor presupposes the indirect discourse and owes its powers of undoing or disrupting to the "distance" that the indirect discourse introduces into language. It seems that what counts are not perceptions, but what one can do with perceptions. But this is a capacity intrinsic to language that depends on the distance that makes the "earlier" present or available in general. Therefore, I would be more inclined

³⁸ Dolan, "'Today the Mind Is Not Part of the Weather,'" 71.

³⁹ Ibid., 58.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

to see the praeteritic antithesis as the sign of a poetry that establishes itself on the presupposition of an outside (speech within speech ad infinitum), together with its correlated affects. For, it is not that a rhetorical figure of disjunction explains Stevens's poems; the language of the outside explains why a figure of disjunction is needed. With this we can move on to "A Clear Day And No Memories," Stevens's late poem which Dolan sees as a pure instance of praeteritic antithesis:

No soldiers in the scenery,
No thoughts of people now dead,
As they were fifty years ago:
Young and living in a live air,
Young and walking in the sunshine,
Bending in blue dresses to touch something—
Today the mind is not part of the weather.

Today the air is clear of everything.
It has no knowledge except of nothingness
And it flows over us without meanings,
As if none of us had ever been here before
And are not now: in this shallow spectacle,
This invisible activity, this sense.⁴¹

Dolan points out the obvious force of presence of what is being denied existence throughout the poem. The first stanza brackets the supposedly nonexistent memories between two negations in such a way that they acquire an even greater force or emotional presence than they would have otherwise or on their own. And the second stanza moves into an even more generalized negation of virtually everything including the speaker and the reader ("us"). The movement has such momentum or intensification that even "nothingness" becomes a positive noun. As Dolan puts it, in the poem "the

⁴¹ Wallace Stevens, *Opus Posthumous*, 138-39.

scene of a lost memory is invoked with tremendous pathos under the negations which insist it is not being invoked at all.”⁴²

Although this is obvious, it is not exact. These are not merely “negations” that must affirm their terms in order to be able to negate them. Perhaps there is yet another way of making sense of all this: “That is, he [the speaker] seems to be able to be conscious of the weather, of being alive in a particular moment, without the mind’s projection of painful memories into the moment.”⁴³ This nice qualification identifies a consciousness whose affirmation (“I am alive at this moment”) is not mediated by a negation and which can nonetheless include an entirely different determination with a different temporality. Does not the great “pathos” of the poem derive, after all, from this inclusive disjunction? It is as if the consciousness which feels the certainty of its being alive at this particular moment also feels that it is already engulfed in an impersonal flux. So much so that this complex feeling can be defined by the coexistence of the two moments: the present and the past in an anonymous flux. Rather than being either cognitive or rhetorical, this is a cinematic strategy. It recalls what David Trotter has called the disproportionality (the play of inclusion and exclusion, presence and absence, too much and too little) that modernist literature, having witnessed it in cinema, acknowledged as the only way to make existence as such appear in its neutrality.⁴⁴ Indeed, with a little imagination, it is not difficult to see the poem turn into one of those

⁴² Dolan, “‘Today the Mind Is Not Part of the Weather,’” 76.

⁴³ Scott MacDonald, “Poetry and Film: Cinema as Publication,” in *Framework 2* (Fall 2006), 42.

⁴⁴ David Trotter, *Cinema and Modernism*, 10.

floating scenes that emerge into the screen, without belonging to nobody in particular, in some cinematography. Or the situation is similar to the one identified by Cavell: we are in the presence of the past, of the life which has become past and excludes us, but which we can nonetheless view. What all philosophy craved for ages has become possible: we see the world as it is in the absence of the subject. Or finally, the tremendous affective energy of the poem derives from the yearning for immanence that the past represents here –the outside that we feel here and now and in the midst of which we find ourselves, both present and absent.

If we add what we said in the previous pages about style to what we have just said about it above, we have, I think, a clue for understanding the predominance of the “he” in Stevens, out of which he is, as Vendler said, the first poet to make a systematic use. We said, following Deleuze’s reflections, that style can be understood in terms of the plane or the image that remains virtual in the actualization of the virtual, insofar as the plane-image registers the “manner” in which the virtual is actualized. We added that this “manner,” or style, can be seen as the metamorphosing temporal synthesis of affects which “dramatize” (and thereby actualize) the virtual. And we have just seen above that style is like a foreign language within language and converges with “non-style” because it is a force of variation in language, a force of exteriority within language. This means that style is not, for example, a matter of the proportion of Romance and Latinate origin words with which Stevens’s diction may be explained.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ This is one of the features emphasized in a classic study by Marie Borroff, *The Language and the Poet: Verbal Artistry in Frost, Stevens, and Moore* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1979). For example: “Stevens’s pervasive formal bias, then, manifests itself on the level of diction not

Stevens's world is a "past" world, the world looked at from behind the glass in
"Madame La Fleurie":

. . . He looked in a glass of the earth and thought
 he lived in it.
Now, he brings all that he saw into the earth, to the waiting
 parent.
His crisp knowledge is devoured by her, beneath a dew. (3-7)

It is such a world buried in the past, I think, that has to do with the "manner" in which the virtual is actualized in Stevens. This is the essential feature of Stevens's image of thought or plane of composition. This is what constitutes the style of his poetry. It is style which is responsible for this world that does not belong to one ("From this the poem springs: that we live in a place / That is not our own and, much more, not ourselves" ["Notes Toward A Supreme Fiction," *It Must Be Abstract*, iv. 14-15]) and is defined by an intrinsic distance of its own; in which there is no rest; in which, because of such traits, the emergence of possibility can signify the most exhilarating event just as the most ominous event can be signaled through it;⁴⁶ in which eccentric persona

only in learned and allusive language but also in the frequent occurrence of distinctively formal words of Romance and Latinate origin, tied neither to any particular area of meaning nor to any particular genre or set of genres, for which native synonyms belonging to the common level of diction are available" (65).

⁴⁶ In "Lebenweisheitspielerei" for instance :

Their indigence is an indigence
That is an indigence of the light,
A stellar pallor that hangs on the threads.

Little by little, the poverty
Of autumnal space becomes
A look, a few words spoken.

embody the occasions of an intense desire in search for an unapproachable or obscure center, unapproachable because it is past. That is why, this world appears as if it is a universe that only a “he” or “it” can inhabit with corresponding impersonal and singular events of “a life.” (Part of Stevens’s problem was perhaps this: “What is a life?” or “What makes a life exactly that life?”)

The “he” (“it” or “one”) is in this sense an element of style; it dramatizes the virtual and bears an essential relation with the event (the speech of the other as Blanchot says). “He” is of the order of the event, and it actualizes it as a past world. Somehow the events demand it in a way that the “I” would not do: “It walks,” “he sleeps,” “one feels” . . . already beginnings of poetry. The following is the poem titled “This Solitude Of Cataracts”:

He never felt twice the same about the flecked river,
Which kept flowing and never the same way twice, flowing

Through many places, as if it stood still in one,
Fixed like a lake on which the wild ducks fluttered,

Ruffling its common reflections, thought-like Monadnocks
There seemed to be an apostrophe that was not spoken.

There was so much that was real that was not real at all.
He wanted to feel the same way over and over.

He wanted the river to go on flowing the same way,
To keep on flowing. He wanted to walk beside it,

Each person completely touches us
With what he is and as he is,
In the stale grandeur of annihilation. (7-15)

Under the buttonwoods, beneath a moon nailed fast.
He wanted his heart to stop beating and his mind to rest

In a permanent realization, without any wild ducks
Or mountains that were not mountains, just to know how it
would be,

Just to know how it would feel, released from destruction,
To be a bronze man breathing under the archaic lapis,

Without the oscillations of planetary pass-pass,
Breathing his bronzen breath at the azury centre of time.

It is the expelled solitary “he” who dramatizes the virtual, distant being, which gives rise to impersonal events like wild ducks fluttering (despite its common reflections), as a past world: “There seemed to be an apostrophe that was not spoken.” It is “he” who actualizes the other’s speech from the outside while preserving its “aphony,” the unspoken apostrophe, and in order to do so it must become this isolated, “solitary” figure, “a bronze man,” who straddles the two worlds of flow and immobility –the river of Heraclitus and the lake of Parmenides. It is because he wants to walk beside the river that he wants to turn into a bronze man at the center; it is out of his desire for feeling the river keep on flowing that he wants his heart to stop and his mind to rest. In this way, the “he” becomes the figure by which, as we have said in the previous chapter, Stevens brings his focus on the transcendental field, immanence, a life.

CONCLUSION: THE LYRIC ASSEMBLAGE

Further, they ascribe the cause of human impotence and inconstancy, not to the common power of Nature, but to some defect or other in human nature, which they accordingly lament, laugh at, condemn, or (as happens most often) denounce, and the person who can revile the impotence of the human mind most eloquently or most cleverly is regarded as if he were divine.¹

Frank Lentricchia's discussion of Stevens, which is the rare reading that takes into consideration the social and political coordinates of Stevens's poetic production, is an obvious place to conclude my own arguments in this dissertation since his position embodies the perfect counter position to mine: he insists on the notion of "interiority" and relies on the Kantian paradigm of aesthetics.²

Let us remember the Spinozian idea of the necessary derivation of affects from ideas, which I have contrasted with the Kantian notion of the power of imagination (defined in terms of the sensible exhibition of ideas accompanied by aesthetic feeling). As I have argued, one can meaningfully talk about "subjective feeling" in relation to the Kantian philosophical paradigm insofar as aesthetic judgment designates just that in Kant: the subject's feeling of itself, as if feeling were the breath that traverses for the first time the compartments of a mechanism that is otherwise inanimate. As I have also argued, however, insofar as Spinoza and Deleuze refer feeling or affect to a plane without a subject to begin with, a phrase like "non-subjective feeling" does not capture

¹ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 163.

² Frank Lentricchia, *Ariel and the Police: Michel Foucault, William James, Wallace Stevens* (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1988).

the sense of their position on the question of affect, especially because it is silent on the singular determination of the affect, and ultimately risks being meaningless. In this sense, affect is what the subject does not have; it comes from the outside and belongs rather to the other.

Spinoza's idea has thus a startling consequence: a life with which "I" co-exist, yet from which "I" am separated, out of field and peripheral. For, while the ideas that I *have* may define a stratum of life on which I exist, they themselves *are* parts of a continuum of expression. Thus even as I have ideas, the ideas that I am proliferate affects, space-times, in which my destiny is played out even if I do not belong there and which are part of my life even if they remain non-actualized:

With every event, there is indeed the present moment of its actualization, the moment in which the event is embodied in a state of affairs, an individual, or a person . . . But on the other hand, there is the future and the past of the event considered in itself, sidestepping each present, being free of the limitations of a state of affairs, impersonal and pre-individual, neutral, neither general nor particular, *eventum tantum*. (151)³

Spinoza's idea of the necessary derivation does point to a doubling: existing on a single plane, my life is played out simultaneously on two levels. I "feel" a life being constructed simultaneous with my life. This other, secret life is perhaps where the "he" or "it" awaits –coexisting with yet apart from "me." It is the occasion of that "intensest rendezvous," as Stevens put it in the "Final Soliloquy Of The Interior Paramour," at

³ Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*.

which “We *feel* the obscurity of an order, a whole, / A knowledge that which arranged the rendezvous” (12-13; my emphasis).⁴

Deleuze says in one of his Spinoza lectures that you can tell who someone is from the affects that he or she is capable of. This is the case because a life is defined by its events. And it is the event that doubles the personal life:

Every event is like death, double and impersonal in its double. “It is the abyss of the present, the time without present with which I have no relation, toward which I am unable to project myself. For in it *I* do not die. I forfeit the power of dying. In this abyss they (*on*) die –they never cease to die, and they never succeed in dying.”

How different this “they” is from that which we encounter in everyday banality. [This is presumably a response to Heidegger on the “they” in *Being and Time*.] It is the “they” of impersonal and pre-individual singularities, the “they” of the pure event wherein *it* dies in the same way that *it* rains. The splendor of the “they” is the splendor of the event itself or of the fourth person. This is why there are no private or collective events, no more than there are individuals and universals, particularities and generalities. Everything is singular, and thus both collective and private, particular and general, neither individual nor universal. (152)⁵

If this is the case then there is no subjective literature. Literature begins with the “they” or “it”; it begins when the subject establishes a relation with this dimension. This

⁴ See the excellent reading of this poem by Sharon Cameron, “‘The Sense Against Calamity’: Ideas of a Self In Three Poems by Wallace Stevens,” in *ELH* 43.4 (Winter 1976): 584-603. Cameron reads “Final Soliloquy” as the third poem in a series (with “The Snow Man,” and “The World As Meditation”) in which the speakers gradually grow more solipsistic and more conscious of themselves because of the exclusion of the external world. However, the crucial thing is that “it is precisely the movement toward an ideational self which yields an awareness of otherness” (584). Cameron suggests that the fiction of “Final Soliloquy” is someone who speaks in his mind, rather than someone speaking to somebody else. The strangeness audible, for example, in the “as” in the opening lines of the poem (“Light the first light of evening, as in a room / In which we rest . . .”) is due to the strangeness of the grammar of speaking in one’s mind. Ultimately, it is strange is that we should hear such a speech. What Cameron says about the “central mind” that appears later in the poem can also be said about “the obscurity of an order, a whole” in the above lines: “The ‘central mind’ is anyway not so much a place as it is that collective center of consciousness in which the individual imagination has its genesis” (600).

⁵ Gilles Deleuze, *Ibid.*

is the opposite direction in which literature moves according to Deleuze, toward the “ill-formed” or the “incomplete”; it does not consist in imposing a “form (of expression) on the matter of lived experience.”⁶ If it is not a question of imposing a form, this is because feeling or affect does not refer to an interior nature out of which forms must be prepared for lived experience. Here then the two alternatives can be clearly distinguished. Is it the interiority of the subject or the exteriority of events coexisting with the subject, a subject who is not defined through interiority since it is itself the actualization of the event –a nomadic subject as Deleuze and Guattari aptly put it? Is it the development of form or becoming?

Lentricchia’s reading of Stevens subscribes to the first of these alternatives. The main framework of his account is the fate of subjectivity, interiority, or the aesthetic impulse in the culture of capitalism, of which the vivid narrative of Stevens’s personal and poetic development is offered to embody a perfect instance. Before coming to interiority and the aesthetic, on which Lentricchia’s essay produces so many formulations from varied angles, we have to look at the questions of sexual difference and gender. For, this is the other fundamental notion that cuts across the poles of subjectivity and economics in Lentricchia’s essay, and I think that it is also where the main limitation of his account is rooted. The price paid for the theme of the cultural construction of gender is the separation of desire from the social. Desire in this account, let alone investing the social, must be contained in the space of subjective interiority, since this is the condition for the possible political function of aesthetic interiority,

⁶ Gilles Deleuze, “Literature and Life,” 1.

situated between culture and capital. With this question we will also revisit our opening pages about the feminine other, sexuality, the regime of facility, becoming-woman and so on, and this is another way in which Lentricchia's text is relevant here, insofar as he passes to the above questions through a discussion of Stevens's equivocal struggle with his manhood in a patriarchal culture which feminizes the poetic or aesthetics, and masculinizes economic activity.

There is indeed something of Joyce's Mr. Duffy in Stevens, with his reticence, "saturnine" nature, and ignorance or fear of the other sex. He also, like the former, would probably allow "himself to think that in certain circumstances he would rob his [insurance company] but, as these circumstances never rose, his life rolled out evenly – an adventureless tale."⁷ This is the world of sexual difference described in Deleuze's "Description of Woman" that I have started with: the torturing, overwhelming presence of the sexed other on the one hand, and the male other who alternates between friendship and rivalry on the other.⁸ Lentricchia's reading of Stevens is built on precisely this scenario: the young poet trapped in the world of the male others and the sexed other. Thus, an early letter by Stevens to his future wife, in which he describes writing poetry as his "lady-like" manner, and another letter to Stevens from his father recapitulating the necessity and virtues of economic independence, stand, for Lentricchia, as the early embodiment of the two poles of Stevens's predestined life that

⁷ James Joyce, "A Painful Case," in *Dubliners* (New York and London: Penguin Books, 1976), 105.

⁸ For relevant details one can see Joan Richardson, *Wallace Stevens: The Early Years, 1879-1923* (New York: Beech Tree Books, 1986). I must say that I share Helen Vendler's criticism (in "The Hunting of Wallace Stevens") of this biography about its "potted" cultural history, trivializing and trivialized psychoanalytic perspective, and so on.

is split between his poetic and economic careers. His essay presents a trajectory in which Stevens moves from sexual ambivalence as a result of the perception of a culturally feminized activity, to the attempt at masculinising the poetic medium (which is, in Lentricchia's account, shared by other modernists), to the finally attained identification with a feminine principle, this time not "lady"-like, following the necessarily disappointing "success" in the male economic world (at least this is the note on which the essay closes through a reading of "The World As Meditation").⁹

It is the cliché formula, "the social construction of gender on the basis of biological sexual difference," which Lentricchia resorts to in his polemic against what he calls "essentialist" feminism, that hampers his account. It is obvious that the "biological" cannot be invoked in any rigorous sense here. But leaving that aside, the worst effect of this framework is that, strangely, it is precisely because the "construction" is said to be social that the "social" as such appears as if it is removed from the reach of desire. Desire is exiled back to the freedom of the subject (interiority) who is now seen as a victim of the social totality. Lentricchia's main lesson to the essentialist feminists consists in this: one must distinguish between male and female subjects and the cultural categories of femininity and masculinity, which are both produced by "patriarchy." Related with the separation of desire from the social is the preemption of the possibility of a genuine ontology of difference, with which, for example, desire could be put into relation. Indeed, in Lentricchia's account the social or

⁹ Lentricchia, *Ibid.*, 168 and 241.

cultural construction of gender culminates in the inescapable world of “ideology,” and “ontology” signifies something like the unquestioning and naive acceptance of the social categories as if they were not historical constructions. It is no wonder then that aesthetics emerges as the last resort of interiority or freedom in its hopeless clash with the social and historical structures of unfreedom.

I have suggested in my opening pages that the concept of the other as the expression of a possible world can recast the world of sexual difference, the grand binary of man and woman, as a possible world on its own. The question then becomes “what is the other-structure that sustains such a possible world”? This does not take us to the world of the ideological categories of gender within which the subjects of both sexes are enslaved. It is rather the inhuman world of faciality, the machine of faciality, which is a specific semiotic regime of signification and subjectivity, in which gender categories appear as semiotic constructs. It is because they are semiotic categories that they offer themselves to be desired and in fact can become the most perverse objects of desire. The universe of faciality is inhuman precisely in the sense that one is born and is said to be a man or a woman not knowing what that means and not being able to do anything about it. Desire is then caught in the endlessly proliferating binary significations and subjectified through each choice it has to make between the units of signification. But it is because desire is always social that it falls into this regime. If it must be contained within semiotic structures this is because exteriority, the drive beyond the given, is a postulate of desire (hence the place of an ontology of difference). It is no accident that Lentricchia’s account does not involve such categories as

“majority” and “minority,” because what makes these categories possible is the possibility of the social investment of desire: the desire for majority, a minoritarian desire, and so on. The impossibility of escaping from the ideological renders the notion of “majority” redundant, and “minority” only becomes self-deception –which in effect turns the desire for the minor into the envy for the major.¹⁰ As we have seen with Deleuze and Guattari, majority becomes an indispensable concept once it is possible to delineate a process of desire (“becoming-woman”) that can go beyond the state of domination indicated by majority, since there is becoming as an autonomous process, only if the “withdrawal” from the by definition majoritarian identity (man) finds a “response” in a by definition minoritarian agent or medium (women, children, animals . . .), which rends the subject of becoming from his major identity.

Here is one of the examples in which Lentricchia gives a good sense of the endgame of aesthetic interiority:

“Interiority” appears to mean in “Final Soliloquy” and in his discourse at large what it has tended to mean in the history of philosophy since about Descartes – that ideal realm of the spirit where the new bourgeois man feels historically untouchable, his freedom guaranteed now by its last best defender, the aesthetic itself, in the moment that Foucault, with the able assistance of Orwell, has defined as the moment of the disciplined society. The message that Stevens’ critics read in his work is that high-formalist literature is the ground of human freedom which, though threatened and drained by everyday life in the world that capital makes, can be nourished and protected by literary experience, and literary experience alone, and especially experience of a writer like Stevens who is exemplary because he provides us, at once, both the theory and the practice of a redemptive imagination. The fundamental hope in Stevens is political –though neither Stevens nor his critics are comfortable with that word: it is

¹⁰ For example: “To get Michelangelo and Shakespeare and all “phenomenal men” out of your head means self-consciously choosing minority (lesser things, little statutes, small thoughts) in full awareness, with your eyes on what constitutes majority . . . The poetics of minority in Stevens is inaugurated with the imagination of insufficiency” (Ibid., 169-70). But why should “insufficiency” be the lack of majority?

conspicuously absent from their discourse –and he is politically hopeful, moreover, in the idealist tradition running from Schiller to Marcuse in which the aesthetic is the antithesis to the totalitarian story Foucault narrates in *Discipline and Punish*, but an antithesis that may well be one of the subtlest effects of an incipient totalitarianism and its culture. (217)¹¹

This presentation is interesting, since it both exposes aesthetics in its untenable form and indicates the only aspect in which it may be defended, its political function. It shows where the inadequacy of the critics of Stevens lies and grants their truth by correcting them. However increasingly suspicious the antithetical function of the aesthetic becomes, it remains the only way of thinking about the space of literature.

Now, returning to the theme of the exteriority of the event, it seems to me that Stevens himself did not conceive poetry much in terms of aesthetic interiority. “Does anyone suppose that the vast mass of people in this country was moved at the last election by rational considerations? Giving reason as much credit as the radio, there still remains the certainty that so great a movement was emotional and, if emotional, irrational.”¹² This might be Stevens’s response to both perspectives above. This is to situate affectivity out in the political sphere, it is not taking it to be an inner experience as the last defensive ground against capitalist rationalization. It is to situate affectivity as an external dimension and making it a precedent for the legitimacy of poetry.

What Stevens calls the “irrational” in this essay implies something like the exteriority of the event. Mutlu Konuk Blasing demonstrated in her reading of the essay that Stevens’s irrational “is distinct from any consciously cultivated irrationality, any

¹¹ Ibid., 217.

¹² Wallace Stevens, “The Irrational Element in Poetry,” in *Opus Posthumous*, 229-30.

local, historically contingent, programmatic or methodological irrationality that depends on and reaffirms the norm of reason, or any mystical and psychological phenomenon.”¹³

The emotional, which is Stevens’s paraphrase for the irrational, cannot therefore be the traditional opposite of the rational that bows to its authority. It is rather an irreducible exteriority. The irrational is like the event in that it implicates both “automatism” and “freedom”: from the perspective of the virtual the event entails freedom, from the perspective of its actualization it entails automatism. “While there is nothing automatic about the poem,” Stevens writes, “nevertheless it has an automatic aspect in the sense that it is what I wanted it to be without knowing before it was written what I wanted it to be, even though I knew before it was written what I wanted to do.” He goes on to say that “if you elect to remain free and go about in the world experiencing whatever you happen to experience, as most people do, even when they insist that they do not, either your choice of subjects is fortuitous or the identity of the circumstances under which the choice is made is imperceptible.”¹⁴ That is to say, following Blasing’s apt paraphrase, the possibility of choice (in poetry) depends on its irrationality, otherwise someone or something else is choosing for you. In the freedom of the event “irrationality” can become an object of “choice.”

Stevens is led to suggest that the political is steered by emotional or irrational considerations rather than rational ones in order to situate poetry in the same anonymous function that politics is situated. So if politics is the contemporaneous,

¹³ Blasing, *Lyric Poetry*, 144.

¹⁴ Wallace Stevens, *Ibid.*, 226.

poetry is the resistance to the contemporaneous. Immediately following the sentences, which I cited above, affirming the irrationality or affectivity of politics, he writes: “The trouble is that the greater the pressure of the contemporaneous, the greater the resistance.” One should presumably take the “trouble” suggesting that the actualization of the irrational cannot be isolated from a counteractualization, precisely because both politics and poetry presuppose the irrational element. Thus there is a politics of poetry: “The only possible resistance to the pressure of the contemporaneous is a matter of herrings and apples, or to be less definite, the contemporaneous itself. In poetry, to that extent, the subject is not the contemporaneous, because that is only the nominal subject, but the poetry of the contemporaneous.”¹⁵

Lentricchia’s account excels in demonstrating that Stevens’s poetry presupposed the same immanent field of capitalism, but he sees in the poetry a desperate reaction to transcend it through subjective interiority. However, given this commensurability, one can equally claim that Stevens perceived in poetry the power of resisting or counteracting the emotional environment of capitalism, whose legitimacy is found in the irrational that remains virtual in the contemporaneous. This is not to deny the grim facts of Stevens’s life in Lentricchia’s narrative or reverse his conclusions, but to contest his plot of transcendence and subjectivity. It is he who demonstrates that the poet was prey to all the debilitating effects of a system of wage-labor, and yet finds it incredible that Stevens might have conceived of poetry working at the same level with this system, with the same material, yet with different effects. Indeed, a more adequate

¹⁵ Ibid., 230.

image of this poetic production has been suggested by Jameson to be “guerilla tactics.”¹⁶ Or as Stevens sums it up: “Instead of seeing, we should make excavations in the eye; instead of hearing, we should juxtapose sounds in an emotional clatter-clatter.”¹⁷

Lentricchia’s criticism unearths an issue that is even more crucial today, i.e., “sentimentality,” what he calls the feminization of culture. Maybe we can say today that the question of sentimentality is revealed beyond masculinity or femininity to be the semiotic regime of faciality as such. For how can one explain the fact that although the cultural power of the “masculinity” looses its hold, the machine of binarism is stronger than ever? The following is one of the conclusions of Kenneth Surin’s diagnosis of the contemporary cultural situation, which he has been discussing in relation to Kant’s theories of judgment, truth, and feeling:

The sublimity that manifests itself in the popular culture as the ever greater expansion of an uncoded pathos at the expense of truth and reason therefore represents a profoundly missed opportunity for the general culture. The “detranscendentalization” of truth could have instituted an alternative cultural political regime in which truth and affect would have been jointly guided by the will linked to eros, and thus powerfully politicized. Instead, will and eros were themselves displaced by a vapid sentimentality that gave an uncoded pathos virtually unlimited field for expansion. A critique of the popular culture can thus no longer be premised on the hope that truth can somehow be brought into service as a transcendental capable of disciplining pathos. For what it is worth, the horse that is pathos has now fled the stable, and there is no point in bolting the stable door. It is not transcendently maintained truth that will recode this uncoded pathos from now on, but the will guided by eros, though we cannot be certain that even the latter represents a realistic cultural political option in

¹⁶ Fredric Jameson, “Wallace Stevens,” in *New Orleans Review* 11.1 (Spring 1984), 10-19. This is an earlier version of the later essay in which Jameson refers to Debray’s work on the Guevarist revolutionary strategy, and compares the new utopian space in Stevens to “foco.”

¹⁷ Wallace Stevens, *Ibid.*, 231.

advanced capitalist societies. To politicize what has so far been massively depoliticized will be something akin to a revolutionary undertaking. (237)¹⁸

With his ideas of the “irrational,” the “sound of words,” and so on Stevens thought he found something to protect against such sentimentality. It is true that he was a prey of the machine of faciality. Hence the place of the “landscape” in his poetry. This is a symbolic landscape, which is why we find in Stevens the two ubiquitous figures of a world of enlarging circles of signification with its unknown signified and an intensified consciousness or subjectivity which jumps from one circle of signification to another. Stevens dramatized this universe as a past world, as a distance that enters into the lives of people and strangely separates them from their own lives. But there is another side to this universe. As I have tried to show, desire invests the other-structure in order to give voice to a passion for the outside by making the inhumanity of the face that underlies the human felt. As the figure of the “he” demonstrates, there is also an outside to the machine of faciality which becomes the occasion of the most intense feeling.

Given that sentimentality entertains today a seemingly unshakeable authority, however, visible even in the contemporary preeminence of Stevens and the aestheticism of his critics, there is no doubt that poetry and literature still have to prove themselves against such sentimentality. If events, like death, have a part that cannot realize its accomplishment, then there must be many ways of dying: “Language must devote itself

¹⁸ Kenneth Surin, *Freedom Not Yet: Liberation and the Next World Order* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2009), 237.

to reaching these feminine, animal, molecular detours, and every detour is a becoming-mortal.”¹⁹

¹⁹ Gilles Deleuze, “Literature and Life,” 2.

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