

*Gone Critical—*

**Towards a Co-Creative Encounter with the Book**

by

Cameron Martin Reid

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I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

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## Abstract

This dissertation follows two interrelated lines of inquiry. The first, I formulate as follows:

- (1) How, historically speaking, has the discourse of literary criticism *thought* the book? How has it represented the book? Used the book? Put simply, what has the book become in the hands of the critic?

Though, of course, answers to such questions will vary widely—especially as they intersect with related matters concerning the critic, herself, and what Henry Sussman refers to as the perceived “task of the critic”—it is my contention that the discourse of literary criticism remains unified by its inability to extricate itself from what I call the *transcendent orientation to literature*: an orientation that has both ancient and modern coordinates. In Part 1 of the dissertation, I map criticism’s ongoing historical affair with *transcendence*—an affair that begins as far back as the Platonic dialogues, but that can be traced right up through the twentieth century, in and through the work of any number of critics, and many prominent schools of literary critical thought.

I, then, formulate the second of my two lines of inquiry as follows:

- (2) How might the materialist critic, imbued by Deleuzean sensibilities, think the book anew? And, by extension, how might the materialist re-think the role or task of the critic?

In Part 2, I shift the focus from the transcendent to the *immanent* (or immanentist) orientation; that is, from the logic of representation to what philosopher Gilles Deleuze—a prominent voice within this dissertation—labels “the logic of sensation”; also, from fixed essences (i.e., fixed laws, identities) to potential powers; from being to becoming;

from the regulated and scientized practices of the institutional critic (spawning predictable results) to the “co-creative” encounters of the critic-artisan (unleashing pure potentials from the book). In short, Part 2 of the dissertation explores the question of how the book opens up to its own *becomings*—i.e., its own difference, its own transformation. To that end, I will enter into a number of co-creative relations of my own with various works of American literature (including, Kerouac’s *On the Road*, Melville’s *Moby-Dick*, Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass*, Stephen Crane’s *The Red Badge of Courage*, and William Gass’s *On Being Blue*).

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Finally, to Andrew McMurry, I wish to extend my thanks for stepping into this process (so late in the game), and for providing a number of valuable insights on the project during the dissertation defence. He and I are kindred spirits on many of these issues; which is to say, we agree more than disagree—if he doesn't mind me saying that.

On a personal level, I would like to thank Rachel Nash, my partner, for her singular optimism about this project, for getting me back to the written word whenever my progress would slow to a snail's pace, and for being my primary sounding board at every stage of this process. Put simply, this dissertation is testament to Rachel's love and support.

*I dedicate this dissertation to the memory of my friend,*

*Martin Whittles (1958–2009).*

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**Preamble—**

## **Mapping the Plan of Escape**

**“What good is commentary?”**

**—Maurice Blanchot (*The Infinite Conversation*, 390)**

I am sometimes asked about the basic claims or objectives of my dissertation—a simple enough question, I suppose, which I find oddly difficult to answer. When cornered, I might (for the benefit of my interlocutor) point to the discourse of literary criticism as my so-called “object of study”; alternatively, I might link my broader interests to literary theory or possibly the *philosophy of literature*—a sub-field of aesthetics that admittedly I have little fondness for, given the banality of its claims and concerns—while trying to remain somewhat circumspect about my actual objectives.

In any case, I have often times gone to great lengths to steer clear of what, for me, has become an uncomfortable discussion. Upon reflection, I believe my reticence before this somewhat elemental question has a few obvious roots: (1) my dissertation—though not initially conceived this way—has evolved into what is sometimes referred to as (and sometimes pejoratively so) a “theory dissertation”—a moniker I am reluctant to invoke for it connotes impracticality, if not tedious polemic; (2) my dissertation (for reasons that will be clarified in my second chapter) critiques the whole idea of a fixed *object of study*—even while it casts a jaundiced eye across the discourse of literary criticism, from Plato to the present—and so tying this work to (say) a specific author, object-text, or field of study feels somewhat disingenuous; (3) my arguments are constructed against the backdrop not of conventional literary theory, but philosophy, and in particular the work of Gilles Deleuze, who in no way identifies with literary critical discourse, nor with any specific school of criticism or theory. In an interview on the publication of his first book with Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze insists that

We’re writing for unconsciousnesses that have had enough. We’re looking for allies. We need allies. And we think these allies are already out there,

that they've gone ahead without us, that there are lots of people who've had enough and are thinking, feeling, and working in similar directions: it's not a question of fashion but of a deeper "spirit of the age" informing converging projects in a wide range of fields. (*Negotiations* 22)

Likewise (4) my dissertation derives not from the desire to create a new Deleuzean-inspired school of criticism, but from the perhaps more modest (and as yet vague) feeling of having "had enough" of what I call, in Part 1, the *transcendent* orientation to literature, and of wanting to map the coordinates of what I call, in Part 2, the *immanentist* orientation to literature—if only provisionally at this point.

But more than that, I attribute the fact of my obfuscations (as they relate to the subject matter of this dissertation) to an unwillingness to rhetorically describe this work, in perhaps utopic fashion, as *a plan of escape*—even though that description resonates with me. In other words, in Part 1, I land on "the plane of transcendence," like a foot-soldier on a battlefield, wrestling with the enemy—i.e., the signifier, the logic of representation, the various forms of idealism that have historically permeated literary critical discourse, and so forth. In Part 2, I explore the question of *how* the book opens up to its own becomings, or its own difference, by looking at a number of prominent works in American literature (i.e., Kerouac's *On the Road*, Melville's *Moby-Dick*, Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage*, and William Gass's *On Being Blue*). So my emphasis shifts in Part 2 from transcendence to immanence; from the logic of representation to what Deleuze calls "the logic of sensation"; from being to becoming; from the fixed coordinates of extant literary critical models (spawning predictable results)

to the possibility that the critic herself might play a more experimental, or what I will call “co-creative,” role in relation to the book.

Finally, let me suggest that while the spectre of institutional criticism hangs over this dissertation, forcing me, at times, into a fairly exhaustive argument concerning the historical trajectory of literary critical discourse, I ultimately pursue a twofold agenda herein that requires me (1) to push back against those institutional models; and (2) to explore how the critic might come to think *differently* about literature, rather than simply “different-from” (say, existing critical standards), which hardly connotes difference at all. So what begins as a set of confrontations, emerges, in the end, as a mandate for the critic (to borrow a phrase from Emanuel Levinas) to *think-otherwise*—a mandate that for me, just as for Levinas, carries an underlying ethical imperative.

## **Introduction—**

### **The Book, and Other Machines**

**A book itself is a little machine...But when one writes, the only question is which other machine the literary machine can be plugged into, must be plugged into in order to work.**

**—Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 4)**

To begin, consider the following excerpts from a letter by philosopher Gilles Deleuze to one of his more petulant colleagues and critics, philosopher Michel Cressole:<sup>1</sup>

There are, you see, two ways of reading a book: you either see it as a box with something inside and start looking for what it signifies, and then if you're even more perverse or depraved you set off after signifiers. And you treat the next book like a box contained in the first or containing it. And you annotate and interpret and question, and write a book about the book, and so on and on. Or there's the other way... (*Negotiations* 7–8)

At this point, Deleuze urges Cressole to “see the book”—i.e., Deleuze’s book (*Anti-Oedipus*), or any book for that matter—“as a little non-signifying machine” (8); in other words, instead of asking what the book signifies or means, one should ask,

‘Does it work, and how does it work?’ How does it work for you? If it doesn’t work, if nothing comes through, you try another book. This second way of reading’s intensive: something comes through or it doesn’t.

There’s nothing to explain, nothing to understand, nothing to interpret. It’s like plugging into an electric circuit.

Deleuze then concludes his comments on the matter with a series of reflections that speak directly to the basic concerns of this dissertation:

This second way of reading is quite different from the first, because it relates a book directly to what’s Outside. A book is a little cog in much

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<sup>1</sup> The following passages—first published by Cressole, and later reprinted by Deleuze in his book, *Negotiations* (under the title “Letter to a Harsh Critic”)—are excerpted from Deleuze’s creative and wide-ranging set of epistolary responses to Cressole’s somewhat unsympathetic treatment of not only Deleuze himself, but his books, his teaching life, his career path, his politics, and his celebrity. While parts of the letter I am singling out herein may read more didactic than defensive, Deleuze begins his reply to Cressole as follows: “You’re charming, clever, mischievous, even vicious sometimes. You might try to be a bit nicer” (3); he later adds, “Your letter’s full of false sympathy and a real thirst for revenge.”

more complicated external machinery... This intensive way of reading, in contact with what's outside the book, as a flow meeting other flows, one machine among others, as a series of experiments for each reader in the midst of events that have nothing to do with books, as tearing the book into pieces, getting it to interact with other things, absolutely anything... is reading with love. (8–9)

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In his comments to Cressole, Deleuze advises against the type of reading (or critical encounter) that subjects the book to various unities and uniformities—what is sometimes referred to as *the logic of representation*—and, by extension, the assorted prohibitions, correspondences, controls and containments that follow from such totalizing engagements. Deleuze further takes aim at the “perverse or depraved” reader, who stubbornly pursues what Deleuze and his occasional co-author—psychoanalyst Félix Guattari<sup>2</sup>—refer to as “the imperialism of the Signifier” (*Plateaus* 65), or, more generally, “the signifying regime of the sign” (112). That is, Deleuze-Guattari, in an attack on Lacanian psychoanalysis (and other language-based critical/interpretative models), indict those who they describe as “signifier enthusiasts” (66), because of the somewhat decadent pleasure they take in being able to isolate and extract abstract chains of signifiers from the material flows of the book. In other words, the apparent goal of the more “depraved” critic is to forge internal resemblances between signifiers (or between meaningful semiotic units), whether those resemblances be generic, structural, symbolic, narratorial, or otherwise. However, Deleuze-Guattari would say that all internal

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<sup>2</sup> Deleuze and Guattari would co-author four influential books over a twenty-year period, including, *Anti-Oedipus*, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, *A Thousand Plateaus*, and *What is Philosophy?* Henceforth, I will refer to this authorial coupling as Deleuze-Guattari.

resemblances are in no way essential to the book, no way necessary; rather, they are textual *effects*. They derive from *emergent* properties of the book. And yet those aforementioned “enthusiasts” will tend to assign fixed “semiotic coordinates” (75) to those particular effects through a multi-phased process that (at minimum) involves

- (1) disconnecting the book’s emergent properties from their causal or genetic history;
- (2) declaring those properties *ideal* (i.e., self-contained, self-caused—the necessary preconditions of the book); and
- (3) assigning to them the unassailable capacity to govern, organize, and formally unify the material flows of the book.

Little effect made good. This process, in turn, gives rise to what Deleuze-Guattari, in *What is Philosophy?*, call “the plane of transcendence” (49). So, in the context of this dissertation—for as the authors argue “every discipline” has its own “capacity...to produce its own illusions and to hide behind its own peculiar smokescreen” (6)—the plane of transcendence fuels altogether dogmatic ways of thinking about the book. In other words, various textual effects will become (at least in some quarters) over-arching textual values—values that, again, are thought to govern or control the diverse material flows of the book.

Put another way, when specific effects of the book are rendered ideal (through the process summarized above), those ideals are thought to not only code the book, but to serve as pre-condition for its actualization. They fold the book, often by force, into strict signifying regimes; they envelop and interiorize the book, and do so in ways that reduce



the book to little more than the standardized measures by which the book itself is formally judged, categorized, explained, etc. According to Brian Massumi,<sup>3</sup>

Bodies that fall prey to transcendence are reduced to what seems to persist across their alterations. Their very corporeality is stripped from them, in favour of a supposed substrate—soul, subjectivity, personality, identity [or, with regards to the book, author, literary structure, narrative device, etc.]—which in fact is no foundation at all, but an end effect, the infolding of a forcibly regularized outside. Transcendence is the glorification of habit. (*User's Guide* 112)

The problem for *book-bodies*,<sup>4</sup> then—those that similarly “fall prey to transcendence,” as Massumi says, or fall prey to what I will call the *transcendent orientation*—is not only “the glorification of habit” (i.e., regulated, critical encounters with the book), but a basic denial of the book’s *doings*, that is, its material (or bodily) capacity to act or be acted upon, to transform or become-other, and to operate productively in the here and now—issues that will be closely considered in later chapters.

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<sup>3</sup> Massumi’s work figures prominently in this dissertation. He is well-known in Deleuze circles for his translation of Deleuze-Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus*, and for his *creative* (read: experimental, inventive, wide-ranging in terms of aims and interests) uptake of the Deleuzian conceptual vocabulary in several books and essays over the last 20 years. It would be incorrect, though, to ground his work in Deleuze alone.

<sup>4</sup> For Deleuze, a *body* is in no way restricted to, say, a human body, but in fact includes any spatio-temporal consistency, any unity, which may be grouped (or held) together in some way with other bodies. Bruce Baugh glosses the term as follows: “any whole composed of parts, where these parts stand in some definite [albeit temporary or provisional] relation to one another” (30). To this, Baugh adds a Spinozian addendum, that bodies, understood primarily in relational terms, always maintain the capacity to affect, and to be affected by (i.e., to register), other bodies. So, in general, the term *body* could refer, say, to any geographical or geological body (e.g., a body of water), any mathematical body (e.g., a unit, element, axiom, constant, etc.), any institutional or socio-political body, and so forth; it could also refer to everything from very small micro-physical bodies (genes, molecules, cells, etc.), to larger, more complex plant, animal or human bodies, to vast universal or celestial bodies (e.g., stars, black holes). At various points in this dissertation, given its larger focus on questions of language and literature, I may have occasion to speak of linguistic bodies (e.g., phonemes, graphemes, morphemes, lexemes, phrases, clauses); semiotic bodies (e.g., signs, symbols, signals, memes, codes); book bodies; discourse bodies; and generic bodies.

Put simply, the transcendent orientation of the critic subjects the book to the sort of debilitating ascesis that (1) flattens its affect, (2) denies the book any sort of productive or generative connection to its *outside*, (3) suppresses its transformational capacities, and (4) starves it of an essential vitality. So the application of derived critical values—to adapt Massumi’s phrase, cited above—“strip[s]” the book of its “corporeality”; it denatures the book through a process that not only involves a clear repudiation of the book’s affective capacities, but also its power to *express*<sup>5</sup> itself in novel and diverse ways, to renew or go beyond itself. Why? Because, as suggested above, the book *falls prey* to the signifying regimes of the sign; it falls prey to (or is reduced to) the dyadic supremacy of signifier/signified, to a set of fixed and forcibly imposed semiotic coordinates, to a set of syntagmatic links between signs, and ultimately to various forms of order and organization, which follow from such regimented critical operations. In fact, in any signifying regime, “every sign refers to another sign, and only to another sign, ad infinitum” (*Plateaus* 112); this turning inward of the sign, then—i.e., in upon itself—restricts the capacity of that sign to (say) trigger material processes, to enter into new socio-political arrangements, to induce transformations of, for example, other linguistic or social structures, other sign systems. Literary signs—and their potential uses, their real world applications and operations, their variable effects, their power to do things, make things, change things—are reduced to little more than signifiers of other signs (i.e., signs of signs), which effectively explains what Deleuze-Guattari mean when they say that in

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<sup>5</sup> The concept of *expression* requires careful elucidation, and will be discussed in detail in other parts of this dissertation, primarily in Part 2. A brief note on terminology: I may, at times, need to unpack Deleuze’s conceptual vocabulary in stages (or in steps) so as not to allow the argument itself to be disrupted, or brought to an abrupt halt, at any one time, by having to descend into abstract and potentially interminable glosses of individual concepts. As we will see over the coming chapters, the best—and really *only*—way to make sense of Deleuze’s (or Deleuze-Guattari’s) often difficult, multi-layered concepts is to put them to work, or better yet, to see them *at work*, in variable ways, and in variable settings.

signifying regimes the signifier cannot “impart...signified without the signified re-impacting signifier in its turn” (114). This circular and wholly insular dispensation of signs devolves into endless rounds of signifier production (what Deleuze-Guattari call “signifiante”) and manic interpretation (or, “interpretance”).<sup>6</sup> In general, Deleuze-Guattari characterize semiotic cycles of this sort—i.e., *signifiante* → *interpretance* → *signifiante*, etc.—as a kind of hermeneutic sickness, or what they otherwise refer to as “interpretosis.” For them, “signifiante and interpretosis are the two diseases of the earth or the skin, in other words, humankind’s fundamental neurosis.”

As noted, these issues will be explicated more fully in later chapters, especially where questions of institutionalized literary criticism arise. For the moment, though, I would like to reiterate the point that critico-interpretative encounters of the sort described above—whether they be carried out by scholars, psychoanalysts, priests, or whomever—ostensibly concern themselves with what Massumi calls a “mirroring or moulding” (“Introduction” xvi) of (in this instance) the book. So the reader (or reading) reduces the book, and all its pragmatic or productive capacities,

- (1) to what it denotes or possibly signifies;
- (2) to what it symbolizes, alludes to, or allegorizes;
- (3) to the representational logic of its critical audience;
- (4) to the chastisements of various factions within the critical community at large (through a process that Michael Jarrett caustically refers to as “spanking the writer”);<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Deleuze-Guattari derive their conception of signifier production and manic interpretation (which they label *signifiante* and *interpretance*) from French linguist Émile Benveniste.

<sup>7</sup> Jarrett made this remark in a conference at Thompson Rivers University, in 2005, where he likened the sort of critical practices designed to denounce the “sins” of the writer—which is usually a sin of adherence

- (5) to how the book itself conforms to certain standards or ideals (e.g., aesthetic, social, moral, or otherwise);
- (6) to how it might simply be ranked or positioned (e.g., canonically, generically, historically).

These sorts of representational and ultimately totalizing approaches to literature, as the first part of this dissertation will argue, have had a lasting impact on the discourse of literary criticism, and have made pernicious contributions to historical conceptions of the literary artefact, itself, in the university and beyond.

Comparatively, though, the “intensive way of reading” (to which Deleuze refers in the passages cited at the outset to this introduction) will make no effort to contain or control the book in any of the ways discussed above. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze-Guattari make the following pledge: “We will never ask what a book means, as signified or signifier; we will not look for anything to understand in it” (4). Instead the authors advance what one might refer to as an *energetics* of literature, which, in the most general sense, means that they view the book as but a singular node in a much more expansive network of matter-energy flows,<sup>8</sup> and that it expresses itself in and through its pulsating and variable relations with those pure exteriorities. But to more fully unpack this notion of an energetics of literature, I propose a short detour into Deleuze-Guattari’s *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (*Kafka*, hereafter)—a book that figures prominently in this dissertation.

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to some dominant ideology—to a kind of secular evangelism. Critics, he argued, are renowned for wanting to scold writers for their transgressions, or rather, for wanting to “sit them down,” as he says, like impudent little children, and spell out in fine detail their various misdeeds (literary, political, ideological, etc.), so as to then “teach them a lesson” they won’t soon forget.

<sup>8</sup> On this point, we recall Deleuze’s characterization of the book, cited above, “as a little cog in much more complicated external machinery...in contact with what’s outside the book, as a flow meeting other flows, one machine among others.”

At the outset of *Kafka*, Deleuze-Guattari ask the question: “How can we enter into Kafka’s work?” (3), and from there go on to map their own critical agenda as follows:

This work is a rhizome, a burrow. The castle has multiple entrances whose rules of usage and whose locations aren’t very well known. The hotel in *Amerika* has innumerable main doors and side doors that innumerable guards watch over; it even has entrances and exits without doors... We will enter, then, by any point whatsoever; none matters more than another, and no entrance is more privileged even if it seems an impasse, a tight passage, a siphon. We will be trying only to discover what other points our entrance connects to, what crossroads and galleries one passes through to link two points, what the map of the rhizome is and how the map is modified if one enters by another point.

As I will show over the course of this dissertation, there is much at stake in this passage for literary criticism, and for the practices of the literary critic. At this stage, however, I would simply like to focus on Deleuze-Guattari’s claim that the hotel in Kafka’s *Amerika* “has innumerable main doors and side doors that innumerable guards watch over.” This image speaks directly to one of Deleuze-Guattari’s primary objectives in *Kafka*, to take on the Kafka critical establishment, and especially the policing of the entrances into Kafka’s oeuvre by prominent scholars in the field such as Marthe Robert.<sup>9</sup> At one point in *Kafka*, Deleuze-Guattari make the case that “[t]he three worst themes in many interpretations of Kafka are the transcendence of the law, the interiority of guilt, the

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<sup>9</sup> In France, Robert was a translator and interpreter of Franz Kafka (and others). She was known for her predominantly Freudian treatment of literature, in general, and of writers like Kafka, in particular. In a late essay, Deleuze would write that Marthe Robert “pushed [the] infantilization or ‘psychoanalization’ of literature to an extreme, leaving the novelist no other choice than that of the Bastard or the Foundling” (*Essays* 2).

subjectivity of enunciation. They are connected to all the stupidities that have been written about allegory, metaphor, and symbolism” (45). One might argue that common to all such interpretations, aside from their collective *overcoding*<sup>10</sup> of Kafka’s writings, are the various modes of isolation and interiority that they impose over its surfaces. They do so (1) by subjecting the oeuvre to specific unities, specific themes or motifs, specific tropes, etc.; (2) by domesticating the politics of Kafka’s writings—i.e., their capacity to act, and to act out; (3) by curtailing flows of desire (or desiring production) within those writings,<sup>11</sup> and hence their capacity to make novel connections, to unfold (and affirm) themselves in various ways, to remain open to new encounters, etc.; and (4) by cutting the work itself off from its capacity to escape its own hermeneutic straightjackets, imposed from without. In effect, all such interpretations of Kafka nail shut the windows, pull the blinds, and (recalling Deleuze-Guattari’s point) put guards at the entrances.

So Kafka’s critics not only restrict access *into* his writings, but turn the work itself *inward* (or in on itself), by again forcing its repeated submission to, and/or corroboration of, the various critical preoccupations (legalistic, oedipal/psychological, etc.)—the critical fetishes, really—of Kafka’s mostly academic audience. In a strangely *Kafkaesque* turn, then, there are no entrances into Kafka’s body of work, without the password—i.e., the critical code—nor are there exits, no escaping the code. As a result, Kafka’s work

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<sup>10</sup> For Deleuze-Guattari, the process of “overcoding” involves the unification of differential codes linked to, say, a given body or system, text or territory, under the strict purview of a “State apparatus” (*Plateaus* 427). In literary critical circles, the Signifier (and also the dyadic pairing of Signifier/Signified) has long *overcoded* the book, reducing it (as discussed above) to little more than specific acts of signification, subject to the hermeneutic treatment of a nearly transcendent authority, who impose certain textual, subjective, and/or linguistic values on the book: “Such is the regime of signs of the State: overcoding, or the Signifier” (428).

<sup>11</sup> Briefly, in *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze-Guattari make the case for a conception of desire that breaks with the subjective longings of a desiring subject who *lacks* (or is deprived access to) a specific object of affection. Instead, their notion of desire indexes the more autonomous and impersonal capacity of bodies or systems, caught in the grip of their own materiality, to access their own unactualized potentials and express themselves in unpredictable *ways*—ways that break (with) codes, that destabilize territorial strongholds (e.g., linguistic, structural), that forge novel connections, etc.—when brought to a point of operative crisis.

progressively falls into bureaucratic hands; in fact, it becomes so caught up in those institutional bureaucracies and their psychological (read: oedipalizing, infantilizing) interpretations of his work, that the very capacity of those writings to be accessed—i.e., read, used, put to work—by different readers, in different ways, becomes suppressed or stifled. Those critical bureaucracies deprive Kafka’s work of its power (1) to draw upon (or make use of) its own unactualized *potentials*;<sup>12</sup> (2) to enter into variable arrangements with bodies other than (or outside) itself; and (3) to communicate or express itself in ways that escape its oppressive codings, i.e., the habitual deployments and various interpretative frameworks to which Kafka’s writings have been historically subject (institutionally, culturally, or otherwise). In a sense, Kafka’s critical audience would seem to have forced his work to take up residence in what Leibniz, in his *Monadology* (of 1714), calls the *windowless monad*—but with the following stipulation. That is, for Kafka, such residence offers no hope of connection or communication with the outside; for Leibniz, however, the atomistic monad—despite having “no windows, by which anything could come in or go out” (179)—distinguishes itself in the way it “enters into compounds” or relational harmonies with its outside. So the monad actively mirrors, and thereby forms connections, with the world, whereas Kafka’s critics deprive him of such harmonious encounters. Their pronouncements isolate the oeuvre, cut it off from productive connections with the outside—i.e., beyond the regulated points of entry and exit deemed appropriate by his critics. Their pronouncements entomb Kafka’s work, rather than open it up to any sort of living or integrative continuum.

So recognizing what has befallen Kafka, I ask the following question: how does the *book* (or book-body) break from that which seals off its entrances—e.g., the

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<sup>12</sup> An issue that again will be fully explicated in later chapters.

outwardly-imposed semiotic coordinates, analytical fixations, and assorted interpretations of its (largely academic) audience? How does the book escape the burden of its various forms of containment and critical confinement? This problematic brings to mind Kafka's own depiction (at the outset of *The Castle*) of K.'s arrival, after being summoned to the village by castle authorities: "There was no sign of the Castle—hill, fog, and darkness surrounded it, not even the faintest gleam of light suggested the larger Castle" (1). Kafka then adds, "on the wooden bridge that leads from the main road into the village"—i.e., at the one and only point of entry into this insular locale, shrouded in snow—"K. stood a long time...gazing upward into the seeming emptiness."

Keeping in mind those aforementioned questions concerning the capacity of the book to escape its various modes of critical confinement, we recall Deleuze-Guattari's claim, cited above, concerning their own critical approach to Kafka: "We will enter, then, by any point whatsoever; none matters more than another." The authors go on to refer to this approach as "the principle of multiple entrances" (*Kafka* 3)—a principle to which they steadfastly adhere in their work because, as a principle, it underscores the critical imperative to protect the book in any way possible from being overcoded by its "enemy, the Signifier." So by entering into Kafka's body of work "by any point whatsoever," Deleuze-Guattari not only seek to proliferate connections, or variable points of contact, between the book and its outside (i.e., the *non*-book, the "absolutely anything" to which Deleuze refers in his letter to Cressole), but to highlight a certain pragmatic conception of literature or the book as that which is essentially "open to experimentation." This view of the book may help explain why Deleuze and Deleuze-Guattari ceaselessly pursue questions of exchange, interconnection, and transmission in their work, and why they



repeatedly draw attention to such relational *phenomena*, if you will, as doors, passages, hallways, entrances and exits, planes, bridges, thresholds, borders, etc. Such terms will often have a privileged role to play in the mapping of their conceptual vocabularies, and in the philosophical (and hence practical and productive) ways they approach a wide range of topics, including, language, literature, art, science, and politics—to name only a few.<sup>13</sup> For Deleuze-Guattari, these terms are not mere metaphors, but rather they assume a very material, very pragmatic and operational, role in their philosophy. It is through doors and across thresholds that flows (of one sort or another) are channeled, blocked, and re-routed; that limits are breached and passed beyond; that encounters occur; that unions or couplings are forged; that trajectories take shape; that processes unfold; that relays are made. As Deleuze-Guattari write, “The problem is not that of being free but of finding a way out, or even a way in, another side, a hallway, an adjacency” (7–8).

Collectively, these terms (e.g., assemblage, bridge, coupling, relay, etc.) index a pure between, that which neither belongs to, nor can be reduced to, the individual bodies a given relation may happen to couple. By way of example, think of a *room*. That which effectively distinguishes a room from, say, a large, self-contained box is its connection to an outside of some sort (e.g., another room, or the outside world). But for that connection to occur between the room and its outside, a door must facilitate or make possible the *passage* between those two realms. But here’s the rub: to carry out such a function, or to

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<sup>13</sup> There are literally countless applications of these terms in Deleuze and Deleuze-Guattari—I offer here only a few examples. In *What is Philosophy?*, Deleuze-Guattari write, “we go from one concept to another by a kind of bridge” (19). In *A Thousand Plateaus*, they argue that “the self is only a threshold, a door” (249), and elsewhere that “Dismantling the organism has never meant killing yourself, but rather opening the body to connections that presuppose an entire assemblage, circuits, conjunctions, levels and thresholds, passages and distributions of intensity, and territories and deterritorializations measured with the craft of a surveyor” (160); in addition, they define the rhizome in terms of “its gaps, detours, subterranean passages, stems, openings, traits, holes, etc.” (415). Finally, in *Essays Critical and Clinical*, Deleuze contends that all writing (including literature) “is a passage of Life that traverses both the livable and the lived” (1).

facilitate that passage, the door must operate (in some way, and to some degree) outside its *relata*—i.e., outside the particular rooms themselves, lest those rooms remain entirely self-contained, and hence not rooms at all. In fact, the link between a specific room and its outside, or really the creation of any whole that might emerge from such a coupling (e.g., a home, a place of business), is inconceivable without that liminal space or pure relation enabling the whole to emerge. Once again, the relation itself can neither be reduced to, nor interpreted through the lens of, that which it relates; in part, this means that spatialized bodies (like rooms or books) differentiate themselves as such—i.e., in their own actuality—through the activation of their relational capacities, or rather, through that which links those bodies to their outside (i.e., to what they’re *not*).

On this point, one might go further and say that all discrete bodies and their corresponding identities (e.g., as rooms, books) are necessarily derivative; they emerge from, or are functions of, the various processes of individuation or differentiation that give rise to those bodies. This is what Brian Massumi, in *Parables for the Virtual*, means by the expression “passage precedes position” (46). To put a fine point on the matter, the room and the non-room (or the outside-room) do not come together as structural binaries, nor are they causally related; that is, they do not imply or presuppose one another. They neither depend upon one another, nor is their relation in some way necessary; instead their relation is merely fortuitous, a “purely contingent relation between actualities” (Baugh, “Deleuze” 360). As suggested above, relations are always independent of their *relata*, which means (1) that the various properties (or component parts) internal to some discrete body are unable to explain the whole that might emerge from that body’s relations (potential or actual) with other discrete bodies; and (2) that the relations

themselves can change without inducing a necessary alteration to the relata, as discrete entities. In fact, there can always be new entrances into, or exits from, what might otherwise remain relatively stable phenomena.

Deleuze initially derives his views on this topic—that which is variously referred to in his work, and in Deleuzian scholarship, as the “autonomy of relation” (Massumi, “Introduction” xxxiii); the “exteriority of relations” (DeLanda, *New Philosophy* 11); and the “primacy of relations” (Bains 22; Massumi, *Parables* 165)—from philosopher David Hume, and Hume’s concept of “associationism.” The fairly complex set of variables involved here will be revisited (in some form or another) in later chapters of this dissertation. But with regards to this question of the book, suffice to say that for Deleuze-Guattari, “[a] book exists only through the outside and on the outside” (*Plateaus* 4), which again means that the book exists relationally, in and through what it plugs into, and what plugs into it. So one might conclude that even the book itself is derived; it exists, or assumes its identity, its “Objectality” (Deleuze-Guattari, *What is?* 3), its book essence, as an effect of various productive encounters and couplings, which ceaselessly unfold between pre-individuated (or non-differentiated) material flows. Again, “passage precedes position.” But even when the book differentiates (or actualizes) itself, as such, its pure outside continues to channel through, unleashing what Deleuze would call “nomadic distributions and crowned anarchy” (*Difference* 265) in and through the book. In other words, through these various synergies, these couplings and ceaseless negotiations between the book and its outside (i.e., the non-book), the book’s specific forms of organization—i.e., the various codes, controls and containments that have taken hold of the book, stratified the book, like so much fog or haze—are collectively thrust

into, and/or consumed by, an anarchic outside, a swirling of incorporeal events, a wildness that ceaselessly dissolves the semiotic haze that has descended over the book. What emerges, in its place, is “[the] book as assemblage with the outside” (Deleuze-Guattari, *Plateaus* 23), rather than “the book as image of the world”—or, better yet, as *representation* of the world. So, for example, the critical themes of subjectivity, interior guilt, the transcendence of the law, and so forth—i.e., all that contains and controls the interior spaces of the book, all that both constitutes and propels Kafka criticism—are denied their transcendent status. The imposed analytical infrastructures of the book collapse, as do the spatial geographies of the castle. To repeat: “Only the principle of multiple entrances prevents the introduction of the enemy, the Signifier and those attempts to interpret a work that is actually only open to experimentation” (*Kafka* 3).

So, for Deleuze-Guattari, the book is best understood as a kind of composite, even a record, of its various inputs and outputs; its exchanges and interactions; its entrances, exits, and subterranean passageways; its forms of expression, consumption, transmission, destruction, and transformation. In *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze-Guattari claim the following:

Reading a text is never a scholarly exercise in search of what is signified, still less a highly textual exercise in search of a signifier. Rather, it is a productive use of the literary machine, a montage of desiring machines, a schizoid exercise that extracts from the text its revolutionary force. (106)

So for the schizoanalytic critic, the book is caught in the grip of its own circulating desires, its own revolutionary becomings. Those desires, then, expressed in and through the book, disrupt its *equilibrium*—i.e., its “steady-state,” in complexity terms—that which otherwise serves to unify the book in one form or another, say, in editor’s offices,

in print shops and publishing houses, in classrooms and academic institutions, and also structurally, discursively, or what have you. Forcing the book *far-from-equilibrium* not only enables previously unactualized potentials to emerge, but allows the book itself to express or renew itself in entirely new and unpredictable ways. Because any unity or organizational form that may have befallen the book, for whatever period of time, need necessarily be understood as derived or (again) emergent—i.e., never presupposed. So, in effect, the book becomes a record of its own circulations (and ways of circulating), its own variations and serial encounters. As Deleuze-Guattari conclude,

We think the material or machinic aspect of an assemblage [at the level of bodies, statements, actions] relates not to the production of goods but rather to a precise state of intermingling bodies in a society, including all the attractions and repulsions, sympathies and antipathies, alterations, amalgamations, penetrations, and expansions that affect bodies of all kinds in their relation to one another. (*Plateaus* 90)

Similarly, the book-body remains in a constant state of interaction with its outside, a constant state of variance, as it ceaselessly registers and records its ongoing encounters with that outside (e.g., its variable attractions, sympathies, penetrations, and so forth).

Thus far, then, we have forged a preliminary understanding of how the book expresses itself in ways that break (or break *with*) its habitual codings; but, to this point, we have yet to deal with the question of how certain critical practices, or what Deleuze refers to as an “intensive way of reading,” might contribute to the book’s capacity to express or transform itself. On this, consider Deleuze-Guattari’s comments in a 1972 interview, published in the wake of *Anti-Oedipus*, concerning their critical method:

What we look for in a book is the way it transmits something that resists coding: flows, revolutionary active lines of flight, lines of absolute decoding rather than any intellectual culture. Even in books there are oedipal structures, oedipal codes and strictures that are all the more insidious for being abstract, nonfigurative. What we find in great English and American novelists is a gift, rare among the French, for intensities, flows, machine-books, tool-books, schizo-books. All we've got in France is Artaud and half of Beckett. People may criticize our book [i.e., *Anti-Oedipus*] for being too literary, but we're sure such criticism will come from teachers of literature. Is it our fault that Lawrence, Miller, Kerouac, Burroughs, Artaud, and Beckett know more about schizophrenia than psychiatrists and psychoanalysts? (*Negotiations* 22–3).

At various points in his work, Deleuze reveals his great admiration for many prominent Anglo-American writers, and locates that admiration in the seemingly *rare gift* among those writers to break with certain forms of order and organization—i.e., extant social and literary codes, dominant (or prevailing) uses of language, specific histories, geographies (or landscapes), and so forth. In so doing, these writers create new practices, new *ways* of doing things; they open up new spaces, new worlds; in short, they take *flight*, and flight, for Deleuze, is “the highest aim of literature” (*Dialogues* 36). In fact, for many Anglo-American writers (e.g., Melville, Hardy, Virginia Woolf, Fitzgerald, and those listed in the citation above), Deleuze argues, “everything is departure, becoming, passage, leap, daemon, relationship with the outside. They create a new Earth.” They do so, I would add, not by simply depicting, for example, “a new Earth,” or by representing

certain “departures” or “passages” in their work (though they may do that), nor by overtly critiquing certain norms or forms of representation in their work (though they may do that as well). Instead, their work actually forces those norms (e.g., grammatical, linguistic, textual, aesthetic or literary, discursive, narratorial, political, institutional) to the point of auto-critique—i.e., where the book escapes its various codes and conventions, or where it breaks (with) identity. For Deleuze, great writers induce upheavals and transformations, not only in language and literature, but in potentially any social or territorial arrangement, any code or structure. In effect, they “liberate a living and expressive material” (Deleuze-Guattari, *Kafka* 21) from the book, just as all great artists will render visible a living potential—i.e., that which cannot be fully contained in, nor exhausted by, the art object. The power of art, then, manifests through its ruptures and breakthroughs, its becomings.

So the reason that Deleuze-Guattari have high regard for certain writers (and not others) is that those writers make new uses of language; they *detrterritorialize* (read: undo, decommission, send flying) prevailing codes and conventions; they build new relationships, new connections; they unleash what Deleuze-Guattari refer to as “collective assemblage[s] of enunciation” (*Plateaus* 80) from the book—i.e., new ways of speaking, of gesturing, of using and organizing signs that point to previously unrecognized collectives (such as ‘*a people yet to come*’). Great writers and great literatures create “a new Earth...a revolutionary-machine to come” (*Kafka* 18). To borrow a term from the Situationists, great writers go on a kind of literary *dérive*<sup>14</sup> of

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<sup>14</sup> For the Situationists, the *dérive* (i.e., drifting, being ‘on the drift’) is “playful-constructive behaviour” that unfolds in and through (or across) a certain cityscape. So while *on the drift*, individuals “drop their usual motives for movement and action [e.g., going to work], their relations, their work and leisure activities, and let themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there” (Debord 50). A “literary *dérive*” similarly emphasizes a set of experimental movements, but, in this case, those that forge new territories of the book, while breaking apart the constants of the literary terrain.

sorts, by which I mean they forge *transversal* relations—a concept that will be explored more fully in later chapters of this dissertation (also, see note 16, below)—or rather, new lines of connection and communication. We recall that what Deleuze-Guattari “look for in a book is the way it transmits something that resists coding: flows, revolutionary active lines of flight, lines of absolute decoding” (Deleuze, *Negotiations* 22); they follow that singular transmission to find “whether it works, and how it works, and who it works for.”

An important question that this dissertation asks concerns the role of criticism in the creation (or co-creation) of this “new Earth”—a role that, in a sense, links critical practice to artistic practice, and the writing of criticism to, say, the writing of literature, which (for its part) is engaged in its own “enterprise of co-creation” (Deleuze-Guattari, *What is?* 173) with the world (or, as I will discuss in Chapter 3, with incorporeal life). In general, the artist’s co-creative endeavors involve the “invent[ion of] unknown or unrecognized affects” (174), the “extract[ion of] new harmonies” (176). So I ask, then, in a related vein, how might criticism play an active and productive role in relation to the book? How might it extract new and unrecognized harmonies without, in turn, allowing its interventions to devolve into practices that suffocate the book, that constrain or restrict it? Deleuze-Guattari remain determined in the case of Kafka—as their various statements of critical intent would indicate—not to contribute to (nor further) existing lines of critical inquiry into Kafka by simply offering one more dominating interpretation of his work that emphasizes, for example, its psychological (or oedipal) underpinnings. Instead, they hope to make him happy. In *Dialogues*, Deleuze writes,

My ideal, when I write about an author, would be to write nothing that could cause him sadness, or if he is dead, that might make him weep in his



grave. Think of the author you are writing about. Think of him so hard that he can no longer be an object, and equally so that you cannot identify with him. Avoid the double shame of the scholar and the familiar. Give back to an author a little of the joy, the energy, the life of love and politics that he knew how to give and invent. So many dead writers must have wept over what has been written about them. I hope that Kafka was pleased with the book that we did on him, and it is for that reason that the book pleased nobody. (119)

This revealing passage both reinforces and expands upon the value Deleuze assigns to this idea of “reading with love,” which he advocates for in his letter to Cressole. In later chapters, I will explore, in detail, what it means for the literary critic to “give back to an author a little of the joy [etc.]” that the author herself “knew how to give and invent.”

In the first part of this dissertation, though, my concerns are more grave, less joyous. That is, I plan to explore what it means not to *please*, but to *sadden*, an author. By this I mean that critical practices designed to “lift the veil of truth,” as it were, on the book, or to spank writers (as Jarrett says) for their ideological sins, or, more generally, to objectify, unify, judge, analyze, interpret, categorize, or defend literature carry out the most damage on the book. Such approaches do little more than deaden the book; they weaken its affective capacities, its joy; they close it off (or close it down), and do so in part by restricting its purview to that of the specialist, i.e., to those who would police its exits and entrances, so as to protect or maintain their own institutional stake in a given author’s body of work. To avoid travelling down those roads, Deleuze-Guattari attempt to

treat Kafka's *writings*,<sup>15</sup> and the "constant transversal communication" (*Kafka* 40) between them,<sup>16</sup> as an open system (1) that acts (e.g., upon language, upon code, upon life, etc.); (2) that acts politically, expressively, affectively; and (3) that is ceaselessly acted upon by its outside (i.e., by the non-book). Put another way, Deleuzo-Guattarian criticism most often concerns itself with the actual operations (or movements) of the book in and through *things*—i.e., in and through other bodies, other machines, etc.; it also concerns itself with what the book does, say, to language; with what it produces (or can produce) socially, aesthetically, or otherwise; with what it brings to life, and so forth. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze-Guattari make the case that "contrary to a deeply *rooted* [read: arborescent or fixed, grounded] belief, the book is not an image of the world. It forms a rhizome with the world, there is an a-parallel evolution of the book and the world...this is its becoming-world" (11). Then, in their final collaboration, *What is Philosophy?*, the authors contend that literature fosters becomings, intensities; it brings to life, as it were, compounds of sensation, of percepts and affects, those that exceed the book, and yet mark the passage between the book and its pure outside, i.e., the non-book—issues that will be explored in Part 2 of the dissertation.

In any case, treating the book as an open system, and in a way that heeds, even hastens, its "becoming-world"—as manifest through its variable links to, breaks from, and transformations of, that world—demands, at minimum, that critics forgo their efforts

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<sup>15</sup> Kafka's writings include not only his books (i.e., short stories and novels), but diaries, public lectures, and letters, as well: taken as a whole, they amount to what Deleuze-Guattari variously refer to as "Kafka's writing machine" (*Kafka* 34), "literary machine" (29), and "expression machine" (32).

<sup>16</sup> Transversality, in this context, points to the non-hierarchical and a-symmetrical bonds of connection and communication between different modes of writing, different utterances; more concretely, the concept indexes the fact that these writings act upon one another, seize upon and actualize one another's potentials, and do so in creative and unpredictable ways that contribute to the "new Earth," of which Deleuze speaks.

to present that one dominating interpretation of the writer. Therefore, in terms of his “basic approach to literary commentary,” Deleuze

may offer poetic evocations of textual effects or cite occasional examples, but never does he attempt to demonstrate that his is the best reading of a passage or the proper way of interpreting a text. Rather, he simply invents a way of thinking about a work, one that has the dual purpose of articulating the logic of a work’s construction from the perspective of the artist and of formulating philosophical concepts of sufficient inner consistency to sustain that logic. The purpose of his analyses is to think *alongside* the work of art, not to explain it or to stand in for it, but to create a philosophical analog that invites the reader to imagine the work in a new way that necessarily entails a new understanding of the world.

(Bogue, “Minor Writing” 114)

It is this idea of *thinking with* or *thinking alongside* the book that appeals to Deleuze-Guattari in *Kafka* (and elsewhere), and to Deleuze, generally, throughout his protracted philosophical engagement with literature over the course of his career, from Proust and Sacher-Masoch in the early 1960s, to his final book, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, published in France in 1993, only a few years before his death.<sup>17</sup> In fact, “to create a philosophical analog...that necessarily entails a new understanding of the world,” as Bogue suggests, is what Deleuze-Guattari, in *What is Philosophy?*, call creating *concepts*. In part what this means—recalling Deleuze’s letter to Michel Cressole—is that thinking alongside the book involves creating

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<sup>17</sup> Even Deleuze’s final published essay, “Immanence: A Life...,” published only months before his death, involves that same sort of “thinking with” the book—in this case, Charles Dickens’ final book, *Our Mutual Friend*.

contact with what's outside the book, as a flow meeting other flows, one machine among others...[it involves] a series of experiments for each reader in the midst of events that have nothing to do with books...tearing the book into pieces, [and] getting it to interact with other things, absolutely anything. (*Negotiations* 9)

So thinking *with* the book means thinking (and even fostering) those contacts with the outside-book, through various empirico-pragmatic operations. Put succinctly, the critico-philosophical encounter for which Deleuze and Deleuze-Guattari advocate in their work involves sustained efforts to *machine* the book—an issue to which we now turn.

As has been suggested, the book operates (literally, not figuratively) as “a machine, producing certain effects, amenable to a certain use” (Deleuze-Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 109). The book is a machine that plugs into, that channels, and that channels through, other machines. Kafka, for his part, plugs into “the ship-machine, the hotel-machine, the circus-machine, the castle-machine, the court-machine, each with its own intermingled pieces, gears, processes, and bodies contained in one another or bursting out of containment” (*Plateaus* 88). *Contextually speaking* (for want of better phrase), the book-machine plugs into machinic assemblages of bodies and utterances, of content and expression. And into those open-ended machinic assemblages, the critic enters to not only *evaluate*—in the diagnostic sense of that word—the “measurable” relations of the literary-machine to, for example, “a war-machine, love-machine, revolutionary-machine...bureaucratic-machine” (4), but to *experiment* with the book by plugging still more machines into it. So, of machines, in general, one might say that they function and function *with* (i.e., they co-function); they work and are put to work; they act upon

bodies; they make or produce things; they liberate potentials; and finally, they enter into novel arrangements with one another. From a machinic perspective, then, literature is fundamentally connective; it is a set of hook-ups or circuits into which things plug, and through which an affective charge (of one sort or another) emits or transmits itself. So the primary question that the Deleuzian critic (let alone the novelist) might ask can be formulated as follows: “How can the book find an adequate outside with which to assemble in heterogeneity, rather than a world to reproduce?” (24). To create such assemblages, and to liberate the expressive potentials of the book, the critic must experiment. As suggested a moment ago, this means plugging the book into its outside, into the non-book—a “much more complicated machinery”—just like “plugging into an electric circuit,” as Deleuze says. This means putting the book to work to see what it can do, or, better yet, to see what it might be capable of.

Brian Massumi refers to this sort of critical intervention as “operative reason” (*Parables* 109), that which he describes as both “experimental” (111) and “*pragmatic* rather than analytic” (111–112). Massumi further characterizes the operative approach as follows:

It doesn't master a situation [nor does it master the book or piece of literature] with exhaustive knowledge of alternative outcomes. It 'tweaks' it. Rather than probing the situation to bring it under maximum control, it prods it, recognizing it to be finally indomitable, and respecting its autonomy. Operative reason is concerned with effects—specifically counter-effects—more than causes. It deploys local interventions in an attempt to induce a qualitative global transformation: small causes with

disproportionate effect, excess-effect, a little tweak for a big return.

Operative reason is inseparable from a process of trial and error, with occasional shots in the dark, guided in every case by a pragmatic sense of the situation's responsiveness (as opposed to its manipulability). (112)

Massumi contrasts this practice of operative reason—which in this context refers to the practice of tweaking the book, of making it *go critical* (109), so as to release its expressive potential<sup>18</sup>—with what he refers to as “instrumental reason.” In other words, where operative reason “deploys local interventions in an attempt to induce a qualitative global transformation,” instrumental reason, in its turn, abstracts, systematizes, and even formalizes those critical interactions. Through instrumental reason, literature becomes a predictable *object* of study: “regularized, repeatable, uniform” (94), which, in effect, means that the book loses its charge, its connection to/with the outside, its capacity to act upon the world; as Deleuze would say, the book loses its capacity to “come into full possession of [its] power of action” (*Logic* 273).

In any case, what Massumi characterizes in terms of the deployment of “local interventions,” Deleuze more generally refers to as “reading with love”; yet, for both, the goal is the same: to pry open new spaces in the book; to amplify the book, intensify it; to see what it can do, what it can effect, produce, or make felt. Deleuzian scholar Bruce Bough—in his essay, “How Deleuze can help us make Literature work”—assigns a triple aspect to the more interventionist or operative modes of literary criticism with which this dissertation concerns itself: that is, we (as critics or readers) *experiment* with the book, with an eye on its potential for *use*, so as to force new *experiences* of the book. So we

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<sup>18</sup> Of note is the fact that this potential of the book remains hidden or inaccessible in its “steady-state,” as complexity theorists would say.

experiment; we unleash potential; we experience. In so doing, we break (and break *with*) established modalities of the book. That is, we induce *flight*: i.e., the augmentation and/or mobilization of the book's power to act beyond those critical controls, by stimulating its capacity to act and be acted upon. Baugh, who links the augmentation of the "power to act" not only to the book, but to the reader, as well (52), offers up a provocative moniker for this approach to literary criticism: "a revolutionary pragmatics of reading" (34)—an approach that enfolds both Nietzschean and Spinozist currents. I will have more to say about these matters in Part 2 of the dissertation. For the moment, though, let me simply underscore the fact that Baugh's *revolutionary pragmatics of reading*—if ultimately productive or beneficial in terms of the reader's critical engagement/encounter with the book<sup>19</sup>—depends upon the capacity of the reader to directly access the materiality (or material aspect) of the book, and to that extent *machine* the book. Machining the book, we recall, involves "plugging [it] into an electric circuit," putting it to work, charging it up, unleashing its potential. Put another way, machining the book involves the coupling of heterogeneous components between the book and its outside; or rather, it involves feeding the book various raw materials—the "absolutely anything," to which Deleuze refers in his letter—from without. Therefore, machining the book means drawing on the capacity of the book to make or produce things, to generate outputs; it means amplifying the book's potential by manipulating its speeds and maximizing its yield. To my mind, the excerpts of Deleuze's letter to Cressole, cited at the outset to this introduction, read

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<sup>19</sup> I derive this point (and the point that follows) from Deleuze's reading of Spinoza; however, it is a more important issue than I am letting on at the moment. To get a sense of my larger intent here, it might be helpful to recall Deleuze's question to readers (cited in his letter to Cressole) about their localized encounters with the book: "How does it work for you? If it doesn't work, if nothing comes through, you try another book." That is, if nothing productive comes from the encounter, if the book fails to reveal its expressive potentials, then simply move on to the next book, the next machinic intervention. Baugh gives great weight to this matter as well in his essay, "How Deleuze can help us make Literature work."

much like a critical manifesto, “practically a war cry,”<sup>20</sup> because they ground the practices of critical reading that Deleuze proposes in, for example, experimentation, pragmatics, and ultimately ethics, rather than in something like the analysis of fixed and self-sustaining values and the banal pursuit of authorial intent.

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I conclude this opening chapter by briefly returning to Deleuze’s letter to Michel Cressole, wherein he (Deleuze) makes the following claim: “There are, you see, two ways of reading a book: you either see it as a *box* with something inside and start looking for what it signifies...Or there’s the other way.” In my own example of the monadic, purely internalized *room* (i.e., windowless, door-less, without access in or out), discussed earlier in this chapter, I drew upon this same image of the “box.” If you recall, my comments on the matter read as follows: “That which effectively distinguishes a room, say, from a large, self-contained box is its connection to an *outside* of some sort (e.g., another room, or the outside world).” The point for both me, on this question of the room, and Deleuze, on this question of the book, is that any and all material things (like rooms or books, or even boxes for that matter) cannot be reduced to wholly self-contained, self-sufficient beings, with no essential connection to their respective outsides; nor should they be summarily reduced to a set of logical properties—in terms of the room: shape, size, color, etc.; in terms of the book: the various *subjects* and *objects* generally attributed

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<sup>20</sup> I take this phrase from Deleuze’s first major work on Spinoza, *Expressionism in Philosophy*, wherein Deleuze writes, “When Spinoza says that we do not even know what a body can do, this is practically a war cry” (255). So by asking—as Deleuze does in his letter to Cressole—what a *book-body* can do, how it works, what it functions with, and so forth, Deleuze foments his own revolution (of sorts), this time in the way book’s are accessed and interacted with.



to books (e.g., plot or narrative, character, theme, aesthetic or literary form, etc.).<sup>21</sup> For Deleuze, the book (much like any “machinic assemblage”)<sup>22</sup> retains a very real set of potentials or capacities—the capacity, for example, to affect and be affected by a non-present outside; also, the capacity to envelop a set of forces (e.g., a certain reading or evaluation, a certain use or application by an audience; also, the forces unleashed by other socio-political machines, other assemblages). The book, in turn, enters into new and novel arrangements with the non-book, and in so doing triggers material processes in those other *bodies* (linguistic, textual, social, etc.). So the book is not only put to work in a certain way through its variable encounters with exterior forces, but, as a direct result of those encounters, the book releases or draws upon its own untapped (i.e., unactualized) potentials, and thereby transforms or re-modulates in the process. Put simply, what I have argued in this chapter is that the book is neither closed nor fully complete in and of itself, nor is it amenable to being read or evaluated in a definitive and/or totalizing way.

Nevertheless, over its long history, from Plato to the present, the *discourse of literary criticism*<sup>23</sup> has—in one form or another—been mired in sustained efforts to somehow totalize the book (i.e., to *box* it up)

1. by subjecting the book to a logic of representation (and the related attributions of identity and internal resemblance);

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<sup>21</sup> Here I am thinking of a point that the authors raise at the outset of *A Thousand Plateaus*: “A book has neither object nor subject; it is made of variously formed matters, and very different dates and speeds. To attribute the book to a subject is to overlook this working of matters, and the exteriority of their relations. It is to fabricate a beneficent God to explain geological movements” (3). We will return to this way of thinking about the book in Part 1 of the dissertation.

<sup>22</sup> For Deleuze-Guattari, all *bodies* (including book-bodies) enter into relations with other bodies (social, political, institutional, etc.—i.e., not just textual bodies). Those relations, then, either enable or block the body in question to transform or become-other; which is to say, the body derives its meaning or function from its complex interactions (or ways of co-mingling) with other bodies (*Plateaus* 88).

<sup>23</sup> I will define this phrase in a moment.

2. by overcoding the book under the unifying auspices of a master Signifier, and an enduring set of meanings/values interpreted by the priest (or academically, by the so-called “sage on the stage”);
3. by depriving the book of “an adequate outside with which to assemble in heterogeneity,” as Deleuze-Guattari contend;
4. by denying what Paul Bains refers to as “the primacy of semiosis,” or what he also calls, following Deleuze, “the being of relation” (17), and hence the capacity of the book itself to form (or again, *enter into*) novel machinic assemblages;
5. by strictly regulating critical encounters with the book—or better, by regulating what Henry Sussman calls “the task of the critic”;<sup>24</sup>
6. by subjecting the book to endless cycles of signifier production and manic interpretation (i.e. “signifying regimes”)<sup>25</sup> in a confused effort to authorize, as Deleuze says, the more “perverse or depraved” critics/readers among us; and
7. by *stripping* the book-body of its “corporeality”—to borrow a phrase from Massumi—through its repeated submission to various forms of

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<sup>24</sup> In his book, *The Task of the Critic*, Sussman speaks to the emergence of a *new* (i.e., post-war) critical persona. The modern critic, he argues, challenges boundaries (disciplinary, institutional, even religious) by engaging in a kind of registerial ‘sleight-of-hand.’ Sussman writes that “the task of the critic has never been harder” (1), in that such a task involves the free-wheeling (though not indiscreet) synthesis of the various discourses and practices of, for example, the poet, philosopher, theologian, scholar, programmer (13, 23), city dweller or *flaneur* (66; also, 261, n.3), cultural watchdog (133), and so forth—whatever the occasion (or *scene of writing*, as Derrida says) calls for. The critic performs, enacts, transgresses, and does so in and through language and the tools of close reading. But when I speak of “the task of the critic” in the first part of this dissertation, I concern myself not with any *new* task for the critic—though that will be the overarching concern of my later chapters, and the second part of this dissertation—but with a more traditional, anti-materialist agenda, and its reinforcement of what I view as an enduring Platonism.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. pp. 10–11, above.

*transcendence* (or to what Deleuze in his book, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, refers to as “the poisoned gift of Platonism”).

As I will demonstrate in the first part of the dissertation, each of these literary critical *gestures*, if you will, each in their own way, serves to contain or control the book’s materiality, to block its becomings; in so doing, they point the way to a transcendent orientation at the heart of literary critical discourse. So, Part 1 of the dissertation takes a detailed inventory of these acts of *dematerialization* in literary criticism’s treatment of the book—acts that have historically served to erect, renew, and ceaselessly reconfigure what Deleuze-Guattari, in *What is Philosophy?*, refer to as “the plane of transcendence” (a concept to which I will turn in the first and second chapters). Part 2 of the dissertation, then, maps the coordinates of a more uniquely *Deleuzian* criticism—a form of criticism saddled, in part, with overcoming many of the biases within literary critical discourse, as a whole, that have both historically and institutionally impeded progress toward a more decidedly materialist engagement with the book.

But let’s look at this issue from another angle, beginning with a return to the question of literary critical discourse.

Michel Foucault, in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, defines *discourse*, in general, as “[a] group of statements that belong to a single system of formation” (121). That is, a group of statements—or what Deleuze-Guattari call “a collective assemblage of enunciation”—that coexist or co-function “with a domain of objects” (*Archaeology* 120)—or what Deleuze-Guattari call “a machinic assemblage of bodies”—in and through some sort of relational field—or what Deleuze-Guattari call “a plane of immanence.” Put another way, any given discourse (e.g., of education, of economics, of psychiatry, of

literary criticism) emerges or unfolds through the distribution, dispersion, and (fairly) regular reproduction of a finite group of statements—statements that derive their historically-situated meanings and values from certain “rules of formation” (*Archaeology* 42). So, in short, a discourse is the sum total of its visual and verbal semiotics, and also the limits that those semiotic coordinates impose on its user’s capacity to see or perceive, to speak, to articulate, and to interpret. Within the wider field of discourse analysis—a field that owes much to the pioneering work of Foucault on these matters—the concept of “discourse” typically refers to any contextualized use of language in and through which (1) meanings are made and reinforced; (2) social actions and interactions unfold in largely regulated ways; and (3) social structures are forged, fortified, and ultimately, codified. So while in each and every act of literary criticism nothing less than the book, and related conceptions of the so-called “task of the critic,” are on the table and tacitly negotiated, most within the critical community will (to some extent) conform to a certain “group of statements” that both regulate and confine the practices of the critic, let alone the expressive capacities of the book. My task, then, in Part 1, involves bringing that discursive programming into focus, so as to open the door, in Part 2, to what Greg Ulmer calls a kind of “post-criticism.”

The ubiquitous figure of the “post-” in literary critical discourse—e.g., post-structuralism, postmodernism, post-colonialism—draws attention, on the one hand, to some sort of discursive or historical past, and to a decisive separation from that past through any number of practical or theoretical displacements; on the other hand, the figure of the “post” signals a turn, a new mapping, a new hope or freedom: in short, a look forward. The *post*, then, comes before and after, just as any (supposedly) new or

novel methodological development in the discourse of literary criticism requires a basic pledge, by critics, to *think differently*. By this I do not mean to imply—not at this point anyway—that, as critics, we need to think “difference in itself,” or to think “lines of continuous variation,” as Deleuze would say (issues to which we will turn in Part 2 of the dissertation). Instead, I simply wish to suggest that the turn toward a distinctly Deleuzian criticism (or to any other critical agenda, past or present) makes significant, yet nonetheless unavoidable, demands on critics in terms of their ability to “think-otherwise”—to think-otherwise about the book, about themselves as critics, about their task, and about the nature of critical practices in general. So in order to shift one’s focus to new critical trajectories, new mappings (of the book, etc.), critics must first distance themselves from some of the enduring literary critical conceits to which they may have unwittingly conformed. As Foucault says, there is “negative work to be carried out first: we must rid ourselves of a whole mass of notions” (*Archaeology* 23). That is, criticism must rid itself of its various modes of transcendence, its logic of representation. To that end, critics must embark on a set of betrayals and falsifications—what Nietzsche calls “the great overcoming”—so as to ultimately open themselves up to *new* practices, new ways of thinking, new potentials, new freedoms. So thinking-otherwise will put the critic on two conflicting yet interrelated paths, propelled (in both instances) by the paradoxical figure of the *post*.

In fact, it is certainly not out of the question to situate Deleuze’s work in that same twofold trajectory, that coincidental back-and-forth progression. That is, Deleuze is as much tied, for example, to the thought of difference and becoming, as he is to the idea

of “a generalized anti-Hegelianism,”<sup>26</sup> an “overturning of Platonism,”<sup>27</sup> and to what he and Guattari, in their final collaborative work, *What is Philosophy?*, refer to as “the long history of an illusion” (47). This latter phrase—to which we will return in the first part of the dissertation—has a direct line to Nietzsche in *Twilight of the Idols*, who argues against what he calls “the history of an error” (40) and “the four great errors” (47). Nietzsche, in *Ecce Homo*, would also speak to the need to overcome “the lies of the millennia” (783)—a negative critique, an overcoming, that would, in turn, serve his more positive philosophical interests such as “the revaluation of all values” and “self-overcoming.” So Nietzsche—perhaps more than most—would decisively separate himself from his predecessors, from Kant, Hegel, and Schopenhauer, in particular; he would further separate himself

1. from a dialectic conception of man, “the abstract thought of contradiction” (Deleuze, *Nietzsche* 10)—i.e., the “dialectical no” (9);
2. from history, values, the will, the concept of truth, and all semblances of interiority;
3. from grudges (i.e., *ressentiment*), bad conscience, guilt, the ascetic ideal;
4. from morality and the thinking of the slave (or slave mentality);

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<sup>26</sup> In *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, Deleuze would suggest that “anti-Hegelianism runs through Nietzsche’s work as its cutting edge” (8). Elsewhere, in his preface to *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze would point to the more widespread modern repudiation “of the identical and the negative, of identity and contradiction” (xix)—i.e., the repudiation of Hegelian dialectics and its associated logic of representation. Keith Ansell-Pearson argues that “Deleuze invokes, as the peculiar spirit of his age, a generalized anti-Hegelianism because for him it is Hegel who puts all the resources of mobile thought in the service of the sedentary, [thus] making good sense, for example, of the State or Christianity” (5).

<sup>27</sup> This is the original title of an essay that Deleuze would later re-name “Plato and the Simulacrum” and append—in revised form—to his work, *The Logic of Sense*. In the first part of this dissertation we will discuss Deleuze’s engagement with Plato, at length, and his idea of what it means to “overturn Platonism.”

5. from Socrates, Christ; also Christianity, Christian nihilism, the Christian priest and also the Judaic Priest.

On and on. So much to leave behind in order to move forward. So much to renounce or denounce. So much to triumph over. One cannot help but recall Lyotard's denunciation of "grand narratives"—narratives that would certainly include the sort of hero narratives within which Nietzsche (or, more precisely, Nietzsche's *Zarathustra*) was mired.

But is all this just a simple example of the idea that *you've got to go back before you can move forward*? Or that we need to redress the past?

My contention is that long-standing biases toward materialist conceptions of the book have opened the door to a long history of critical distortions within the discourse of literary criticism, those that have suppressed the book's capacity for *difference* (i.e., excess, variation, becoming) by locating an enduring Platonism at the heart of literary critical discourse. As a result, the wider discourse has been dominated (1) by the logic of representation (an issue to which I will return in Part 1 of the dissertation); (2) by the perpetuation of various structural, semiotic, and/or moral confinements of the book (i.e., various false unities); (3) by the assumption of the autonomous critical subject, pursuing a standardized critical agenda; and (4) by more contemporary efforts to coordinate critical practices around a (presumed) set of consensually-derived conversational constants. It is a history beholden to, and reinforced by, what I will call (following Deleuze-Guattari) a "transcendent orientation" to the book—where transcendence itself is erected and stabilized (in large part) by illusory claims to unity and uniformity that follow from the institutional (or what Deleuze-Guattari would call "molar") application of standardized critical measures. In fact, I would argue (admittedly in somewhat polemical fashion) that

literary critical discourse is both defined and propelled by its transcendent orientation—an orientation we find rooted in the Platonic dialogues—and the near- ceaseless renewals of those transcendences, right up through the present day. So to antiquity we turn in Chapter 1, before shifting the focus, in Chapter 2, to (again) the various renewals and reconfigurations of Plato’s “poisoned gift” in later developments of the discourse of literary criticism.

Then, as suggested above, the second part of the dissertation will go on to map the coordinates of a Deleuzean (or, more generally, materialist) criticism—a criticism that distances itself from the plague of this enduring Platonism. That is, the focus, in Part 2, turns *away* from the various stratigraphic currents of literary critical discourse (discussed in Part 1), and *toward* the question of how literary critical practices might be grounded in what I call an immanentist orientation to the book. So, Part 2 examines how long-standing impediments to machining the book are ultimately overcome by a criticism that mobilizes what I call (following the lead of Massumi and complexity science) the *criticality* of the book, or rather, the capacity of such to *go critical*. Left behind by this approach are the various modes of critical overlay that suppress the relational or transformational powers of the book. In Part 2, then, I will examine the productive role of the literary critic, and will attempt to find common ground (both theoretical and practical) between Maurice Blanchot’s claim that “criticism recovers itself...in the work as one of its essential moments” (“Preface” 5) and the more active, materialist interventions of the critic.

Finally, in the epilogue to this dissertation, I posit the notion of critic as artisan—an idea I derive from Deleuze-Guattari’s discussion of the minor sciences in *A Thousand*



*Plateaus*, and in particular the authors' comments on the artisan (and the artisanal economies), therein. In this context, I ask the following questions: How might literary criticism be reconceived or reconstituted in light of its own *minoritarian-becomings* (a concept I will discuss in the epilogue)? What then becomes of what Deleuzian scholar Gregg Lambert calls the "official or institutional language" (*Who's Afraid* 42) of literary criticism in literary critical circles where the more "intensive way of reading" (that Deleuze proposes) begins to gain a strong foothold? And finally, how is the critic herself ultimately transformed when stripped of direct control over the operative movements of the *critical*? I will argue, in short, that a uniquely Deleuzian critical practice requires a new role for the critic, one where the critic gives up her official pretensions (vis-à-vis critical judgment) and her sense of control or ownership over the book, so as to pursue the path of the *rude* artisan, which ultimately involves working with (i.e., forcing) a certain set of materials—in this case, aesthetic and linguistic materials—just to see what they can do.

## Part 1

### The “Plan[e] of Transcendence,” The “Plan[e] of Organization”

Perhaps there are two planes, or two ways of conceptualizing the plane. The plane can be a hidden principle, which makes visible what is seen and audible what is heard, etc., which at every instant causes the given to be given, in this or that state, at this or that moment. But the plane itself is not given. It is by nature hidden. It can only be inferred, induced, concluded from that to which it gives rise (simultaneously or successively, synchronically or diachronically). A plane of this type is as much a plan(e) of organization as of development: it is structural or genetic, and both at once, structure and genesis, the structural plan(e) of formed organizations with their developments, the genetic plan(e) of evolutionary developments with their organizations.

—Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 265)

In one aspect, the plane of transcendence is an image of the glory beyond...; in another, it is the identity grid coextensive with that image; in yet another, the medium that brings the image to light (the apparatus by means of which the identity grid is reapplied to and evaluates some of the bodies from which it was abstracted). The plane of transcendence, however, is best understood not in terms of the content of any particular image...but as the process presiding over the creation of a certain kind of image (general images: those constituting categories, identities, good/commonsensical ideas).

—Brian Massumi (*A User's Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 111)

## Chapter 1

### “The Poisoned Gift of Platonism”—

### On the Dematerialization of the Book

The poisoned gift of Platonism is to have introduced transcendence into philosophy, to have given transcendence a plausible philosophical meaning (the triumph of the judgement of God).

—Gilles Deleuze (*Essays Critical and Clinical*, 137)

The story of literary criticism—as chronicled in anthologies, and long narrated by literary critics—begins, almost routinely, in antiquity, with Plato’s *Republic*, and the largely disparaging view of the *imitative* arts (e.g., poetry, drama, music, painting) therein contained. The irony has rarely been lost on philosophers and critics that Plato should be so notorious for mounting one of history’s most searing indictments of the arts, and yet be such a great dramatist and literary stylist in his own right. Perhaps his own insight into the artist’s psyche and the practices of the artist makes Plato more mindful than most of the remarkable power of art to mould minds and stir passions. Whatever the case, Plato would famously (some would say infamously) argue that if art were somehow misconstrued by the denizens of the republic, or if artists themselves were thought to present accurate depictions/imitations of reality, their work might ultimately do significant damage (psychological or otherwise) to the burgeoning republic at a vulnerable stage of its development. I will clarify Plato’s position on these matters more fully below, but in brief let me say that according to Plato a republic needs an enduring set of standards with which to assess, and in turn pass judgement on, its various cultural products (among other things). Moreover, the poets, and those who interpret their work, need be properly schooled in the *formal* and unerring truth about the various objects, themes, issues, values, social roles, etc., depicted in their poetry—a schooling that, as one might imagine, most lack. So because the poets are deficient in the sort of rational or, at least, practical understanding of the worldly things that their work depicts, Plato would censure these individuals (1) for their flawed or mistaken imitations; (2) for their deceitful and often corrosive impersonations (or representations) of the gods; and (3) for their capacity to whip the most vulnerable citizens (e.g., children, the ill-informed or

naïve, and even the more inexperienced stewards of the State) into a psychological frenzy. Poetry, Plato argued, if not perceived rationally, and if not recognized for its capacity to charm or mystify the unsuspecting, can foster everything from moral equivocation, to the fear of death, to the sort of poor social example that ultimately undermines a republic.<sup>28</sup>

Given such concerns, Plato would call for the banishment of most all the poets, less those who compose hymns to the gods or praise great leadership—in other words, those who reinforce existing values (e.g., social, political, moral) in their work, or who attempt to represent the refined simplicity of the truly good man. Specifically, Plato held that the poets should (1) reproduce the simple and fixed meters and rhythms of an ordered and brave life, and (2) express a positive harmony between rhythm and language—and should do so in a way that not only mirrors, but reinforces, the social, psychological, and spiritual balances that a people need in order to prosper. And by maintaining those balances, the poets effectively utilize their art (and their artistry) to positively influence those who might otherwise be manipulated by the sort of transitory beliefs and opinions that for Plato are endemic to the imitative arts.

So Plato was the first (though in no way the last) to bring the social, moral, and didactic responsibilities of the poet into focus; he was also the first to argue that, ideally speaking, poets should operate as functionaries of the State, which means that their work should highlight a set of non-reactive, non-incendiary ideals, such as reasoned

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<sup>28</sup> As we will see later in this chapter, concerns such as these persist in political and cultural discourse right up through the present day. A notable example of contemporary Platonism—one of many—is Alan Bloom’s book, *The Closing of the American Mind*. Therein, Bloom laments the fact that modern American culture has been reduced to “three great lyrical themes: sex, hate and a smarmy, hypocritical version of brotherly love. Such polluted sources issue in a muddy stream where only monsters can swim. A glance at the videos that project images on the wall of Plato’s cave since MTV took it over suffices to prove this...Nothing noble, sublime, profound, delicate, tasteful or even decent can find a place in such tableaux. There is room only for the intense, changing, crude and immediate” (74).

moderation, optimism, poetic justice, and the like. Moreover, the poets ought to reinforce a society's prevailing systems of value, and should, in turn, excise the images of vicious, unrestrained, mean, and graceless characters from their work. Plato, then, was the first to forge a direct relationship between artistic devices—i.e., the mimetic activities of the artist—and the stability of the State.

What I want to argue at this point is that Deleuze's phrase, "the poisoned gift of Platonism"—to which I refer in the title to this chapter<sup>29</sup>—does not so much refer (in the present context) to Plato's critique of the arts, but rather to the influence of Plato's metaphysics on what I would characterize as materialist conceptions of, and approaches to, poetry in the *discourse of literary criticism*.<sup>30</sup> Which is to say that the supposed threat that the poets and their work pose to the republic—i.e., the threat of materiality—is the threat of unregulated (read: non-representational) lines of continuous variation (or ceaseless modulation); the threat of pure exteriority, without interior grounding or stable identity. It is the threat posed by pure potential (i.e., by the wild, the chaotic, the uncontrolled or uncontrollable). It is, moreover, the relativist threat that "anyone can lay claim to anything"—a point to which I will return below. In any case, Plato's desire to mitigate the materialist threat has habitually masked (or diverted attention away from) his underlying "moral motivation in all its purity" (Deleuze, *Difference* 265). As Deleuze points out, this moral motivation involves (1) the introduction of *transcendence* into philosophy (and, more broadly speaking, into the history of ideas); and (2) the

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<sup>29</sup> Admittedly, I use this phrase in a way slightly different from Deleuze, who is referring to the impact of Plato's *poisoned gift*—i.e., transcendence and "the triumph of the judgement of God" (*Essays* 137)—on philosophy. I contend, though, that Platonic doctrine has made equally pernicious contributions to conceptions of poetry (or literature), and has done so through the same conceptual mechanisms (namely, transcendence and judgement).

<sup>30</sup> Recalling the introduction to Part 1 of this dissertation, when I speak of the *discourse* of literary criticism in the pages that follow, I am referring to the patterned and often regulated ways of making meaning, and of performing the task of criticism in (largely) institutionalized settings.

assignment of a “plausible philosophical meaning” to the concept of transcendence—i.e., “the triumph of the judgement of God.” In terms of the former, I would add that transcendence—or what I call the *transcendent orientation*—has not only permeated philosophy, but also various questions (or conceptions) of society, culture, the law, leadership, and, for our purposes, the literary critical acts of dematerialization that have traditionally informed conceptions of the book. In this chapter, and the chapter that follows, I will explore the historical role that the transcendent orientation to the book has played in propelling anti-materialist sensibilities in and through the discourse of literary criticism. For the moment, though, let me simply suggest that introducing transcendence (or the idea of such) into conceptions of the book involves—at minimum—the implementation of certain normative measures, certain standards and organizing principles, into literary critical discourse, those that not only forge a certain idea of the critic, but that regulate or coordinate critical encounters with the book (i.e., the way books are read, received, and represented by critics).

So this chapter will explore, in detail, Plato’s view of the arts, with a special emphasis on Plato’s critique of the poets and their work, and his embryonic conceptions of the critic, as well, which I derive primarily from a close reading of the *Ion*, an early Platonic dialogue. As was suggested in the introduction to this dissertation, my objective in this first chapter is to map the semiotic coordinates of the transcendent orientation to literature, as they present themselves in and through Platonic doctrine. This, then, will set the stage for exploring, in the next chapter, how Plato’s concept of transcendence—his “poisoned gift,” as it were—has since guided the literary critical enterprise, from Aristotle (Plato’s student) through the twentieth-century. With regard to this last point, I

should add that my intention is not to offer an exhaustive recounting of the discourse of literary criticism in terms of its repeated appeals to transcendence, but to explore the broader trajectories of literary criticism's anti-materialist agenda and its consequences for conceptions of the book, the critic, and the perceived task of the critic, by drawing upon a number of pertinent historical examples from literary critical discourse. The first two chapters, then—Part 1 of the dissertation—provide the backdrop to Part 2, where my focus shifts from the transcendent orientation to literature to the question of *how* the Platonic orientation (vis-à-vis literature) can ultimately be overcome through a critical approach to literature (or the book) that, following Deleuze, I characterize as *immanentist* in nature, and that will mark the return to a more fully materialist engagement with the book. In any case, before turning to Plato's critique of the arts, we first need to consider the cultural and philosophical context in which the dialogues themselves took shape, that which contributes to Plato's ultimate denunciation of the poets and their work. On these issues, Gilles Deleuze offers a variety of important insights.

### ***Plato's Athens***

Deleuze argues that “what Plato criticizes in the Athenian democracy is the fact that anyone can lay claim to anything” (*Essays* 137). This means that *anyone*—excluding, of course, women, slaves, prisoners, and anyone else who might be marginalized, for whatever reason—can lay claim (or at least potentially so) to positions of power and authority within the Greek polis, and anyone can wield considerable influence on/over the people. More specifically, anyone (who maybe so inclined) can teach children or the uninitiated. Anyone can practice law, and potentially be in the position to pass judgement or mete out justice in some way. Anyone can put their intellectual or creative stamp on



the telling of history or on the writing of philosophy. Anyone wandering through the Greek marketplace can advance specific social or political ideals, can posit their own moral agendas, can speculate on questions important to the republic (e.g., truth, justice, love, moral action, good and evil). And to support or defend one's biases or opinions (*doxa*), anyone—or again, potentially anyone—can make use of the tools of rhetoric to render their arguments more persuasive or intellectually compelling.

So “Platonism appears,” according to Deleuze, “as a selective doctrine” (*Essays* 136), that which “restore[s] criteria of selection” (137) to everything from public debate, to the vetting of public officials (e.g., leaders, teachers, etc.), to philosophy, and to wherever specific assessments or appraisals of one sort or another—e.g., cultural, political, legal—that may be required to arbitrate competing claims. Put another way, Platonism concerns itself with erecting precise measures for “judging the well-foundedness or legitimacy” (136) of individual claims to, say, governance, knowledge, the truth, or what have you. Moreover, Socrates—the main character and enduring voice of reason in Plato's dialogues—does more than make specific judgements about those claims; he also makes judgements, tacit or otherwise, about the claimants, themselves—those who Deleuze variously refers to as “pretenders” (*Logic* 257),<sup>31</sup> “imitators” (258), “suitsors” (254), and “rivals” (*Essays* 136), for reasons that will become clear in a moment. In *Republic*, and really throughout the Platonic dialogues, Socrates assumes a kind of administerial role, that of “philosopher-arbiter” (Lambert, *Non-philosophy* 28), in his dealings with citizens, strangers, and the rhetorically-savvy Sophists (e.g., lawyers, teachers, statesmen) who frequent the Athenian marketplace. Platonism, as Deleuze

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<sup>31</sup> The text cited here is drawn from an essay entitled, “Plato and the Simulacrum”—a revised version of an earlier essay (“Overturning Platonism”). The newer version of the essay then was appended to the English translation of Deleuze's book, *The Logic of Sense*.

writes, “confronts sophism as its enemy,” and adds that because the Sophists “lay claim to anything and everything, there is the great risk that [they] will scramble the [e.g., procedures of] selection and pervert the [e.g., tools of] judgement” (*Essays* 136).

So to alleviate those risks, Plato posits the need for enduring standards through which to make selections among claimants, and pass rational judgement on their claims. In general, such standards derive from one’s *recollection* of, and/or rational scrutiny into, intelligible Ideas, i.e., the pure form of things, instantiated in particulars.<sup>32</sup> Deleuze also suggests that Plato’s “installation of the mythic circle” (*Difference* 66) similarly offers the “philosopher-arbiter” (or the process of arbitration, itself) a set of standardized measures and organizing principles with which to assess particular claims to the truth. Greek myth, according to Deleuze, not only expresses (or provides demonstrations of), say, timeless ideals, values, organizing principles, etc., but becomes the very ground upon which those aforementioned claims are situated and formally assessed or evaluated. In discussing the authoritative role of myth in the Platonic dialogues, Deleuze argues,

Myth, with its always circular structure, is indeed the story of a foundation. It permits the construction of a model according to which the different aspirants can be judged. What needs a foundation, in fact, is always a pretension or a claim. It is the claimant who appeals to a foundation, whose claim may be judged well-founded, ill-founded, or unfounded. (*Logic* 255; trans. modified)

Myth, in other words, illuminates the human condition and provides a narrative means of moral instruction; myth also becomes a kind of heuristic for screening, dividing up, and

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<sup>32</sup> In the *Meno*, Socrates argues that “what we call learning is only a process of recollection” (sec. 81), meaning that we are only able to learn (or know) what the soul already possesses, i.e., an *essential* knowledge of things, or of basic truths, derived neither from sensation nor mere opinion.

deciding among individual claims to the truth. So, for example, by telling the stories of good and heroic men (e.g., overcoming obstacles, deciphering oracles); by depicting acts of wisdom and virtue; by offering up images of, say, justice (or the truly *just* man), and so forth, myth—*not* dramatic poetry, not art—provides models, and hence a set of enduring standards with which to measure the relative strengths and weaknesses of individual claimants, and thus to judge the well-foundedness of their claims. More to the point, myth implicates or captures individual claimants (and their claims) in an over-arching system of judgement, given that for Plato, all are measured by the quality of their pretensions (or better, their claims), which, in turn, situates those individual claims in pre-existing hierarchies (social, political, etc.) and pre-existing systems of value. So the aspirants' claims are judged on a sliding scale, somewhere between valid and invalid, pure and impure, true and false, laudable and wicked, authentic and inauthentic, etc., as *each* in their own way—each claim, each claimant—is measured in relation to the sort of ideals retrieved through memory (and/or rational inquiry) or exemplified in myth.

According to Plato, the burgeoning republic must people itself with aspirants and contenders, with *wannabes*, those who allow themselves (their beliefs, their claims, etc.) to not only be read through the lens of those aforementioned ideals—which, by the way, all claimants aspire to, though necessarily fall short of—but to be tied to derivative social identities (e.g., claimant, rival), as well, which in turn implicates them in what Deleuze calls “lineages” (*Logic* 254) or “lines of descent” (*Difference* 60), through the democratic process of “elective participation” (61). For his part, Socrates, through a methodological procedure that appeals to various fixed principles and enduring standards, again derived through myth, judges the degree of legitimacy that ought to be accorded individual

conceptions of, and/or claims related to, say, the *good* (or the good life), leadership (and effective governance), justice, beauty, and other ideals, and then hierarchically positions those claims, and the claimants who advance them, accordingly. For Plato, all claims are necessarily limited copies or reproductions of abstract universals; sensible copies of those standards become increasingly less authentic or less pure, as a matter of degree, than the models from which they derive, and to which they conform. So Platonic doctrine concerns itself—at least superficially—with sorting out the differences between second-hand (third-hand, etc.) versions of those universal forms, and with ranking and organizing copies according to their greater or lesser claims to the truth. For Plato, the method of arbitration that forges those gradations plays a vital role in bringing order and organization to a still tentative democracy beset, he believes, by the sort of relativist leanings that, as Deleuze contends, enable anyone to “lay claim to anything.”<sup>33</sup>

The *Republic*, then, depicts a society in its *becoming*—i.e., in its acts of self-differentiation; in its crossing of thresholds and breaking with extant traditions; in its social, political, and intellectual unfolding—a society wherein debates or discursive battles repeatedly crop up over key concepts and questions deemed relevant to the Athenians of antiquity. As well, the dialogues depict a philosophical cohort who come together as rivals, from all walks of life: what links yet creates divisions among them are their combative sensibilities. In fact, the same sort of situational agons depicted in the dialogues, between rival or adversarial philosophers making formal pronouncements on any number of matters, Deleuze sees “exercised in diverse domains [across Athenian

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<sup>33</sup> Parenthetically, this form of arbitration distinguishes Plato’s dialectical methods from those concerned with forging, say, genus/species distinctions (Aristotle), or with the representation of contradictions and contrarities (Hegel). That is, Plato concerns himself *not* with representation, in whatever form, but with making informed decisions about where individual claims stand in relation to the One, so as to distinguish between “pure and impure, good and bad, authentic and inauthentic” (Deleuze, *Difference* 60)

society]: love, athletics, politics, the magistratures” (*Essays* 136). To this list, one might add the various battles or contests that take place between dramatists competing for artistic supremacy in the Dionysian festivals, and between gods and humans vying for power in Greek myth. In fact, the Platonic dialogues (or Platonic doctrine itself) cannot be adequately understood independent of the culture of contest and competition, wherein those dialogues took shape. Plato, in fact, would seek to foster that cultural proclivity in an effort to bring the nascent democracy to fruition in a way that authenticates its winners and exposes its losers. So, in short, “the totality of the Platonic motivation...has to do with selecting among claimants” (Deleuze, *Logic* 257; trans. modified), and then situating those claimants in structured and hierarchically-ordered lineages.

So let me sum up the picture thus far. Ideals depicted in Greek myth (and rationally recalled) provide necessary “criteria” (Deleuze, *Difference* 62) for making selections among individual claimants (and their claims) by not only laying the *foundation*—or what Deleuze calls “the ground”—for an enduring set of standards to be revealed, but also by allowing rival claimants “to participate in greater or lesser degree in the object of the claim[s],” themselves. So, on the one hand, the ground is always ideal, always “first place” (61), in the sense that “Justice alone is Just...[but as] for those whom we call the just, they possess the quality of being just in second, third, or fourth place...or [even] in simulacral fashion” (62)—a point to which we will return in a moment. In Platonic doctrine, as suggested above, those who possess the quality of, for example, being just, no matter where they might stand in relation to the ideal form of Justice, can never be more than claimants or aspirants themselves.<sup>34</sup> But again, the primary function

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<sup>34</sup> Socrates notwithstanding. That is, for Plato, Socrates would set the standard for the “philosopher king,” and much like Christ—the “king of kings”—Socrates was persecuted and ultimately put to death for his

of the *ground*—which in our example is the ideal form of Justice—is “to allow participation,” or better, to actually further the process of “elective participation” (61). The participating claimant, then, in making a claim (to whatever), invokes or “calls for a ground” (62), at which point “the claim must be grounded (or denounced as groundless).” So, in short, while the ground authorizes both claim and claimant, they then reinforce the ground through a process of reciprocal determination.

Plato’s impetus here is threefold. We have already encountered his first two objectives: (1) he wishes to set standards by which to judge claimants and their claims in a society where “anyone can lay claim to anything”; and (2) he wishes to forge lines of descent, whereby claimants (and again their claims) are hierarchically situated within those lines through an elective mode of participation. But Plato’s third and final objective here is to suppress every last trace of simulacra in the republic. Deleuze argues that “Platonism as a whole is erected on the basis of this wish to hunt down the phantasms or simulacra which are identified with the Sophist himself, that devil, that insinuator or simulator, that always disguised or displaced false claimant” (*Difference* 127; trans. modified); he adds elsewhere that the “Platonic wish to exorcise simulacra...entails the subjection of difference” (*Logic* 265) through “the exclusion of the eccentric and the divergent, in the name of a superior finality” (260). What this effectively means is that through the history of ideas, positive *difference* (read: that which escapes, diverges, exceeds; or rather, that which cannot be contained, and in no way models itself on a pre-

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beliefs. But the point here is that Plato becomes more than a student of Socrates and instead one of his apostles, disseminating his prophetic message, his rational faith. For Plato, Socrates is the living embodiment of “the just” or “the beautiful.” He, in other words, does not so much have pretensions of justice, but is the form of *the just* made flesh. And he, unlike the artist, is not divinely *inspired*, but again, like Christ, the actual incarnation and expression of the divine itself.

existing idea or ideal) has consistently been viewed as a kind of monstrosity, even an “evil” (*Difference* 29), owing in large part to the enduring influence of Platonic doctrine.

In Deleuze’s reading of Plato, the simulacrum is the mark of pure difference; it is an inherently false copy, that which differs in kind (*not* degree) from the true claim (i.e., the copy), which as we know is modeled on the pure idea. So simulacra are not copies of copies, not lesser copies; they neither conform to, nor measure up to, an original. As true dissemblers they will neither promote (nor outwardly revel in) their lack of conformity. They are not simply iconoclastic in that way. Instead, they will maintain their purely superficial, imagistic reproductions of worldly things (e.g., the poet will falsely render, say, the actions of a General, the ideals of Justice and Beauty, etc.), while following an independent and inauthentic trajectory of their own. These acts of dissimulation are then what make the unfounded pretensions of the simulacrum so dangerous:

Plato distinguishes, and even opposes, models and copies [but does so] *in order to obtain a selective criterion with which to separate copies and simulacra*, the former founded upon their relation to the model while the latter are disqualified because they fail both the test of the copy and the requirements of the model” (*Logic* 264–65; my emphasis).

So simulacra—coded in Platonic doctrine as ‘poetry’ (or any other imitative art form), but also coded historically as, for example, ‘woman,’ ‘writing,’ ‘body,’ ‘matter,’ etc.—are essentially false or inaccurate images without a fixed resemblance to any foundational form, or without prior identity. For Plato, “*copies* are secondary possessors...[potentially] well-founded claims, guaranteed by resemblance; *simulacra* [however] are like false claims, built upon a dissimilarity, implying an essential perversion or a deviation” (256;

trans. modified). The simulacrum, then, needs to be exposed, according to Plato, for its inherent deviancy, its “essential perversion,” and its potentially corrosive psychological effects on the uninitiated. It needs to be confronted in instances where its dissimulations are either unrecognized or unknown, and most certainly in instances where the falsities it promotes are taken to be true and just images of the truth, despite its independence from any a priori standard or ideal. This is precisely what Plato fears could happen if artists and their work were allowed to flourish in the republic. So simulacra need be mediated, domesticated, controlled, if not excised altogether from the republic. In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze writes, “It is true that Platonism already represents the subordination of difference to the powers of the One, the Analogous, the Similar, and even the Negative. It is like an animal in the process of being tamed” (59). Put simply, subordinating the play and affirmation of pure difference to the One, the Analogous, etc.—or by installing that difference in specific lineages or lines of descent—contains that difference, subjects it to, and measures it by, a set of pre-existing standards, models, universals, laws, values, codes, principles, axioms, hierarchical orders, or what have you, “in order to render it [i.e., difference] both liveable and thinkable” (30). This process of taming difference, or, in particular, the materiality of the book—as we will see in the next chapter—is a historical driver of the discourse of literary criticism.

Plato, in any case, betrays his ultimate motivation (i.e., taming difference) in the dialogues through the legitimate role he assigns the *copy*—or rather, the entire model-copy dyad—in the dialectical processes of division and selection. Deleuze argues,

The model-copy distinction is there only in order to found and apply the copy-simulacra distinction, since the copies are selected, justified and



saved in the name of the identity of the model and owing to their internal resemblance to this ideal model. The function of the notion of the model is not to oppose the world of images in its entirety but to select the good images, the icons which resemble from within, and eliminate the bad images or simulacra. (*Difference* 127)

Plato's emphasis on the "well-founded" copy, "guaranteed by resemblance," can be read as an essential rebuke of that which cannot be modeled on transcendent ideals, or of that which eschews resemblance—in short, simulacra (i.e., false copies, false claims).

According to Deleuze, "[w]hat is condemned in the figure of the simulacra is the state of free oceanic differences, of nomadic distributions and crowned anarchy, along with all that malice which challenges both the notion of the model and that of the copy" (265), and this is precisely what underscores (if not propels) Plato's moral agenda, as discussed above. So, subordinating simulacra, and hence the play of "free oceanic differences" and "crowned anarchy," not only involves the crucifixion of emerging and positive difference, but the basic denial of materiality, itself—an issue to which we now turn.

Platonism judges (and/or comes to know) a material world, a world of particulars, through the quality of that world's various claims to certain *immaterial* standards, ideals, or principles. Hence, Platonic doctrine takes aim at the legitimacy of things that do not—for whatever reason—conform or somehow *measure up* to those higher ideals. In other words, Plato targets the simulacrum (read: "false copy") (1) for its circumvention of the dialectics of division/selection (and also that of model/copy, general/particular); (2) for its eschewal of any grounded (or grounding) identity and/or stable reference; and (3) for its lack of *resemblance* to a given form (or formal truth). The materialist's charge, then,

against Plato, is that the attribution of resemblance strips that world of particulars of its corporeality (or of what I will call its material substrate), and hence its own expressive traits and powers of self-organization. Resemblance, in other words, flattens difference—that is, it reduces *things* (like books) to the various features or functions they have in common with other similarly categorized or classified things, which in turn binds those things (perhaps inextricably) to specific lineages or lines of descent. So while few would deny that two books might resemble one another—at least in some respects—or share certain features/functions in common, the simple attribution or demarcation of those resemblances (authorial, generic, structural, narratorial, what have you) ultimately suppresses or restricts the power of the book to become-other, to enter into new material-semiotic arrangements, to express itself anew, to renew or reinvent itself. Put another way, any and all marks of interior resemblance work to contain and control the book, to limit its potential or untapped capacities, i.e., its difference. Resemblance imposes an identity and a set of values on the book from which the book, then, struggles to extricate itself. Comparatively, the simulacrum sidesteps those marks of resemblance and the various ancestral bonds (i.e., lines of descent) that such resemblances give rise to. The simulacrum interiorizes *dissimilarity* or difference, rather than commonality, and as a result does *not* receive its force externally, from some sort of stable (or stabilizing) authority, some sort of transcendent value.

If nothing else, then, the simulacrum confounds the idealism at the heart of Platonic doctrine because it affirms a material and productive power, a power of non-identity, of chaotic discord, and of independent and exterior (i.e., not interior) relation. Moreover, the simulacrum *falsifies* or undermines the competitive spirit at the heart of

ancient Athens, i.e., the sort of aspirations that drive competitions, that separate winners from losers, and that propel the idea of the “good copy.” The simulacrum undermines such hierarchies in its basic eschewal of resemblance; it defames the dialectics of copy-making, and even the whole model-copy dyad. This, as Deleuze says—following Nietzsche—is the *power of the false* (*Logic* 263), a falsification of the *copy, icon, or idol*; the simulacrum “overturns representation and destroys the icons” (265; trans. modified). It escapes all external or abstract grounds, all marks of subordination, all appeals to the One or the analogous. This is the “twilight of the idols.” The simulacrum, for its part, has its own integrity, its own ground, beyond any supposed referent. It is its *own* positive or productive power, its own doing or affirmation, its own affective force: “a joyful and positive event...an ungrounding” (263). And while the simulacrum does *aspire* to things, or better, to *copy* things (cf. p. 55, above), it does so “underhandedly, under cover of an aggression, an insinuation, a subversion” (257); this, in turn, creates problems for “the domain of representation filled by copies-icons, [which are] defined not by extrinsic relation to an object, but by an intrinsic relation to the model or foundation” (259).

So, in short, the simulacrum is an “aggression.” It falsifies and ruptures. It subverts. It destroys and overturns. It induces “vertigo” (*Logic* 262), as Deleuze contends, and is propelled by a kind of intoxication—“a Dionysian machine” (263). Its determining features are its non-iconic status and essential non-resemblance. Also, its eschewal of formal order. Its “demonic character” (258)—complete with its own set of falsities (or falsifications), its own forms of dissemblance, its own fallen nature. The simulacrum, as we know, never possesses (ideals, etc.) in a *secondary* or more subordinate way. Rather, it enters into its own *primary* relations, and thereby produces concrete, material effects

(or what Deleuze-Guattari call *desires*)<sup>35</sup> in other bodies. And because the simulacrum is not simply imitative, but rather locates itself “outside knowledge [i.e., the good copy] and [right] opinion,” Plato—in an obvious attempt to render inert or inactive the innately “rebellious” character of the simulacrum, or better yet, to stave off its “becoming-mad” or “becoming unlimited”—tries “to repress it as deeply as possible, to shut it up in a cavern at the bottom of the Ocean” (259). But can the simulacrum ever be repressed or closed off in this way? Can it be decisively barricaded? Deleuze would say *no*, if for no other reason than “the simulacrum implies huge dimensions, depths, and distances that the observer cannot master” (258). So when it ultimately “breaks its chains and rises to the surface” (261) and, like man, “forsake[s its] moral existence in order to move into aesthetic existence” (257), the simulacrum asserts its power through its limitless capacity to force movement in other bodies, to induce transformations, to affect (and be affected).

While the simulacrum, then, may be experienced or encountered as a set of unregulated material forces, it can never be grasped in totality, except mistakenly through various representational controls, or, through the illusory “impression of resemblance” (Deleuze, *Logic* 258). On this point, Deleuze concludes “the aim of Platonism...[is] to bring about the triumph of icons over simulacra” (259)—a “triumph” that involves

- (1) assigning regularity and uniformity to infinite movement;
- (2) imposing form on/over matter;<sup>36</sup>
- (3) forging equalities or resemblances (i.e., demarcating similarities);

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<sup>35</sup> Bonta and Protevi define Deleuze-Guattari’s concept of “desire” as “the material process of connection, registration and enjoyment of flows of matter and energy coursing through bodies in networks of production in all registers, be they geologic, organic, or social” (76). More on this in Part 2.

<sup>36</sup> Through the process of “hylomorphism”—a process that Deleuze-Guattari discuss in *A Thousand Plateaus*, and to which we will return in the next chapter. My argument, in brief, will be that the discourse of literary criticism has a long and varied history with the hylomorphic model.

(4) setting limits on the *expressive* capacities (or potential) of simulacra.

Continued efforts to contain simulacra in any or all of these ways reflect the normalizing powers of a pervasive and wide-ranging “State apparatus” (Deleuze-Guattari, *Plateaus* 245). So Platonic doctrine, in short, “is a question of assuring the triumph of the copies over simulacra, of repressing simulacra, keeping them completely submerged, preventing them from climbing to the surface and ‘insinuating themselves’ everywhere” (*Logic* 257). Plato’s more widespread agenda in this area will eventually come to envelop questions of the book, as he sets his sights on a more specific foe in the figure of the poet. So on this point our focus now shifts to Plato’s critique of the arts.

### ***“An Ancient Quarrel”***

In *Republic*, Plato points to a *quarrel*—what he, in fact, deems an “ancient quarrel” (X.607b)—between philosophy and poetry, or rather, between philosophers and those who would champion the cause of poetry (e.g., poets, critics, the “rhapsodes”).<sup>37</sup> Though Plato fails to outline this acrimonious history in any great detail,<sup>38</sup> he bases his own quarrel with poetry, first, on ontological grounds; second, on epistemological grounds; and third, on psychological grounds. We will deal with each in turn. In brief, Plato’s ontological argument holds that poetry, as a copy of a copy of the eternal forms,

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<sup>37</sup> We will consider the figure of the rhapsode in our discussion of the *Ion* later in this chapter. In brief, *rhapsodes* were professional performers of Epic poetry in Ancient Greece.

<sup>38</sup> Plato writes that this quarrel “is proven by phrases like ‘the dog yelping at its master’ . . . and ‘great in the empty talk of fools’ and ‘the crowd of over-wise heads’ or ‘subtle thinkers’ . . . and innumerable other signs of the old opposition between them” (X.607b–c). These phrases provide little insight for the modern reader into this ancient quarrel. In a footnote to this cryptic passage, translator G. M. A. Grube writes that Plato “presumably” derived these phrases “from poetry, but their sources are unknown” (251, n.14). Elsewhere, in his introduction to Aristotle’s *Poetics*, Grube claims that, like Plato, Xenophanes and Heraclitus “violently attacked Homer [and Hesiod] for telling immoral and untrue stories about the gods” (ix).

resides “at three removes from nature” (X.597b),<sup>39</sup> that is, three removes from the pure, self-same (or transcendent) source from which all material (or otherwise worldly) things derive, and against which all things are measured and formally judged. The poets, though, draw almost exclusively on what they see or hear about a given object or a specific virtue for their knowledge of such things. But for Plato the senses remain a notoriously unreliable gauge of the truth, as compared to the knowledge one acquires through practical know-how, or better, through recollection (cf. note 5, above). By deriving one’s knowledge of objects/things in the world through the mere sensual apprehension of diluted copies—i.e., particular instances of more general or ideal forms—and not a reasoned appeal to the actual forms themselves, the poet has little recourse but to simply mirror or imitate those secondary copies. For Plato, imitation (or mimesis) will only compromise the originary truth and, as suggested above, divert the attention away from both the aspirations of the copy (i.e., to *measure up*) and the formal conventions of copy-making. In any case, because the poets lack either a practical or rational orientation toward that which they copy, the ultimate value of their poetry to the republic as a source of knowledge, a tool of moral instruction, or a purveyor of the truth, comes directly into question, which points the way to the second phase of Plato’s dispute with the arts, his epistemological argument.

While in dialogue with one of his marketplace disciples, Glaucon, Socrates takes pains to acknowledge his appreciation for Homer, whom he deems the greatest of all tragedians. Yet Socrates cannot accept the legitimacy of any poet, including Homer, who, because of his indirect or third-hand contact with the truth, lacks not only “worthwhile

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<sup>39</sup> Plato uses the phrase ‘at three removes from nature’ because “the Greeks always counted the first as well as the last number of a series” (Grube, 234, n.9). Plato puts the matter as follows: there are “one genuine and two bastard pleasures” (IX.587c).

knowledge of his subject” (X.602b), but also “right opinion about the beauty or quality of the things he imitates” (X.602a). In other words, given poetry’s degraded ontological status, as discussed above, it follows that any knowledge or practical insight into, say, questions of virtue or human nature that the poem itself provides must also be considered degraded or corrupt, and thus summarily dismissed for the possible distortions and moral equivocations that it propagates. As Plato writes, “the maker of the image, we say, knows nothing of the reality; he only knows appearance” (X.601b–c). So by travelling in that realm of appearances, the poet cannot help but advance faulty or incomplete renderings of the truth, which prompts Plato’s well-known contention that a defenceless and inexperienced citizenry—which includes the more naïve stewards of that citizenry (III.387c)—are put at substantial psychological risk through their exposure to poetic lies and half-truths, or better, through their exposure to the sorts of poetic imitation and impersonation (i.e., mimesis) that pale in comparison (in terms of their value, their use, the knowledge they offer, etc.) to the more authentic and rational claims to the truth pursued by historians and philosophers. This, then, sets the stage for the final prong of Plato’s threefold attack on the arts, his psychological argument.

According to Plato, poetry (just like all the imitative arts) is problematic for Greek society not just because it firmly situates itself in the mutable world of appearances (rather than the immutable and transcendent realm of the forms) but because it demands a so-called *willing suspension of disbelief* from its audience. That is, because poets want their audiences to forge deep-seated emotional or psychological attachments to the imaginative universes they create, they want those audiences to ignore the fictive and constructed nature of art; and, on this point, audiences may be all-too-ready to oblige.

Why? Because of what Socrates refers to as “the natural charm of poetry” (X.601b), that which manifests itself at the level of words, phrasing, meter, tune—in the more material (though admittedly, still regulatory or structured) elements of the poem. Socrates argues,

though he knows nothing except how to imitate, [the poet] gives colour to certain crafts with words and phrases so that others without knowledge, who judge by the words, believe that anything said with meter, rhythm, and tune, be it on cobbling or Generalship or anything else whatever, is right—so great is the natural charm of poetry. (X.601a–b)

So while the otherwise unsuspecting audience may be ready to believe whatever the artist asserts or puts forward, Plato fears that the poets and their poetry are then free to spread various forms of confusion or misprision—e.g., about the gods, about the true nature of humans—throughout the republic, and do so (1) with little or no concern for accurately representing those things in ways that either the philosophers or historians would deem truthful, and (2) without censure or criticism for disseminating such inaccuracies.

So, in short, poetry seduces; it deceives. While poets produce inferior truths and promote distorted virtues, even worse, they actively foster the illusion that such distortions retain their connection to the real world, to real virtues, which thereby persuades a less critical or less knowledgeable audience to embrace such illusions, *as if* they were real. The result, then, for Plato, is that poetry corrupts the minds of the uninitiated, and it defiles the republic in its embryonic and hence most vulnerable state: “If you admit the Muse of sweet pleasure, whether in lyrics or epic, pleasure and pain will rule as monarchs in your city, instead of the law and that rational principle which is always and by all thought to be the best” (X.607a). For Plato, poetry appeals to the body,



to one's emotions, passions, base appetites and desires; it appeals to the material self rather than one's higher, more virtuous self, or one's innate sense of reason. Poets, then, have the ability to disturb or psychologically damage the layperson, precisely because their poems compromise one's capacity for rational and informed thought.

This concludes Plato's multi-pronged attack on the poets and their poetry. It is worth recalling that Socrates, at several points in the dialogues, freely acknowledges the greatness of Homer,<sup>40</sup> but such acknowledgements in no way alter the fact that the poets "lay claim to anything"; and the resulting impact (social, psychological, or otherwise) of doing so distorts or undermines everything from the rational appeal to the truth, to the defence (if not the guarantee) of specific values and/or social norms, to the very stability of the republic. Accordingly, Platonic doctrine assaults the poet's legitimacy and exposes the seductive lure of the poem. So threatening, in fact, are the poets and their work that Socrates, in *Republic*, makes the following decree:

[If] a man who in his cleverness can become many persons and imitate all things should arrive in our city and want to give a performance of his poems, we should bow down before him as being holy, wondrous, and sweet, but we should tell him that there is no such man in our city and that it is not lawful that there should be. We would pour myrrh on his head and crown him with wreaths, and send him away to another city. (III.398c)

But despite the fact that Plato lets his position on the arts—which as I will show envelops not only his conception of poetry, but his literary critical position as well—be dictated by both his political and epistemological concerns, he *will* admit, as suggested above, the

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<sup>40</sup> In *Republic*, for example, Socrates concedes that "Homer is a supreme poet and the original tragedian" (X.607a).

sort of poet who appeals to the higher self, who sings hymns to the gods (X.607a), who celebrates marriage (V.460a), who praises heroic men and preserves values: “We ourselves would employ a more austere and pleasure-giving poet and story-teller for our own good, one who would imitate the speech of a good man” (III.398a–b). Plato also draws a distinction between mimetic and narrative poetry, between poets who *imitate* the vices or moral failings of, for example, a psychologically disturbed character and those who simply report what a given character says or does, while retaining their own separate identity as narrators of the action (III.396e). Plato is clearly concerned with the former, with those forms of poetry (or drama) that “[remove] the distance of personal judgment” (Asmis 348), and do so by putting words in the mouths of Gods and men. But underlying Plato’s concerns about mimetic poetry is not simply the contribution of such to moral equivocation in the republic, or the danger posed by pleasure-giving forms of poetry judged without reference (say) to an ideal beauty, but the enduring threat of the simulacrum (i.e., false copy or semblance)—and, by extension, the sophistry—which remains the greatest threat to good judgment and stable authority in the republic. In Plato’s “poetic ontology,” a poem “is essentially a moral rather than a linguistic construct; [and] formulated in language, it is realized by being imprinted in the soul of another” (345–6). So Plato subordinates (linguistic) matter to (moral) form; in so doing, he subordinates what I will call—in line with the complexity sciences—the *self-organizing* capacities of language to vary, to elaborate or develop itself, to escape its own forms of homogeneity and/or equilibrium, to induce sensation in other living bodies, and so forth: “In Plato’s general aesthetics, the whole sensory environment is an image, or

‘iconic’ symbol, of moral goodness or badness” (349), and so his aesthetics becomes an essential contributor to his wider anti-materialist agenda.

That artists and their work must be judged worthy, or that they ought to serve a greater *good*—whether that good be social, political, psychological, pedagogical, moral, or spiritual—remains one of the most enduring legacies of Platonism in the discourse of literary criticism. Friedrich Nietzsche, in *The Birth of Tragedy*, posits a decisive shift in Greek conceptions of tragedy, where Dionysian principles associated with Aeschylean tragedy—e.g., the joy of suffering, transcendental justice, individual annihilation—give way to the Apollonian dictates of Socratic rationalism—e.g., optimism, poetic justice, the desire to conform to universal truths, and the use of art for moral instruction.<sup>41</sup> So with the rise of Socratic rationalism, and with the related notion, discussed at length in *Republic* (and elsewhere), that the poets and their work suffer from an inherent crisis of legitimacy—that which Plato attributes to poetry’s distortions of *reality* (i.e., the One, the truth, etc.), and the inability of most poets to accurately reflect and reinforce existing values—comes a variety of long-held convictions among literary critics that, for example, literature should conform to certain standards, that it should elevate, rather than unsettle, a society, and that it should, as Sir Philip Sidney held, both “teacheth and moveth to virtue” (348). We will return to these matters in the next chapter. At this point, though, we might profitably turn our attention to Plato’s *Ion*, a dialogue that provides a good many of the semiotic coordinates for the modern literary *critic*—a term I use with some

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<sup>41</sup> According to Nietzsche, Wagnerian opera would mark the end of this trajectory, but only a few years after making this pronouncement, Nietzsche would renounce this position in his storied break with Wagner—a break precipitated by Wagner’s turn toward Christianity and enduring anti-Semitic sensibilities, i.e., more transcendent preoccupations and sensibilities.

reservation<sup>42</sup>—and that formally sets in motion the anti-materialist bias that will come to dominate literary critical discourse.

### ***Plato's Ion—Occupying the Middle Ground***

Socrates: “I really do want to hear you, but not before you answer me this...”

—Plato (*Ion* sec. 536)

The *Ion*—an earlier and much lesser known dialogue than that of the *Republic*—provides some of Plato's most compelling insights into those who would occupy the middle ground—or what Plato calls the “middle ring” (an image I will discuss later)—between spectator and poet. That position is held by the *rhapsodes* (i.e., professional performers of epic poetry), and it is Socrates' main objective in his encounter with Ion—a rhapsode himself—to stir a nascent critical impulse in a profession (i.e., rhapsody or professional oratory) that he (Socrates) has little regard for. To that end, Socrates poses a question to the rhapsode: “don't you use the same discipline throughout whenever you master the whole of a subject?” (sec. 532). Without hesitation, Ion concedes the point. Socrates then speculates that by having a thorough knowledge of how different poets represent/depict certain topics, and of the aesthetic and textual principles to which poets adhere (albeit unwittingly or involuntarily),<sup>43</sup> an orator would be well-equipped to analyse, interpret, compare and contrast particular poems (if not particular poets). By extension, the orator-critic would be better able to differentiate good art from bad (e.g.,

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<sup>42</sup> Strictly speaking, Ion—the dialogue's title character—is not a critic, but an actor and orator. However, the dialogue itself deals with matters directly related to the practices of the critic, including, what it means to be an effective interpreter, how to make sound judgements on a text or on an author, and so forth.

<sup>43</sup> As I will discuss in detail below, Socrates contends that “none of the epic poets, if they're good, are masters of their subject; they are inspired, possessed, and that is how they utter all those beautiful poems. The same goes for lyric poets if they're good... as soon as they sail into harmony and rhythm they are possessed by Bacchic frenzy” (sects. 533–534).

“*He’s good, and they’re inferior*”). So, in short, Socrates argues that if “there is an *art of poetry* as a whole” (my emphasis), a strong understanding of that art (or of the rules of art) should not only strengthen the rhapsode’s own reading of a given poet, but his ability “to speak about all the other poets as well”; that is, such knowledge should enable Ion (1) to provide clever comments about individual works of art, (2) to be a sound judge of *all* poets and their work, and again (3) to sort good art from bad. So knowing the “art of poetry” contributes to the orator’s capacity not only to dissect and comment upon a given art *object*, but to ground their own performance of that art in truth, that is, in competent, authoritative, and ultimately well-informed renderings of the text.

Socrates believes, though, that Ion lacks (1) either a rational or practical understanding of the myriad *things* with which the Homeric verses concern themselves (e.g., horses, chariots, being a General, and so forth); and (2) any sort of critical competency at the level of poetry and poetics. Ion’s main problem, in fact, is that his concentrated focus on Homer leaves him *ill*-equipped to make useful comparisons between poems or between poets—a charge to which Ion freely admits: “When someone discusses another poet I pay no attention, and I have no power to contribute anything worthwhile: I simply doze off” (*Ion* sec. 532). With this admission, Ion sinks his own case in the debate. In fact, Ion goes even further and confesses that his passion for Homer really comes down to the glory he receives for orating the Homeric verses (sec. 530), and to the money that audiences, sufficiently moved, pay for his efforts (sec. 535). But Socrates asks, what of truth? What of any sort of interpretative mastery over the text? He also laments the fact that while some make comparisons between specific works of art—e.g., between paintings, between sculptures—no one seems prepared to pass judgement

on the poets and their work (sec. 533). So by lacking a meaningful knowledge of poetics and most worldly things depicted within the poems, Ion's self-professed erudition vis-à-vis Homeric Epic (his one true love) must be viewed with suspicion.

On this point, Socrates captures the rhapsode's attention. That is, Ion prides himself on being acknowledged as the greatest of all the Homeric rhapsodes, and with being "crowned by the Sons of Homer with a golden crown" (*Ion* sec. 530). So trading on some of Ion's own vanity, Socrates persuades—or at least *begins* to persuade—the rhapsode that by simply viewing himself as able to "speak more beautifully about Homer than anyone else" (sec. 533) amounts to little more than arrogant self-promotion when not reinforced by a rational orientation to the text, and by repeated appeals to the sort of unassailable critical values we discussed a moment ago (e.g., the pursuit of truth, interpretative mastery, authoritative knowledge of worldly things, the ability to make just comparisons between poets, and so forth). So even by this early stage of the dialogue, Socrates has begun to make the case that Ion—and, by extension, all rhapsodes, or all those who would *champion* the poet's cause, as Socrates says in *Republic* (X.607d)—needs to shift the focus away from a more creative or performance-based interaction with the poetry, and toward a more abstract conception of, let us say, poetic *form*. That form not only transcends particular poems, but governs, interiorizes, and gives formal unity to those poems, as well. In other words, the focus now turns to what Deleuze-Guattari, in *What is Philosophy?*, refer to as the "Objectality" (3) of, in this instance, poetry—i.e., its abstract or generalized essence; or better, the formal condition or quality of the poetry, itself, that which functions independently of any particular art object, or any material (or sensible) creation. The construction of an abstract poetic *whole* is derived through the

extraction of what Massumi calls an “identity grid” (*User’s Guide* 113), or rather, through the extraction of “an order and organization of [in this case, *poetic*] functions” (113) from an amorphous and unrestricted field of unassigned variables, pure potentials, or from what Deleuze-Guattari generally call “lines of continuous variation.” This process of extraction-abstraction then gives rise to a self-contained, internally consistent, *object* of reflection and critical scrutiny. We will return to these matters in the next chapter in relation to the historical discourse of literary criticism.

So Ion, to be an effective orator, needs to engage any number of fixed, critical values. Short of that, Socrates argues, “Anyone can tell that you [Ion] are powerless to speak about Homer on the basis of knowledge or mastery” (*Ion* sec. 532). In *Phaedrus*, Socrates similarly draws attention to the need for this type of knowledge in both speech-making and poetry: “First, you must know the truth concerning everything you are speaking or writing about; you must learn how to define each thing in itself; and, having defined it, you must know how to divide it into kinds until you reach something indivisible” (sec. 277). In *Laws*, Plato’s main character, simply named “Athenian,” rhetorically asks the following question: “may we not say that in everything imitated, whether in drawing, music, or any other art, he who is to be a competent judge must possess three things;—he must know, in the first place, of what the imitation is; secondly, he must know that it is true; and thirdly, that it has been well executed in words and melodies and rhythms?” (sec. 669a–b). In these (and other) dialogues, Plato assigns a set of clear epistemological objectives to the poet, while in *Ion*, those same objectives come to enfold the practices of the orator-critic, as well. Which is to say that in preparation for an artful performance, the rhapsode needs to make rational, critically competent, and

morally responsible, decisions about whether or not a given melody or rhythm adequately supports (or does justice to) specific imitations within the poem.

But Socrates goes on to argue that the rhapsode may be wholly incapable of being a competent judge of the poets and their work:

Many are the noble words in which poets speak concerning the actions of men; but like yourself [Ion] when speaking about Homer, they do not speak of them by any rules of art: they are simply inspired to utter that to which the Muse impels them, and that only; and when inspired, one of them will make dithyrambs, another hymns of praise, another choral strains, another epic or iambic verses—and he who is good at one is not good any other kind of verse: for not by art does the poet sing, but by power divine. Had he learned by rules of art, he would have known how to speak not of one theme only, but of all; and therefore God takes away the minds of poets, and uses them as his ministers. (*Ion* sec. 534)

Of note is the fact that, in the *Ion*, Socrates will ultimately conclude that the rhapsodes, just like the poets, can never really be discerning or expert when it comes to knowing the truth about worldly things (e.g., chariots, Generalship). In fact, in the above passage and elsewhere in the Platonic dialogues, Socrates attributes a kind of divine madness to the poets, arguing that they are “possessed by the Muses” (*Phaedrus* sec. 245). In the *Ion*, Socrates claims—in somewhat denigrating fashion—that “a poet is an airy thing, winged and holy, and he is not able to make poetry until he becomes inspired and goes out of his mind and his intellect is no longer in him. As long as a human being has his intellect in



his possession, he will always lack the power to make poetry or sing prophecy” (sec. 534). Similarly, in the *Phaedrus*, Socrates contends that a mindless inspiration takes hold of a delicate and virgin soul, and there inspiring frenzy, awakens lyrical and all other numbers; with these adorning the myriad actions of ancient heroes for the instruction of posterity. But he who, having no touch of the Muses’ madness in his soul, comes to the door and thinks that he will get into the temple by the help of art—he, I say, and his poetry are not admitted; the sane man disappears and is nowhere when he enters into rivalry with the madman. (sec. 245)

In the *Ion*, though, Socrates ascribes this same “touch of the Muses’ madness” to not only the poets, but to audiences, and to those such as Ion who engage (i.e., speak, perform, interpret, comment upon) the Epic verses of, say, Hesiod or Homer. I will discuss the nefarious linkages that Socrates draws between the poets, their poetry, their interpreters (or public face), and their audiences, below. For the moment, I would simply say that, according to Socrates, speakers of epic poetry are just as mad, just as deluded, as the poets themselves, which is the reason why Socrates would want interpreters of epic verse, such as Ion, to no longer take the stage, if you will, with the poet, but instead move to the shadows. He would want them to stand back and judge, to master the poets and their work. Plato holds that all particulars (which includes specific instances of art) contract an ideal essence into their own internal makeup—i.e., a resemblance that then becomes the formal cause of a given material copy. So the *Ion* makes the case that all art objects, in their sensible or material guise, ought to be perceived by just interpreters of that art (i.e., the critics) as reflections of larger ideals, and that the art itself ought to be

judged in terms of its relative conformity to those ideals. This is the critical role that Socrates assigns to the otherwise misguided and ill-informed Ion. But at this point it is worth recalling that for Plato, both poets and rhapsodes are, at best, dissemblers, and as such entirely incapable of offering authentic or even useful insight into that which the poets themselves contract into their verses. And while the poet's imitations will always be fabricated, imagined, or derived from hearsay, Socrates must also assume that the rhapsodes are even at further remove from the truth: "So you turn out to be representatives of representatives" (sec. 535). But Socrates' argument, even if thought to be persuasive, raises important ethical considerations to which we now must turn.

First off, one should recognize that Socrates poses an insurmountable task to Ion. That is, he poses a set of epistemological (if not ontological) imperatives that can never be satisfied without separating the rhapsode from his own creative energies, his own power to act, and even his own way of *being* in the world (for reasons that will become clear in a moment). In short, Socrates dismisses Ion's capacity to speak (or perform) the Homeric verses with the sort of creative zeal that had yielded the rhapsode first prize at the *Festival of Asclepius* (*Ion* sec. 530). Socrates, in effect, says to Ion: *curb your enthusiasm*. That is, he lets him know that his skill as an orator is inconsequential; his self-professed "clever[ness]" (sec. 531), vis-à-vis Homer, and his desire to be "crowned by the Sons of Homer," are little more than mere conceits; and that his assumption that spoken word performances can be a useful tool for illuminating Homeric epic is misguided. Socrates arrives at these conclusions, as noted, because of Ion's lack of knowledge about worldly things—i.e., what Homer depicts in his poems—and his admitted readiness to "doze off" when other poets and their work are discussed. So when

first told of Ion's award-winning performance of the Homeric verses, Socrates finds the accomplishment to be dubious, but is superficially polite, and makes a somewhat deferential gesture toward the rhapsode: "Surely you won't begrudge me a demonstration?" (sec. 530). However when Ion agrees to demonstrate his talents, Socrates stalls: "Really, I shall make time to hear that later"; and when that *later* arrives, Socrates again changes the subject: "I really do want to hear you, but not before you answer me this..." (sec. 536).

Socrates' hesitations are, in fact, telling, because the point (as suggested above) to which he will ultimately arrive in this dialogue is that the rhapsode only magnifies the errors and misdeeds of the poet. The rhapsode, he believes, like the poet, offers nothing to a rational society, nothing to that society's understanding of worldly things, nothing to the pursuit of truth. Moreover, the rhapsode himself offers nothing to even one's understanding of poetry. So while Socrates himself is the first to raise the idea that Ion should demonstrate his talents—"Surely you won't begrudge me a demonstration?"—it is Socrates who, at the end of the dialogue, curiously laments Ion's inability to perform:

You assured me that you knew many lovely things about Homer, you promised to give a demonstration; but you're cheating me, you're a long way from giving a demonstration. You aren't even willing to tell me what it is that you're so wonderfully clever *about*, though I've been begging you for ages. (*Ion* sec. 541)

Both this passage and Ion's attendant silences are critical for understanding the progression of Socrates' argument, as a whole. The fact is that by the end of the exchange, Ion is *literally* left speechless, i.e., deprived of the sort of performance that can

responsibly be presented at this point, and Socrates knows it. In fact, Socrates concludes that “If you’re really a master of your subject, and if, as I said earlier, you’re cheating me of the demonstration you promised about Homer, then you’re doing me wrong. But if you’re not a master of your subject...then you’re not doing me wrong” (sec. 542). So, in other words, if you admit your own critical and epistemological failings with regard to Homer then silence is really your only recourse. And because you cannot speak knowledgeably about Homer, about poetry, or about the various themes and issues represented within the Homeric verses, then you bring nothing of value or importance to those verses, and your performance of such is purely corrupt. In the end, Socrates silences the rhapsodes of antiquity; he cuts out their tongues, leaving them little more than the poet’s lowly sidekicks—“representatives of representatives” (sec. 535)—forced into the same inspired frenzy that consumes the poet. Given the rhapsode’s madness, and his obviously degraded status in relation to both poem and poet, his silence is certainly understandable, and perhaps all for the best. So Socrates rationalizes Ion out of a job.

But here’s the rub. Socrates argues that Ion needs a knowledge of things that he can *never* have knowledge of. Ion, as we know, is but a mere rhapsode, not a General, not a charioteer, not a shepherd, just an orator—and, as such, he has neither expertise nor mastery in things beyond the realm of oratory. But lacking direct knowledge of real-world things, Ion’s expertise as a speaker of the Homeric verses, according to Socrates, must be brought into question. So Ion, when pressed to demonstrate a first-hand knowledge of the myriad things that Homer writes about—again, being a General, a navigator, a horseman, and so forth—Ion has nothing to say. So Socrates brings Ion to an impasse. Socrates, in effect, asks: how can one speak knowledgeably about Homer, when

one cannot even speak with any authority about the quality of his imitations, either as they compare to similar imitations by other poets, or, more importantly, as they conform to active realities? As we know from *Republic*, Plato also derides the poet's familiarity with such matters, and perceives their work as *simulacra*, i.e., false copies. So, of course, the rhapsode fares no better in this equation, given that he derives his own understanding of things from the poet's corrupt body of half-truths and dissimulation. The rhapsode's knowledge, therefore, is only a further corruption, a further degradation of the truth. Rhapsodes are nothing more than second-generation dissemblers.

But what would it mean for the rhapsode to affirm his authority before the Socratic tribunal? The answer is nothing less than, say, *being* a General, being a navigator, etc. But of course, that's not possible, and again Socrates knows it. For even if Ion were actually a General, then Socrates immediately wants to know "why in heaven's name [do you] go around the country giving rhapsodies but not commanding troops?" (*Ion* sec. 541). The suggestion here is clearly absurd: according to Socrates, what it would mean for Ion to be a just interpreter of Homer is to renounce the practices of orating or performing the Homeric verses and—should he wish to stretch the point—pursue a career path as some bizarre 'rhapsode-General' hybrid. Similarly, we know from *Republic* that what it would mean for the poet to offer a knowledge worth knowing is to *not* be a poet at all, but instead a General, a charioteer, even an artisan or historian: only *then* is direct, first-hand knowledge a possibility. But, of course, the point remains that poets who would wish to write about things other than, say, being a General (or what have you), would have little use for discrete factoids on this one particular matter. Whatever the case, Socrates' critical agenda brings Ion to his epistemological, if not

ontological, limits. Socrates derides Ion for not *knowing* what cannot be known (except perhaps in a very limited, and ultimately pointless, way), and diminishes the rhapsode for not *being* someone (e.g., a General, a charioteer) who might have access to the sort of first-hand knowledge that Socrates deems relevant in this context. So by the end of the dialogue, when Socrates complains “you’re cheating me of the demonstration you promised” (sec. 542), the complaint must be read as rather disingenuous, given that the demonstration Socrates wants cannot be demonstrated. One wonders, in fact, if there may be any other purpose here than to simply dishonour the rhapsode, or to formally discredit his way of engaging (i.e., reading, interpreting, performing) the Homeric verses?

Of note is the fact that Socrates’ critical agenda puts severe restrictions on Ion’s power—i.e., his power to act, to perform—and does so, in large part, by reducing that power to a point of creative impotence (“really, I shall make time to hear that later”; “you’re cheating me of the demonstration you promised,” etc.). Ion has little recourse throughout the dialogue with Socrates but to repeatedly fall silent when the opportunity to demonstrate his skills arises. For to accept the dictates of Socratic rationalism in this context, Ion must accept, as Daniel Smith puts it, his own “subjection and slavery as if it were his salvation” (“Deleuze and Derrida” 63), and so faces an ethical dilemma:

The fundamental question of ethics is not ‘What *must* I do?’ (the question of *morality*) but rather ‘What *can* I do?’ Given my degree of power, what are my capabilities and capacities? How can I come into active possession of my power? How can I go to the limit of what I ‘can do’? (62)

In the *Ion*, Socrates raises the question of ‘what *must* I do?’ to be, for example, a competent interpreter or speaker of Homeric epic. This, as Smith points out, is a

“question of *morality*,” in that it presupposes an answer—an answer foretold. It presupposes a set of pre-existing rules or standards, and the fact that one must conform (adhere, defer) to those standards. To ask “what must I do?” is to assume that, in this case, a kind of *critical* law has already been written, that which both authorizes and puts restrictions on specific literary critical (or, more performance-based) encounters with writers and their work. And for Socrates, as we know, the rhapsode remains obligated to meet those supposed mandates. But as Deleuze points out in his reading of Spinoza (from which Smith’s aforementioned claims derive), “In an ethical vision of the world it is always a matter of capacity and power, and never of anything else. Law is identical to right. True natural laws are norms of power rather than rules of duty” (*Expressionism* 268). So Ion’s *natural* right in this (and any other) context is to do all he can, to extend his power as far as he can, and pursue the sort of co-creative encounters with the book that agree with him. But Socrates subordinates this approach to “rules of duty,” and, as Deleuze says, to “a moral law that purports to prohibit and command.”

By posing the moral question—‘what *must* I do?’—transcendence (or what I am calling the *transcendent orientation*) now enters the equation. As Smith points out, “transcendence is what represents my impotence (power = 0)” (“Deleuze and Derrida” 63). In other words, the requirement to meet certain unimpeachable standards, those that formally regulate my critical encounters with the book, and that restrict me from exercising my ‘will to power,’ not only prevent me from acting, but rob me of my true freedoms, my natural right. They enslave me. Smith also suggests that “*transcendence represents my slavery and impotence reduced to its lowest point*: the absolute demand to do the absolutely impossible is nothing other than the concept of impotence raised to

infinity” (62–3). Adopting a transcendent orientation (to the book, or whatever else), then, “*represents my slavery and impotence*,” my inability to perform and see what I can do. So the fact that Ion pledges to be “crowned by the Sons of Homer” as the greatest of all the Homeric rhapsodes, and the fact that he ceaselessly strives to magnify his powers of action—i.e., his performative abilities, his capacity to *affect* spectators and the book—by maximizing his own *joyful passions*—i.e., his power to be *affected by* the Homeric verses and the enthusiastic reactions of the spectators—carries little weight in a literary critical context that obligates the rhapsode to pursue unachievable epistemological and ontological objectives. By having, then, to accept “the absolute demand to do the absolutely impossible,” Ion has to accept his own “subjection and slavery,” his own “impotence,” as Smith pointedly argues, “as if it were his salvation.” Ion has to accept a morally-based critical agenda that delegitimizes what he does (what he can do, or might be capable of).

Replacing, then, the question of “what *can* I do?” with the more restrictive “what *must* I do?” becomes an important driver of the moral motivations at the heart of Plato’s contributions to literary critical discourse. But anticipating some of the claims of my later chapters, I want to point out that the *materialism* (or materialist sensibilities) with which this dissertation concerns itself cannot be divorced from questions of ethics. That is, I pose the possibility of an ethico-materialist encounter with the book, one that views both *critic* and *book* from the point-of-view of their unactualized capacities to perform, or to go to the limits of what they *can* or might do. This is a form of criticism that draws upon (or better yet, stimulates, amplifies, intensifies) the book and its potentials, its productive capacities, its expressivity, etc. The materialist critic, as the Interchapter will show, rather



than reducing the book to a set of fixed intentions or values, or to what it means or signifies, actually induces *criticality* in the book—making it go critical.

In any case, as I have suggested, the apparent purpose of Plato's *Ion* is to reprimand the rhapsode (and any other) for laying the emphasis on the wrong things. That is, the rhapsode concerns himself with beautiful words, with oratory, with being good at what he does, with elevating the poet and his poetry. But the rhapsode, for all his skilful encounters with the book, lacks knowledge, and is unable (just like the poet) to offer up a knowledge worth knowing. The rhapsode cannot be a competent judge of what he orates because he lacks a studied sense of where the Homeric verses stand in relation to the work of other poets. Ion cannot see internal resemblances. He cannot forge lateral continuities between poets and their poetry. When the work of another is raised, Ion simply dozes off, which is just as well because his supposed mastery of Homer, according to Socrates, is mere illusion. Ion makes his greatest mistake, then, in believing that the singularity of his ethico-materialist encounters with the book—i.e., the singular extremes and excesses that unfold in and between himself and Homer, himself and the audience, Homer and the audience, and even the audience members, themselves—have an inherent value of their own. Socrates derides the rhapsode for his penchant for the pure encounter because he (Socrates) sees little or no reason for the rhapsode-cum-critic to be in league with Homer, to “sing his praises,” to forge enthusiastic, performance-based partnerships with the poet. The rhapsode's encounter with the Homeric verses counts for very little when, say, judgment, knowledge, critical competency, and rational scrutiny are held in higher esteem than what one might refer to as the ephemera of relations produced between speaker and verse, speaker and spectator, etc. Moreover, those relations, those

encounters, count for little when an abstract understanding of the enduring principles of art has greater value than the singular relays, propulsions, and excesses of the rhapsode.

So while Socrates' primary objective in this dialogue may be to debase or devalue Ion's pretensions about himself, about his gift for interpreting Homer, and so forth, what we see here are some of the earliest semiotic coordinates for what will become (even in Aristotle, Plato's student) the discourse of literary criticism. In a way, Plato offers important clues in the *Ion* into what an authentic, morally sanctioned critical encounter with the book might involve, and even offers a glimpse into the future of literary critical discourse. First off, Socrates wants to make Ion feel ashamed of his vocation; he wants him to concede his own investments in the world of simulacra (e.g., "you turn out to be representatives of representatives"); he wants him to defer to certain epistemological objectives, lest his efforts as a reader and interpreter of the Homeric verses lose their value to the republic—"you make many lovely speeches about [Homer] without knowing anything" (sec. 542). At the same time, Socrates wants Ion to recognize the validity of another type of vocation related to poetry, one grounded in truth and the pursuit of knowledge. One that emphasizes the ability to judge, to make comparisons, to separate good from bad, to create rankings, etc.—in short, all the just and noble pursuits of the rhapsode-cum-critic—before anything else. So taking the *Ion* to its logical conclusions, one might argue that Socrates really wants to persuade the rhapsode that if his vocation is to have a noble future, the rhapsode needs to get off the stage and into the gallery. From there, and there alone, he can judge; he can be the first real judge. In the gallery (or in the shadows), Ion is more than just another spectator; rather, he comes to Homer armed with a set of critical tools that allow him to express why one should admire Homer, and how

the quality of Homer's imitations compare to those generated by other poets. He comes to Homer with the necessary foundations upon which to make comparisons. Finally, he comes to Homer ready to test, to carry out measurements, to establish rankings, etc. In so doing, Ion's engagement with the Homeric verses may be perceived as legitimate, and his critical pursuits, worthy (or at least more so).

But it is important to point out at this point that Socrates sincerely doubts that there ever could (or should) be a noble future for the rhapsode. That is, simply tweaking his way of engaging the poets and their poetry is not enough. Socrates goes so far as to question Ion's state of mind when performing/reciting the Homeric verses: "are you at that time in your right mind, or do you get beside yourself? And doesn't your soul, in its enthusiasm, believe that it is present at the actions you describe...?" (*Ion* sec. 535). Ion readily concedes the point. That is, he concedes that he may be deluded or mad; he concedes his own passionate involvement in the text, and the fact that he may be swept away by Homer's simulacral images. Socrates, in fact, likens the effect of Homer on the rhapsode's mind to the effect produced by "a 'Magnetic' stone [that] moves iron rings" (sec. 533)—an image that he goes on to describe as follows:

This stone not only pulls those rings, if they're iron, it also puts power *in* the rings, so that they in turn can do just what the stone does—pull other rings—so that there's sometimes a very long chain of iron pieces and rings hanging from one another. And the power in all of them depends on this stone. In the same way, the Muse makes some people inspired herself, and then through those who are inspired a chain of other enthusiasts is suspended.

There is a familiar *ring* to this remarkable passage. That is, the electro-magnetic charge—perhaps we might call it an *Ionic charge*—that enables the rhapsode to assume the middle ground (or middle ring) between Homer and the spectator (i.e., that “chain of other enthusiasts”), is precisely what Plato fears might be the case in *Republic*.

We recall that one of the primary dangers associated with the simulacrum, or with the acts of dissimulation and unfounded pretension perpetuated by the poet, are the psychological and behavioural disturbances that such artistry provokes in the minds of the uninitiated. Socrates anticipates this claim (in the passage cited above) through the suggestion that a material charge of sorts passes through this set of interlocking rings, which then forges (or perhaps reinforces) deep reciprocal ties between poet, poetry, rhapsode, and spectator. Socrates then furthers the point in the following passage (which I quote at length):

This spectator is the last of the rings....The middle ring is you, the rhapsode or actor, and the first one is the poet himself. The god pulls people’s souls through all these wherever he wants, looping the power down from one to another. And just as if it hung from that stone, there’s an enormous chain of choral dancers and dance teachers and assistant teachers hanging off to the sides of the rings that are suspended from the Muse. One poet is attached to one Muse, another to another (we say he is “possessed,” and that’s near enough, for he is *held*). From these first rings, from the poets, *they* are attached in their turn and inspired, from one poet, some from another; some from Orpheus, some from Musaeus, and many are possessed and held from Homer. You are one of *them*, Ion, and you are

possessed from Homer. And when anyone sings the work of another poet, you're asleep and you're lost about what to say; but when any song of that poet is sounded, you are immediately awake, your soul is dancing, and you have plenty to say. You see it's not because you are a master of knowledge about Homer that you can say what you can say, but because of a divine gift, because you are possessed. (*Ion* sects. 535–36)

Ion, then, like the poet, “is possessed,” and consumed by a kind of Bacchic frenzy (“your soul is dancing”); moreover, he finds himself inextricably bound to what Socrates calls a “looping” power of possession. In this, then, we have the heterogeneous linking (the assemblage) of various bodies (e.g., books, rhapsodes, spectators), and a breaking up of their respective equilibriums. We have plugs and hook-ups. Relays and propulsions. A movement of forces, ascending and descending. Emergent subjectivities. An exteriority of relations. We have a *machining* of the book—the book as conduit, that is, both a harnessing and channelling of material/bodily energies. We have the book in its becoming, as a *being* of sensation. Ion, for his part in the chain, readily admits that when he tells sad stories his “eyes are full of tears” (sec. 535), and when he tells “frightening or awful” stories, his “hair stands on end with fear and [his] heart jumps.” The spectator then takes up that rhapsodic charge: “The spectator is the last of the rings.” In the end, a line of possession unfolds between poet, rhapsode, and spectator that according to Socrates robs them, collectively, of their “right mind[s]”; the rhapsode, for example, dresses up, and dances around, in an inspired frenzy.

So Socrates wants the rhapsode, the middle ring on the chain between poet and spectator, *to break the chain*, as it were, that which carries the magnetic current along an

unbroken line from poem to spectator, forming a material continuum. As discussed above, the real problem here is that uninitiated audiences (or spectators) find themselves both mentally and physically swept up in these currents of divine madness, with no ability to make sense of what they may be experiencing, or what they may be exposed to. This is why Socrates ultimately condemns the rhapsode for facilitating these relations, rather than regulating the unchecked energies, the delirium, that passes unimpeded between poem (or poet) and spectator. The rhapsode, if responsible, would filter or mediate those magnetic currents; to do so, he would need to ground his critical agenda in (shall we say, provisionally) a type of instrumental reason.

In any case, the issues raised in Plato's "allegory of the rings"—despite the fact that Plato intended to use this allegory as a way to attack the rhapsode, and the nefarious relations he sought to forge between poet (or poetry) and spectator—point the way, I would argue, to a mode (or method) of literary critical engagement that finds its modern correlate in the complexity sciences. So I would simply suggest, in defence of *Ion*, that his objective as a rhapsode is to enliven or make vital the Homeric verses for the spectator, to intensify them, to draw upon their operative forces—i.e., their capacity to affect, to live (and be relived)—and to maximize (or magnify) their potential outputs. In short, *Ion* wants to 'turn people on,' to bring tears to their eyes, to make them *feel* or register sensation more profoundly. *Ion* wants to engage Homer in an affective fashion, and wants for his audience to deepen or extend their own encounters with the epic poet. *Ion*, let us say, is a "friend" of poetry, or of "beautiful thoughts" (*Ion* sec. 530), just like the philosopher is a *friend* of wisdom: "this I know about myself: I speak about Homer more beautifully than anybody else and I have lots to say; and everybody says I do it

well” (sec. 533). Ion is an enthusiast, an artisan with words (taking them on a line of flight). Homer presents a set of materials to the rhapsode, and Ion stretches and manipulates that material substrate, rendering it plastic, malleable. But for Socrates this is an illegitimate pursuit, one that has Ion reinforcing the illusions of the poet through a simulacral critical encounter of his own, wherein the rhapsode—just like the poet before him—trades in false claims and pretensions.

So the rhapsode-cum-critic needs to reject his form of critical encounter with the book and replace it with a critical strategy that strips the poem of its corporeality. He needs to eschew the immediacy of the encounter, and the ephemera of relations, for a more abstract and generalized *non-connection* to art—“you have to learn his thought, not just his verses!” (*Ion* sec. 530). Socrates argues that Ion, who I deem the proto-critic, rather than attempting to infuse *life* into the Homeric verses (i.e., rather than making them work, putting them to work, seeing what they are capable of, etc.), rather than attempting to *machine* the book, must now stand in judgement of it. He must make comparisons between poets, sort winners from losers, and excise false claimants from the equation. He must evaluate their respective representations of a given topic, theme, object, social role, etc.; he must create rankings, sort good from bad, speak knowledgeably about the poets and their work. Ion must know who speaks best on questions of society, war, heaven and hell, the gods and man. So when Socrates raises such questions as, “[who] will be an adequate judge of all who speak on the same subjects...?” (sec. 532), and how does one know “when [a poet] does his work well and when he doesn’t...?” (sec. 533), he presents a direct challenge to the rhapsode (and to critics of the future, or the critic yet to come) to pursue the sort of critical encounter with the book that values knowledge and mastery

above all else. And yet by doing so, a sort of asceticism falls over the materiality (or material capacities) of the book, as the rhapsode himself is reduced to silence (“really, I shall make time to hear that later”). When Socrates concludes that “anyone can tell that you [Ion] are powerless to speak about Homer on the basis of...knowledge or mastery” (sec. 532), he means to express the Platonic hope for the future of professional discourse on poetry (or literature).

The *Ion*, then, is of particular importance to the discourse of literary criticism (and this dissertation) (1) because of the comparisons it makes between the sensibilities and practices of both poet and critic, and (2) because it posits a fundamental distinction between the truly knowledgeable and the merely conversant in the realm of literary criticism. In terms of this latter point, I would add that the *Ion* draws attention to the question of expert systems—or the role of the expert—within a critical or interpretative milieu. While in the end, the rhapsode may not be a literary critic in a way recognizable to more modern practitioners in the discourse of literary criticism, I view this dialogue as a preliminary indoctrination of the proto-critic into a critical way of thinking, a critical mindset. Plato wants the sort of ally in his “quarrel” with the poets who will renounce the magnetic energies flowing between poet and spectator; he wants the sort of ally who will think critically about the poets, make assessments about their work, create lineages, separate good from bad, etc., and do so by toning down their enthusiasms (or inspired frenzy) so as to pursue a more sober, more rational path toward critical mastery over the book. It is Plato, then, who advances the need for a generalist’s knowledge. It is Plato who advances a disinterested, expert-oriented agenda, which replaces rhapsodic charge with the sort of staid methodical procedures that dull critical practices to this day.



## *Transcending the Book*

Without transcendence, we are warned, we will fall into a dark of chaos, reduced to a pure 'subjectivism' or 'relativism,' living in a world without hope, with no vision of an alternate future.

—Daniel W. Smith (“*Deleuze and Derrida*” 62)

Let me suggest at this point that Plato’s wide-ranging quarrel with the imitative arts has seeded many problematic conceptions of literature, particularly among literary critics, and has contributed (to) any number of flawed or—at minimum—narrowly defined premises concerning the role and practice(s) of the critic, as well. One might even hypothesize that the discourse of literary criticism serves as an ongoing reply to, and/or confrontation with, Platonism—a hypothesis that, at first blush, echoes Alfred North Whitehead’s famous dictum that “all of philosophy is but a footnote to Plato,” and perhaps, less obviously, Harold Bloom’s notion of *the anxiety of influence*.<sup>44</sup> Indeed, I will argue in the next chapter that literary criticism’s most hardened and enduring motifs remain in tacit and sometimes overt dialogue with Platonic doctrine on the arts; also, the dominant (or, let me say, *majoritarian*)<sup>45</sup> discourse of literary criticism has, at a genetic level, preserved deep reciprocal ties with Platonic sensibilities. I will add, finally, that with rare exception, literary critics have routinely been powerless to escape the still palpable grip of Platonism.

However, the point I wish to make in this context breaks with the suggestion that all literary criticism (like all philosophy) is a mere *footnote* to Plato, if by “footnote” we mean something secondary. Something exegetical or purely referential. Something

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<sup>44</sup> In his book, *The Anxiety of Influence*, Bloom argues that the great writings associated with each new literary epoch must be evaluated in terms of a perennial struggle for creative territory, that which manifests itself in and through a defensive and patterned “misreading” (30) of the great poets who have come before—i.e., through a process that Bloom generally refers to as creative *misprision*.

<sup>45</sup> The major/minor distinction, first formally articulated in Deleuze-Guattari’s *Kafka*, will be discussed in the latter stages of this dissertation.

derivative or contingent. A simple attribution.<sup>46</sup> That is, I shift the focus away from the more conventional (though no less accurate) argument that Plato set the terms of literary critical debate, and instead emphasize the point—which I adapt from Deleuze’s reading of Plato—that Platonic doctrine would historically suffuse the discourse of literary criticism (1) with a *transcendent orientation* to literature; and (2) with bureaucratic or administerial conceptions of “the task of the critic.” So the “poisoned gift of Platonism”—to which Deleuze refers—speaks less to the obvious reproduction of, and/or adherence to, specific themes or imperatives, advanced by Plato, and more to a kind of conceptual programming, a software, if you will, that has had profound effects on both philosophy and literary criticism. For Deleuze, Plato’s *real* “gift” to the history of ideas is the operative idea of transcendence, and the credibility that Platonism assigns to transcendent modes of thinking. Put simply, Platonic doctrine not only establishes a template for critical action—i.e., a set of assignments and a corresponding set of values accorded different variables (e.g., the critic, the text, the task of the critic) within the literary critical equation—but sets in motion a key conceptual algorithm, as well—i.e., the logic of transcendence and its attendant forms of image production, unfolding on what Deleuze-Guattari refer to as “the plane of transcendence” (*What is?* 49). This algorithm has long directed, nay compelled, literary critics to pursue a quasi-theistic agenda—a position I will attempt to clarify over the final pages of this chapter.

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<sup>46</sup> I would argue that the footnote ought not be viewed as a textual appendage, but as a subset of critical action, in general, that which amplifies and intensifies the text through “an elevation of [its] power, an increase in [its] dimensions, a gain in [its] distinction” (Deleuze, *Fold* 73). Footnotes, in short, directly *intervene* in the text and induce transformations; they catalyze, mobilize, magnify; they act as creative relays; they break apart unities; they feed the textual rhizome, affirm the expressive potential of the work, and deliver up counter-images. The footnote, in short, maximizes various “amplitude[s]” of the work.

First off, philosopher Todd May offers the following observations concerning the question of transcendence:

That which transcends stands outside or above. It is beyond. God of the Judeo-Christian tradition is the primary example. God transcends. He transcends the world, but also transcends human experience. He is beyond anything we can conceive of him. (27)

So any onto-theological conception of transcendence would hold that, say, humans are of a lesser order than God, and that they are composed of an inferior, or at least dissimilar, ontological stuff.<sup>47</sup> From this, then, a question emerges (which I pose in several ways): How does the human actually *know* or experience God? How do transcendent forms (like God), rendered abstract within the human realm, affirm both themselves and their power to control whomever (or whatever) within that realm, despite their superiority? Put another way, how can transcendence even identify itself as such, given the cognitive and perceptual limitations of the human mind? The religious, philosophical, and socio-political mechanisms by which the case for God (or transcendence) has historically been made are certainly complex and far beyond the scope of this chapter. But, in brief, a *materialist* perspective on the matter—that which informs much of the thinking in this dissertation as a whole—would be that God both derives and exercises his power through the sustained efforts of interested parties (in religion, government, and elsewhere) on a world-historical stage to concretize or reify those powers. Such efforts might involve (1) assigning God, *the father*, the capacity to somehow capture or enfold humans (and other animals)—those from whom God has been deemed ontologically separate—within his

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<sup>47</sup> Parenthetically, the monistic principle of *immanence*—which is typically contrasted with transcendent dualisms—would hold that God expresses or explicates himself equally in all things, and so all things share equally in that expression. The immanentist orientation will be discussed in Part 2 of the dissertation.

own larger purpose or purview; (2) labelling those newly captured beings God's *children*; and (3) holding them up to the supposed standards, values, or eternal judgements set down by God. The effort to reify ideals or abstractions, like God, would also involve separating those abstractions from their own genetic or productive ancestries—i.e., their own social, historical, or psychological origins, their own conditions of intelligibility—so that they operate in a way that seems self-generating and self-sustaining.

These processes, as one might imagine, quite readily lend themselves to paranoid and largely over-determined efforts (again, among interested parties) to assign the kind of substance and/or foundational role to the abstractions themselves that enable them (1) to overcome their own abstracted, imagistic nature, and *re-present* themselves as wholly independent forms; and (2) to assert control, from without, on those from whom they have been abstracted, and to do so with the kind of authority whereby the various mandates they hand down are viewed as unimpeachable. To those interrelated ends, the idea of an all-powerful, all-knowing God relies not only on what philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach<sup>48</sup> would describe as the outward projection of the inward (albeit ideal) nature of humans, but also on the autocratic capacities of those individuals or institutions who would serve (and be served by) the sort of power assigned to God: as Deleuze-Guattari, in *A Thousand Plateaus*, write, “The interpretive priest, the seer, is one of the despot-god’s bureaucrats” (114). So a key role of “the interpretative priest,” or of religion, more generally, is to subordinate the life and life-force of all *things* (e.g., all beings, bodies, or whatever else) to an omnipresent yet wholly despotic power—a power that from a purely

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<sup>48</sup> Conceptions of God from a materialist perspective begin (arguably) in the work of Feuerbach, who argued that God is an abstraction or outward projection of the inward nature of human beings; as such, the attributes assigned God correspond directly to the needs (or perceived short-comings) of humanity vis-à-vis morality, love, understanding, etc.

materialist perspective that amounts to little more than a vapour, a fog, even a ghost. But despite its residual nature, God or “the glory beyond” (as Massumi calls it in the headnote to Part 1 of this dissertation) is obviously far from powerless: its unerring capacity to operate with an iron fist and to maintain its position and privileged rule certainly goes without saying. God sets *the* standard against which all things are formally measured; at minimum, those measurements are produced and *felt* materially (e.g., in the ascetic, flagellating, or self-mortifying body), socially, politically, and so forth. Still, the effects of transcendence—i.e., of transcendent power, transcendent forms, transcendent modes of thinking, and so forth—are all enabled by a kind of vampirism, a purging of the life, or of its material and self-organizing powers, from that which has been rendered subordinate to an abstract power. So to this point we have parasites, ghosts, vampires: all things that live or *live on* in a purely derived fashion.

These processes, when generalized, have important repercussions outside the onto-theological realm. In fact, they apply whenever (or wherever) an appeal might be made to a “higher” standard or norm, as it reflects itself in, for example, a superior power, a superior thought, a superior narrative, a superior order, etc., or really any abstract conception of, say, a consciousness *beyond* consciousness, a subject *outside* the subject, a world *external to* the world, and so forth. As noted, all such transcendent constructions identify themselves (or are identified) in like fashion, which affirms or grounds their right to govern or control from without. Deleuze, though, in a late interview, makes the claim that “Abstractions explain nothing, they themselves have to be explained: there are no such things as universals, there’s nothing transcendent, no Unity, subject (or object), Reason” (*Negotiations* 145). So, for Deleuze, the prevailing

forms of transcendence in and through the history of ideas—e.g., the Judeo-Christian God, the Platonic Forms, Subject/Object relations, Man, or what Massumi describes as “general images: those constituting categories, identities, good [and/or] commonsensical ideas” (*User’s Guide* 111)—rather than being given, rather than preceding the sensible flux of human experience, rather than being the *One* that explains the many by supplying the fixed foundations upon which life erects itself, these things need be explained by the multiple processes (e.g., genetic, material, social, semiotic, discursal, historical, and political) that they presuppose. Transcendence must be explained by what enables or lies immanent to it,<sup>49</sup> and in a way that “frees thought of any ultimate metaphysical foundation... represented in images... by the privileged mind of man (subject)” (Colebrook, *Deleuze* 87).

Deleuze-Guattari contrast those who they deem “first philosophers”—e.g., philosophers involved in the making and mapping of concepts—with philosopher-sages, who are religious personae, priests, because they conceive of the institution of an always transcendent order imposed from outside by a great despot or by one god higher than the others.... Whenever there is transcendence, vertical Being, imperial State in the sky or on earth, there is religion. (*What is?* 43)

Like philosophy, the discourse of literary criticism has historically given rise to its own critic-as-sage motif, and has done so (1) through the dissemination of certain *illusory* (read: unified, standardized, privileged) images of the critic, and of the critical task, in

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<sup>49</sup> For Deleuze, what might succumb to transcendence emerges, initially, from “the intense world of differences” (*Difference* 57), which parenthetically should not be confused with a kind of structure, or structural logic. What enables or conditions the sensible remains integral to, yet wholly separate from, its sensible outputs. Put another way, what materializes in the actual, what emerges, is neither pre-established, nor predictable.

general; and (2) through its manufacture of, and/or repeated appeal to, a set of enduring critical constants as they relate to specific conceptions of the book and its author. Like Deleuze-Guattari's "interpretive priest," mentioned above, the literary critic similarly passes powerful judgements on the book, and does so through the repeated invocation and application of various abstract standards or modes of organization. Those organizational modalities prevent the book, I would argue, from expressing itself in novel or transformative ways, or rather, they preclude the "unfolding of its lines, the production of something new" (Deleuze, *Negotiations* 146). Instead, the installation of static, evaluative measures petrify the book, restrict and deny it—deny its life-force. For Deleuze, "unifications, subjectifications, rationalizations, centralizations have no specific status; they often amount to an impasse, a closing off," and so,

When you invoke something transcendent you arrest movement, introducing interpretations instead of experimenting...interpretation is in fact always carried out with reference to something that is supposed to be missing. Unity is precisely what's missing from multiplicity, just as the subject's what's missing from events...[but whatever the case] it's only ever abstractions [posed from] a transcendent viewpoint.

I will have more to say on these matters in the next chapter. But it is worth noting at this point that the plane of transcendence expresses itself as a paranoid extension of a truly immanentist power; that is, the plane can be explained by the operations of arrest and control on the plane of immanence, by the attempt to silence, limit, or restrict the unerring flux of difference and productive variation.

To sum up, the plane of transcendence—as suggested above—is not tied simply to theological, or even ontological, imperatives alone, i.e., to higher beings, or to a Judeo-Christian God, imposing eternal mandates from without. Transcendence is also affirmed through the production of empirical, social, theoretical, or political constants, and really in and through any “system of laws or relations that would govern life” (Colebrook, *Perplexed* 129). Moreover, the transcendent orientation serves the interests of a powerful, totalitarian, and ultimately paranoid State apparatus in a way that captures or overcodes<sup>50</sup> various *bodies* (including, book bodies) various relationships, social arrangements, etc. Transcendence, in fact, striates “all reality: space, time, body, culture, nature” (Bonta and Protevi, *Geophilosophy* 147), and does so generally (though not exclusively) by subjecting those things to the operations of standardized and pre-existing regimes of signification. Literary criticism, I argue, like most all theoretical or interpretative endeavours, is typically written from what Deleuze-Guattari call “a sedentary point of view and in the name of a unitary State apparatus” (*Plateaus* 23). From that perspective, various critical postulates take shape around, for example, a conception of individuated enunciation—i.e., what Michel Foucault refers to as the text’s “author-function”<sup>51</sup>—or,

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<sup>50</sup> In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze-Guattari claim that “Unity always operates in an empty dimension supplementary to that of the system considered (overcoding)” (8); they then add that *overcoding* is a semiotically “produced... phenomena of centering, unification, totalization, integration, hierarchicalization, and finalization” (41; trans. modified), which on the whole suggests transcendent operations are in play.

<sup>51</sup> In “What is an Author?,” Foucault undermines—as would Maurice Blanchot and Deleuze—most all propositions concerning the author-function, among them, the suggestion that “the author provides the basis for explaining not only the presence of certain events in a work, but also their transformations, distortions, and diverse modifications (through his biography, the determination of his individual perspective, the analysis of his social position, and the revelation of his basic design). The author is also the principle of a certain unity of writing—all differences having to be resolved, at least in part, by the principles of evolution, maturation, or influence. The author also serves to neutralize the contradictions that may emerge in a series of texts: there must be—at a certain level of his thought or desire, of his consciousness or unconscious—a point where contradictions are resolved, where incompatible elements are at last tied together or organized around a fundamental or originating contradiction. Finally, the author is a particular source of expression that, in more or less completed forms, is manifested equally well, and with similar validity, in works, sketches, letters, fragments, and so on” (384).



more generally, around what Deleuze-Guattari call “a tripartite division between a field of reality (the world) and a field of representation (the book) and a field of subjectivity (the author)” (*Plateaus* 23), which involves the enduring pursuit of dominant significations. Also, the critical State apparatus lays a consistent emphasis on structures of the book: e.g., ends, beginnings, points of departure and arrival, foundations, filiations, reproductions, interiorities. Deleuze-Guattari conclude that “It is a regrettable characteristic of the Western mind to relate expressions and actions to exterior or transcendent ends...[to] culmination and termination points” (22). At this point, then, we turn in earnest to the question of how the discourse of literary criticism has historically internalized Plato’s anti-materialist agenda.

## Chapter 2

### How to Make a Dead Writer Sad—

### Stratigraphic Criticism and the Judgment of God

Every stratum is a judgment of God.

—Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 44)

I tell you that they have reinvented microbes in order to impose a new idea of God. They have found a new way to bring out God and to capture him in his microbic noxiousness.

—Antonin Artaud (*To Have Done with the Judgment of God, A Radio Play*)

My ideal, when I write about an author, would be to write nothing that could cause him sadness, or if he is dead, that might make him weep in his grave...So many dead writers must have wept over what has been written about them.

—Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet (*Dialogues II*, 119)<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> The authorial coupling between Deleuze and his former student, Claire Parnet, would result in the 1977 publication of an *unusual* volume, entitled *Dialogues*—re-released in English under the title *Dialogues II*. I describe this work as “unusual” because, despite its title, the authors skirt the communication—or interview-based—format in favour of a series of individual, though perhaps heteroglossic, essays on a variety of subjects, signed separately by each author. Deleuze and Parnet would later collaborate on a series of wide-ranging interviews, entitled *L'Abécédaire de Gilles Deleuze (The ABCs of Gilles Deleuze)*—an 8-hour presentation that would come to French television in 1994, a year prior to Deleuze’s death, despite his wish to have the interviews released only after his death. In any case, I will hereafter refer to this coupling as Deleuze-Parnet, following the same convention I set for Deleuze and Guattari.

### *The Literary Organism*

We begin by recalling Deleuze’s claim—highlighted in the last chapter—that “the poisoned gift of Platonism is to have introduced transcendence into philosophy, to have given transcendence a plausible philosophical meaning (the triumph of the judgment of God).” In particular, I wish to focus on the phrase “the judgment of God”—a phrase that plots an intricate philosophical trajectory through the work of Deleuze (and Deleuze-Guattari), and so requires careful elucidation. The phrase itself can be traced back to French poet/philosopher Antonin Artaud, and his infamous *radio play*,<sup>53</sup> “To Have Done with the Judgment of God.”<sup>54</sup> In this play, Artaud claims that God is renewed in the figure of “man.” He writes, “although nobody believes in God any more everybody believes more and more in man. / So it is man whom we must now make up our minds to emasculate.” The sincerest wish of Artaud’s speaker, then, is “to put an end to this ape once and for all [...] to strip him bare in order to scrape off that animalcule that / itches him mortally.”<sup>55</sup> So putting an end to “this ape” means—at least in part—putting an end to the *idea* of man as organic unity, and dismantling the representation of bodies as self-sufficient, self-contained bio-mechanical organisms, which are structured in ways similar to the amoeba, but at a higher level of complexity.

For Artaud, “God”—or really, the *judgment* of God—renews itself in the discrete and autonomous figure of the organism, and, by extension, the organizing principles and

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<sup>53</sup> Strictly speaking, Artaud’s work is scripted less like your average radio drama, and more like a long poem that in recent interpretations (of the last decade, or so) has been presented as “performance art.”

<sup>54</sup> This piece was first recorded in late 1947, by Artaud himself—after several years being confined to psychiatric hospitals, and a few months prior to his death in 1948. The play, however, would never make it to air in France—a fact that seemed to have hastened its author’s death—and would remain on the shelf for the next 30 years, owing in part to its sacrilegious content and chaotic mode of presentation. The following selections are excerpted from a transcript of the play, reproduced in *Antonin Artaud: Selected Writings*.

<sup>55</sup> A microscopic organism, like an amoeba or a paramecium, is sometimes referred to as an “animalcule,” which basically translates as “little animal.”

organic unities that serve to contain and control that material body. So the organism's predetermined organization is the real enemy, the real target, of Artaud's play. Put simply, *God*, and the attendant power of any transcendent authority to enclose the body—i.e., to subject it to a set of restrictions or confinements—reasserts itself not just in the figure of *man*, but, more precisely, in the semiotic and structural coordinates that various organic conceptions of *man* impose on the body. So Artaud concludes: “you can tie me up if you wish, but there is nothing more useless than an organ.” By this he means a couple of things. First, there is “nothing more useless” than that which regulates (or gives order to) the body's machinic encounters with the outside; nothing more useless than that which selectively filters (or filters out) intensive sensory inputs by limiting itself to a *specific* function within the body (e.g., seeing, breathing, or circulating blood).<sup>56</sup> In other words, “there is nothing more useless” than that which partitions and *organizes* material flows in, out, and through the *organism*. Second, John Protevi points to what he calls “the interchange of theology, biology and politics inherent in the question of nature and the organism” (30). He labels this “traditional nexus” a “theo-bio-political structure,” and isolates numerous historical convergences of these various discourses in the work of, among others, Aristotle and Kant. A simple example of this nexus may be a concept like the “body politic,” or Kant's notion of an “architect God.”<sup>57</sup> But in his reading of Aristotle, Protevi provides a more complex rendering of the issue as follows:

Under the rule of the soul, the body becomes unified, a single organ... Any formation of a unity is always that of ruler/ruled, and the unification of the

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<sup>56</sup> Think of the eyes reducing sensation/experience to a set of visual coordinates: What do they overlook?

<sup>57</sup> Protevi argues that in Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, “nature and freedom are finally related in the thought of a moral architect God who guarantees that nature must at least cooperate with our moral action” (35).

animal body under the rule of soul is masterly rather than political

(*Politics...*). *Psychic organisation entails somatic enslavement.* (33)

So the discursive exchanges between biology, politics, and theology—which are nearly ceaseless—underscore the link that Artaud formulates between conceptions of the organ (or the self-contained *organism*) and the judgment of God. In fact, taking Artaud’s point to its extreme, one might conclude that “there is nothing more useless than...” a pre-determined *organization*, an *organizing* principle, an *organic* unity, an *organizing* power, a discursive *organization* (social, psychological, literary), or the idea of a hermetically-sealed *organism*, for which God provides the basic model.

So Artaud concludes with the following provocation:

When you will have made him a body without organs,  
then you will have delivered him from all his automatic reactions  
and restored him to his true freedom.

Here then we have the first appearance of what will become one of Deleuze-Guattari’s most notorious and difficult concepts, the “body without organs” (henceforth, BwO)—a concept that can be rendered in any number of ways.<sup>58</sup> One approach is to note that the *organism*—and not the “organ,” *per se*: as Deleuze-Guattari claim, “the BwO is not at all the opposite of the organs...The enemy is the organism” (*Plateaus* 158)—deprives us of “true freedom,” because it effectively *automates* the material body; it regulates the capacities (or powers) of the body; it imprisons the body by way of preset organizations and organic unities. Deleuze-Guattari then advance the issue as follows:

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<sup>58</sup> At different times in their work, Deleuze-Guattari describe the BwO as “the zero degree of intensity,” “the plane of immanence” or “plane of consistency,” the “molecular” body, “the earth,” “a recording surface,” “the disjunctive synthesis,” etc. We will return to this concept in the Interchapter between Chapters 3 and 4.

The BwO is opposed not to the organs but to that organization of the organs called the organism...the organic organization of the organs. The *judgment of God*, the system of the judgment of God, the theological system, is precisely the operation of He who makes an organism, an organization of organs called the organism, because He cannot bear the BwO, because he pursues it and rips it apart so He can be first, and have the organism be first. *The organism is already that, the judgment of God*, from which medical doctors benefit and on which they base their power. The organism is not at all the body, the BwO; rather *it is a stratum on the BwO*, in other words, a phenomenon of accumulation, coagulation, and sedimentation that, in order to extract useful labour from the BwO, imposes on it forms, functions, bonds, dominant and hierarchized organizations, organized transcendences” (158–59; emphasis my own).

There are several important gestures in this passage that will need to be unpacked as we move forward. Of particular note, though, is the direct correlation the authors draw between the organism and the judgment of God. Their point is that *God*, in whatever shape or form it takes—from transcendent authority to microbe (see Artaud’s statement in the head-note to this chapter)—always remains the figure (or marker) of organic unity and transcendent order. Moreover, the function of God, in every context, is to suppress difference, to contain and control it, and to unite bodies under the banner of some sort of structured and totalizing whole. So, as Artaud says, what once was God is renewed in the concept of man, or even the “animalcule [i.e., ‘little animal’] that / itches him mortally.”

Deleuze reinforces this point in a late essay, whose title, “To Have Done with Judgment,” obviously harkens back to Artaud’s radio play. In this essay, Deleuze claims that “judgment implies a veritable organization of the bodies through which it acts: organs are both judges and judged, and the judgment of God is nothing other than the power to organize to infinity” (*Essays* 130). In other words, judgment presupposes the *organized body*. It presupposes a set of standards, and a certain foundation or ground that guarantees those standards; it also presupposes that which can be judged in light of those standards. So wherever prefigured organizations of one sort or another set standards, and encourage claims to be made—i.e., through elective modes of participation—in relation to those standards, and wherever reactions or interactions in and between bodies become automated, thus giving rise to, for example, regulated encounters, fixed identities, habits, patterns, routines, and so forth, the *judgment of God* is at work. That judgment suppresses the unpredictable, unregulated body. And recalling our discussion of Spinoza from the last chapter, it cuts the body off from its power to act, from what it can or *might* do, from its actions and passions, its true freedoms or “natural right” (Deleuze, *Expressionism* 258), and its “joyful affections” (261). Judgment then not only reinforces stabilized (or stabilizing) structures of knowledge and authority, but it also reinforces dialectical schemata for organizing (e.g., categorizing, ranking, stratifying) bodies—as Deleuze says, organizing them “to infinity”: “Where we once had a vital and living body, God has made us into an organism...an organized body without which his judgment could not be exercised” (*Essays* 131).

But the enduring question in this context is *how*, precisely, is the body made into an organism, that which, in turn, reflects and reinforces the judgment of God? For

Deleuze-Guattari, the simple answer is that organisms are created through *strata*—or rather, through the processes of stratification.<sup>59</sup> They argue the point as follows:

Strata are acts of capture, they are like ‘black holes’ or occlusions striving to seize whatever comes within their reach. They operate by coding and territorialization upon the earth...The strata are judgments of God; stratification in general is the entire system of the judgment of God (but the earth, or the body without organs, constantly eludes that judgment) (*Plateaus* 40).

The point here is that all organisms are essentially stratified at the level of *form* (by way of various codes, structures, territorializations); and at the level of *substance* (by way of the contents it captures and the matters it selects). So the organism, in terms of both form and substance, *is* the sum total of its various layerings and formed matters (i.e., its strata). The judgment of God, then, is reflected in and through that strata: “a stratum, and not only an organism, is necessary to make the judgment of God” (159). The stratified organism, newly constituted, now weighs upon the body; it codes and restricts the body. It occludes the body, and its potential variations (i.e., its capacity to alter, to transform, to enter into new arrangements with other bodies). The stratified organism suppresses difference in the body, and does so by suppressing the body’s capacity to renew itself, to unfold, to become-other. But as Deleuze-Guattari go on to say, the organism itself is just one form or type of strata that imposes on the body: “Let us consider the three great strata

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<sup>59</sup> Drawing on the work of Dutch Linguist, Louis Hjelmslev, Deleuze-Guattari argue that the creation of any sort of strata (geological, linguistic, social, etc.) requires a “double articulation,” which means that strata take shape through the contents they gather, and give form to (i.e., code), and in the way that those contents are formally expressed. Both expression and content are themselves doubly articulated, through form and substance (e.g., *form* of content, *substance* of expression, etc.). It is in and through the *form of expression* that the stratum will “sing the glory of God” (*Plateaus* 43).



concerning us, in other words, the ones that most directly bind us: the organism, signification, and subjectification.” So the body is confined not only to its bio-mechanical frame, but is reduced to what it signifies (i.e., the interpretations or representations we may have of it—e.g., we ask: ‘*what is it?*’ or ‘*what does it mean?*’). The body is also restricted to structures of value and import, and ultimately subjected to some type of identity or essential attribute that only further shuts down its materio-semiotic capacities to engender sensation, to bifurcate, and to become-other.

These matters are somewhat complex, and admittedly I provide only a very brief sketch of Deleuze-Guattari’s work on these issues. But the point to which we have thus far been leading in this chapter is the idea that *book-bodies*, just like all other bodies, are stratified in and through the discourse of literary criticism. Book-bodies are subject to various controls at the level of both form and content—again, just like any other stratified body. Book-bodies repeatedly endure the imposition of organizational structures, the regimes of signification, and both the subjective and communal will. Under these various forms of control, book-bodies are organically unified. They are schematized and regulated through a form of criticism (or critical methodology) that I will generally refer to—over the pages that follow—as *stratigraphic criticism*. That is, I will show that various approaches to the book (if not the critic, and the task of the critic, as well) that stratigraphic modes of criticism promote have played a prominent, yet wholly pernicious, role in the discourse of literary criticism, from Plato to the present. Those modes of criticism manifest themselves, most clearly, in the historical efforts of many critics (and many schools of criticism) to impose various settlements and stabilities on the book, various forms of semiotic containment and control. In part, stratigraphic modes of

criticism view the book through the lens of its lateral continuities with other books—i.e., its generic and structural bonds, its internal resemblances, its various marks of identity. In that way, then, stratigraphic criticism subjects the book to the judgment of God, to what organizes it, what codes<sup>60</sup> and overcodes<sup>61</sup> it. So “the *triumph* of the judgment of God” in this context is really the triumph of the literary organism, the triumph of critical strata, and the triumph of the various universals (or literary values) that promote that strata. This is the triumph of form over matter (the hylomorphic model). The triumph of interiorities. The triumph of endless tribunals, or of ceaseless rounds of legitimation and validation. The triumph of what contains or suppresses the new, the vital. The triumph of what stifles the book’s becomings, its machinic flows—in short, the immanent capacity of the book to forge productive connections and go to the limits, or the *n<sup>th</sup>* degree, of its power.<sup>62</sup> In the end, Deleuze-Guattari make the critical point that “the judgment of God weighs upon and is exercised against the BwO...[and it] is the BwO that is stratified” (*Plateaus* 159).

In this chapter I will demonstrate *how*, and to what extent, literary critical discourse has been mired in what Deleuze-Guattari refer to as “the long history of an illusion” (*What is?* 47)—the *illusion* of transcendence—which is ceaselessly renewed and reinforced by subordinating the book to various critical striations: i.e., “the triumph of the

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<sup>60</sup> A code is a set of rules governing the combination, juxtaposition and organization of various resources (e.g., semantic, phonological, syntactic, semiological) in the use of language (or any other sign system). Codes control how speakers activate and make use of the meaning-making potentials of language, and they regulate not only the production, but also the reading/reception, of texts (*think*: narrative codes). More precisely, codes determine the range of formal options—i.e., the linguistic, grammatical, semiotic, and discursive repertoire—available to language users; they then become powerful markers of hegemony and social control in their capacity to both express *and* reinforce ideologically-saturated social information.

<sup>61</sup> We first encountered this notion in the introduction. In general, *overcoding*—or the process of such— involves (1) the suspension of heterogeneous codes (syntactic, narrative, textual), and the substances that they structure (i.e., give *form* to); and (2) the expression (or re-articulation) of those “formed matters” at a higher—or at least different—level of organization. According to Deleuze-Guattari, this semiotic process yields “phenomena of centering, unification, totalization, integration, hierarchicalization, and finalization” (*Plateaus* 41). So the book is overcoded, first, by being extracted from a more material (though coded) milieu; and second, by being expressed as a unified, organic whole, which means or signifies something.

<sup>62</sup> On this point, recall our discussion of Spinoza and ethics from the last chapter.

judgment of God.” I also argue that critics have become (unwitting?) participants in the dissemination and persistent renewal of Plato’s “poisoned gift.” In fact, I would go so far as to suggest that the true Platonic legacy regarding the book does not so much manifest itself in, for example, critical concerns about the ontological status of the book, or the psychological distortions propagated by literature—though this latter has long been an issue for many schools of literary/cultural criticism—but instead in rhetorical efforts to erect and stabilize the literary organism, itself. As has been suggested, erecting the literary organism involves the ongoing stratification of the book and the forced imposition of, among other things, a set of sanctioned critical values, those that not only standardize or regulate critical encounters with the book (i.e., how books are interpreted, evaluated, represented), but that ultimately dematerialize the book, and hence its capacity to vary, to affect and be affected, to function as a being of sensation, to remain open to external forces and ultimately *go critical*—matters that we will explore in Part 2 of the dissertation. So the role of transcendence in literary critical discourse reveals itself most fully in the enduring efforts of critics to stratify the book, or to unify it in some way, and then to mask the underlying discursivity that undoubtedly conditions those critical efforts.

### ***The “Triple Illusion”***

Contemplation, reflection and communication are not disciplines, but machines for constituting Universals in every discipline.

—Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (*What is Philosophy?*, 6)

In their final collaborative effort, Deleuze-Guattari broach the question at the centre of that work—i.e., what is philosophy?—by making a case (in the early stages of the book) for what they believe philosophy is *not*:

We can at least see what philosophy is not: it is not contemplation, reflection, or communication. This is the case even though it may sometimes believe it is one or other of these, as a result of the capacity of every discipline to produce its own illusions and to hide behind its own peculiar smokescreen. (*What is?* 6)

For Deleuze-Guattari the primary role of philosophy is to invent *concepts*—those that “map” (*read*: think along with, put to work)<sup>63</sup> everything from, say, chaotic material processes in the physical universe (and beyond), to novel states of affairs in given social or political bodies; from transformative events and worldly becomings, to the lived experiences and everyday encounters of the individual; from the cultural sensibilities of the present, to new and unusual ways of thinking or ways of doing. The creation of concepts may involve either the overturning or reinvention of older concepts—those that reflect the concerns of a different age—as philosophers attempt to engage, or take a more contemporary accounting of, current realities (conditions, situations, experiences), in whatever ways they might present themselves. So concepts create new possibilities *for*, new ways of thinking, and/or interacting *with*, the world.

But the potentially vital role that concepts *can* play, and, by extension, philosophy and philosophers, in society and elsewhere, is diminished or suppressed in one of two ways: first, by philosophers who make repeated appeals to, and hence reinforce, a given body of overworked, if not altogether obsolete, conceptual formulations—those created for perhaps an earlier time, or a different set of problems (philosophical or otherwise)—

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<sup>63</sup> In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze-Guattari distinguish the productive, experimental practices associated with “mapping” from the sort of mimetic reproductions involved in what they call “tracing.” (See, for example, their introductory plateau, “The Rhizome,” pp. 12–3, 21.)

even while trying to speak to current concerns, and novel experiences. Following Nietzsche on this point, Deleuze-Guattari agree that philosophers

‘must no longer accept concepts as a gift, nor merely purify them and polish them, but first *make* and *create* them, present them and make them convincing. Hitherto one has generally trusted one’s concepts as if they were a wonderful dowry from some sort of wonderland.’<sup>64</sup>

So because experiential realities (or events on the ground, if you will) remain in a constant state of metamorphosis, concepts that have become little more than petrified abstractions, and that offer only conventional renderings of supposedly universal concerns, must be overturned or creatively re-configured by a philosophy that seeks to meet the exigencies of a continuously changing reality:

there’s no point at all doing philosophy the way Plato did, not because we’ve superseded Plato but because you can’t supersede Plato, and it makes no sense to have another go at what he’s done for all time. There’s only one choice...transplanting bits of Plato into problems that are no longer Platonic ones. (Deleuze, *Negotiations* 148)

Second, and more importantly for our purposes, the essential work of the philosopher (i.e., concept creation) may also be suppressed by a philosophy that falls prey to what Deleuze-Guattari call the “triple illusion” (*What is?* 49) of (1) *contemplation*, which involves the *tracing* (e.g., copying, mimetic reproduction) of a set of privileged,

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<sup>64</sup> I cite this passage from Deleuze-Guattari’s *What is Philosophy?* (5). The original excerpt, though, comes from Nietzsche’s *The Will to Power*. In his comments, Nietzsche begins by saying that philosophers “have not stopped to consider that concepts and words are our inheritance from ages in which thinking was very modest and unclear.” He then concludes with the following: “this piety towards what we find in us is perhaps part of the moral element in knowledge. What is needed above all is an absolute scepticism toward all inherited concepts” (III.1.409; pp. 220–21).

self-same ideals against which we then measure our relative degrees of perfection or legitimacy, and through which we come to define (or understand) ourselves; (2) *reflection*, which involves not only the interpretation of subjective experience—i.e., subjective modes of engagement with the world, subjective ways of knowing—but the inquiry into a commonly-held set of critical (or cognitive) faculties that *falsely* unify experience; and (3) *communication*, which involves establishing (or working toward) some sort of foundational consensus about *things* (in society, in culture, and beyond) through a preset conceptual vocabulary (e.g., democratic, liberal humanist); put another way, communicational paradigms assert the legitimacy of ready-made conversational constants in the explanation or description of, say, the structure and contents of conscious experience in the phenomenal world.

For Deleuze-Guattari, these forms of philosophical activity (contemplation, reflection, communication), despite claims to the contrary, all derive from singular and localized encounters with the world; and so, they each have “a history” (*What is?* 17) and a “becoming” (18) of their own, i.e., an evolution and set of transformations unique to that practice; and each practice—even if it may be thought to serve some type of “first philosophy” or universal principle—either presupposes or grounds itself in a multiplicity of pre-established concepts.<sup>65</sup> At certain points in the history of philosophy, though, and in the hands of certain philosophers (e.g., Plato, Descartes, Kant, Husserl), these one-time philosophical trajectories (both localized and situated) become, in a word, *constants* of

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<sup>65</sup> On this point, Deleuze-Guattari give the example of Descartes’ cogito, which despite its claims to being a *first* philosophy (which ostensibly means a philosophy *without* supposition), presupposes—at minimum—an understanding of the concepts (or processes) of doubting, thinking, and being (*What is?* 24). So as Deleuze-Guattari write, “There are no simple concepts. Every concept has components and is defined by them. It therefore has a combination. It is a multiplicity... There is no concept with only one component... Every concept is at least a double or triple, etc.” (15).

philosophical activity in their own right—i.e., preconceived ways of thinking and knowing the world. They become the philosophical (and also critical) mechanisms by which the judgment of God is rendered. They bring a transcendent unity to the world, and to our subjective or intersubjective experience of that world; they each, in their own way, become a kind of critical lens for interpreting and organizing experiences; and they each provide the conceptual or discursive tools—i.e., the terms of discussion, the talking points (or points of reference)—for recognizing, understanding, or communicating those experiences. So a philosophy that contemplates a set of Ideas or ideals (e.g., Justice, Truth—the Platonic Forms, in general; also, God, Being) that transcend, and yet govern, reality, Deleuze-Guattari label “objective idealism” (7); a philosophy that reflects upon the *subject* of knowledge (e.g., Descartes’ Cogito), or on the cognitive conditions for all possible experience (e.g., Kant’s transcendental critique), they call “subjective idealism”; and a philosophy that pursues the goal of establishing communicative agreements, rational consensus, shared concerns, etc. (through, say, the tools of communicative action and/or discourse ethics), they deem “intersubjective idealism” (7).<sup>66</sup> In each of these philosophical activities, then, what Deleuze-Guattari call “the mole of the transcendent” (46) repeatedly renews itself.<sup>67</sup>

So *if*, as Deleuze-Guattari contend, “every discipline” retains the capacity “to produce its own illusions,” and as well the capacity “to hide behind its own peculiar smokescreen,” *then* the following question presents itself, given the concerns of this

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<sup>66</sup> Deleuze-Guattari further characterize this notion of rational consensus as the “cogito of communication”—i.e., an intersubjective mode of knowing or thinking the world which, they add, “is even more dubious than that of reflection” (108).

<sup>67</sup> By “mole,” Deleuze-Guattari are indexing something like a *molar* unit—e.g., some type of normalized (and normalizing) variable that regulates, governs, organizes, etc. from without—and not some furry, subterranean creature. In brief, molar formations of the book-body are typically in play when a derived literary effect becomes a normative measure for interpreting or making sense of the book.

dissertation: Does the discourse of literary criticism similarly produce its own set of illusions or *idealisms* by promoting—not unlike philosophy—its own universals of contemplation, reflection, and consensus-oriented communication? And, if so, in what ways have those various “fogs and miasmas” (Guattari, *Chaosmosis* 135) come to regulate critical encounters with the book? And how have they contributed to the kind of critical injustice that, as Deleuze laments, must have made many *dead writers* “weep” in their graves? In fact, following Deleuze-Guattari’s indictment of the Kafka critical establishment in their work, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (which we discussed in the introductory chapter), Deleuze himself, in *Dialogues*, goes on to chastise certain elements within the critical community for the ways they have sought to subjugate or debase writers: “You should hear qualified critics talking of Kleist’s failures, Lawrence’s impotence, Kafka’s childishness, Carroll’s little girls. It is unworthy... the work will appear all the greater the more pitiful the life is made to seem” (49).

Before turning, then, in the next chapter to the question of what it might mean for critics to effectively circumvent the judgment of God, I wish to examine, in the pages that follow, the various critical tools by which literary criticism has historically pursued what I have been calling a stratigraphic agenda, vis-à-vis the book. That is, following Deleuze-Guattari’s claim that there are essentially “[three] machines for constituting Universals in every discipline” (*What is?* 6): contemplation, reflection, and communication, I will attempt to show how these machines have become coextensive with literary criticism, or rather, how they have aligned themselves with “the image” that literary critical thought “gives itself of what it means to think, to make use of thought, to find one’s bearings in thought” (37). My argument, in short, is that the discourse of literary criticism—or, more



generally, literary theory—has demonstrated a nearly ancient proclivity for perpetuating a transcendent orientation to the book, and has done so through the construction of various *universals of thought*, or literary critical constants, that have served to unify, systematize, and organize the book, and in a way that both renders it abstract and wholly predictable. So critics in this field have long pursued an agenda (1) that objectifies the book, in large part by reducing it to an instantiation of certain aesthetic or linguistic principles; (2) that subjects the book to various critical representations; and (3) that further subjects the book to the consensus of a given discourse community. But as Deleuze-Guattari repeatedly remind us, “Universals explain nothing, they themselves have to be explained” (7).<sup>68</sup> And so, with this injunction in mind, I wish to illuminate what has become universal in literary critical discourse, and thus an enduring source of the book’s organizational strata: i.e., its stable critical values and the restrictive judgments that those values imply.

### ***First Trajectory: Universals of Contemplation***

Philosophy, the history of philosophy, is encumbered with the problem of being, IS. They discuss the judgment of attribution (the sky is blue) and the judgment of existence (God is).

—Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet (*Dialogues II*, 56)

To begin, we recall that in Plato’s *Ion*, Socrates raises the spectre of an abstract art object, or what I am calling a *literary organism*. This organism is accessible—at least potentially so—to the astute reader/interpreter of poetry through a kind of disciplinary knowledge of the field, according to Socrates (sec. 532), and is therefore knowable independently of the particular *instantiations* of poetry. So when Socrates asks Ion, “what

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<sup>68</sup> In *Negotiations*, Deleuze similarly argues, “Abstractions explain nothing, they themselves have to be explained: there are no such things as universals, there’s nothing transcendent, no Unity, subject (or object), Reason; there are only processes, sometimes unifying, subjectifying, rationalizing, but just processes all the same” (145). For further repetitions of these same ideas, see Deleuze-Parnet’s *Dialogues II*, p. vii.; also, Stivale’s summary of *L’Abécédaire de Gilles Deleuze, avec Claire Parnet* (see especially: “U as in ‘Un’”).

in the world is it that you're clever about in Homer but not in Hesiod?" (sec. 531), he means to say that there are enduring poetic principles—and a generalized art object, itself—that will transcend the work of individual poets, yet nonetheless organize, unify (i.e., overcode), and hence assert significant control over, the various literary pretensions of the poet. Knowledge of those principles provide those who would presume to assess individual poems with the necessary know-how to make *just* comparisons between poets and their poems, to pass judgment, to sort good art from bad, and to arbitrate the relative quality of related claims to the truth or related imitations of worldly things.

So, by extension, Socrates raises the possibility that *someone*—perhaps the rhapsode, but more likely someone *else*, yet to be named—may be capable of assessing, even mastering, the poetic genre (again, as a whole), by knowing how a given poet's work ranks within the more abstract stratifications of the literary organism. On this point, Socrates offers the following example (in somewhat patronizing fashion, I would add): “Well now, Ion, dear heart, when a number of people are discussing arithmetic, and one of them speaks best, I suppose *someone* will know how to pick out the good speaker” (*Ion* sec. 531). That someone will likely have access to a set of criteria by which to compare speakers. Socrates then expands the point as follows: “now take the whole of any other subject: won't it have the same discipline throughout? And this goes for every subject that can be mastered” (sec. 532)—including, of course, poetry. On this point, Socrates links the mastery of the poem to the mastery of *poetics*. But Ion—as we well know—lacks any sort of rational or practical attunement to such disciplinary knowledge:

Anyone can tell that you are powerless to speak about Homer on the basis of knowledge or mastery. Because if your ability came by mastery, you

would be able to speak about all the other poets as well. Look, there is an art of poetry as a whole, isn't there?

So, in the *Ion*, poetry becomes an object of critical scrutiny—a self-contained, internally consistent set of operations that (at least potentially) can be known to the rhapsode-cum-critic, or to anyone else who judges individual instances of art through the lens of certain critical filters, or certain aesthetic and social rankings, tied to fixed poetic principles.

At the outset of *What is Philosophy?*, Deleuze-Guattari claim that “With the creation of philosophy, the Greeks violently force the friend into a relationship that is no longer a relationship with an ‘other’ but one with an Entity, an Objectality, an Essence” (3)—a point that helps clarify Socrates’ argument in the *Ion*. That is, the rhapsode—or, let us say, the *friend* of Homer (who sings the poet’s praises)—is forced to postpone the performance (“I’ll make time for it, I promise”). He is forced to suspend his intimacies with the poet, the poet’s verses, and the spectator. He is forced to delay, defer the singularity of those encounters, the in-between, the living relationship. He is forced to eschew any sort of creative or constructive coupling with the book, and thus his capacity—what I deem essential—to experiment with the book, amplify its intensities, bring it to a point of operative crisis (a place far from equilibrium), and infuse it (or open it up to) any sort of life-force. In a sense, the rhapsode *is* the living embodiment of the book’s potential (just as the philosopher, for Deleuze-Guattari, is the “potentiality of the concept” (5)—an issue to which we will return in the next chapter). But the relationship with the book, now foisted upon the rhapsode, becomes possessive in nature, rather than co-creative. One of dominance and control, because in Platonic doctrine, “Friendship must reconcile the integrity of the essence and the rivalry of claimants” (4). What this

means for the rhapsode is that he must reconcile himself to, or acknowledge, a rational *idea* of the poem, a rational essence, which transcends the work of any one poet, any one poem. Ion must judge the quality of Homer's pretensions (i.e., his imitations, his thought), as they relate to higher ideals, and thereby assess *how* the Homeric verses themselves compare to, or *rival*, the other poet "claimants" of his age. So, in effect, Ion is forced—and forced "violently," I would add—to give up *old* friends, leave the stage (following the ancient chorus in this regard),<sup>69</sup> and enter into a kind of pre-arranged marriage with a more abstract "Entity." As we well know, self-same, self-evident ideals (as conceived of by Plato) never allow for the sort of co-creative, and perhaps more *friendly* (i.e., reciprocally determining, mutually intensifying), relations that might unfold, say, between allies or intimates caught within the immediacy of the encounter. Deleuze-Parnet refer to relations of this latter sort as "Nuptials without couples or conjugality" (*Dialogues* 8)—an issue that will be taken up in later chapters, as we begin to imagine more ephemeral and intensive modes of the literary critical encounter.

Still, I argue that the separation of poem from *friend*—i.e., from spectator, from critic, from the "champions" of poetry "who are not poets" (Plato, *Republic* X.607d)—and the subject-object dualism that displaces this type of pre-Socratic coupling, becomes the necessary precursor to what one might call an "eidetic" (Deleuze-Guattari, *What is?* 47) mode of criticism, and its focus on "the great Object of contemplation" (51). That is, critical efforts to identify a literary object of study—a literary organism, or, more

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<sup>69</sup> According to Friedrich Nietzsche, in *The Birth of Tragedy*, a pre-Socratic, "primordial unity" gives way to a series of binaries (or dualisms) that begin to take shape in later developments of Greek tragedy—in part owing to the shift in sensibilities associated with Socratic rationalism—including those between comedy and tragedy, just and unjust, good and bad, reward and punishment, and (interestingly enough) stage performer and chorus: in other words, the chorus—in a way that reflects Socrates' hope for Ion—is separated from the action, and thus no longer serves as an active player or participant in the drama.

precisely, a harmonious, self-same, and thus internally consistent idea (or ideal) of the poem or novel—depends, first of all, on the extraction/isolation of what Deleuze-Guattari would call the “Objectality” of the poem. The poem’s objectality derives from particular instances of art—or, in fact, from specific poetic variables lifted from the book, rendered abstract or ideal, and hence re-conceived as the knowable or recognizable substrate that informs the production (and reception) of all books, all poems. So the poem, guaranteed by its internal resemblance to other poems, can now be subjected to the tools of comparative analysis and rational inquiry. It can be known, mastered. The Eidetic era of critical contemplation grounds itself, then, in the formal recollection or reminiscence—i.e., the “total recall”—of the poem’s objectality.<sup>70</sup> Eidetic criticism, in short, is memory-based. So when the critic or spectator first encounters the poem, they encounter an objective memory of a more abstract art object (or structural form), stripped from the immediacy of its material environs, and formally positioned in an essential relation (1) to other poems; (2) to the various aesthetic and epistemological preconditions of that poetry; and (3) to the various critical, aesthetic, and socio-cultural codes that have grown up and taken shape around those poems. Situated thus, the poem’s materiality, its energies and ephemera, are collectively subordinated to a set of unimpeachable and enduring critical values that transcend art—those that filter, domesticate, and tame art. This, then, is what Deleuze means when he says that Plato’s *real* motivation is to root out the simulacrum, which, in this instance, involves rooting out the artistic dissembler. It means purging difference (anomaly, excess, divergence) from all critical orientations to poetry.

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<sup>70</sup> The “eidetic” plays a pivotal role in Plato’s metaphysics (i.e., his theory of the *Forms*), with the basic idea being that things/objects are only *recognizable* to us only because they mimic (or are pale reflections of) immutable Forms. So material objects (like a poem) repeat the *One*, the same—an idea rarely out of fashion in literary critical discourse, especially in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (e.g., in formalism and structuralism).

## *Towards a Structural Destiny*<sup>71</sup>

Structural linguists and semioticians—i.e., those who wish to isolate a unified *ideal* of language, or system of *langue* (in Saussurean linguistics), buoyed by a rationally-derived body of linguistic or grammatical constants—relate the book, as Deleuze-Guattari contend, “to exterior or transcendent ends” (*Plateaus* 22) through the dual construction of a “genetic axis” (12) and a “deep structure” or “structural destiny” (14) to the book.<sup>72</sup> Leaving aside the many semantic (and conceptual) complexities associated with these terms, I would simply say that Deleuze-Guattari mean to draw attention to their particular role as “infinitely reproducible principles of *tracing*” (13). That is, each linguistic axis—both genetic and structural—has a foundational character that can be *traced* (i.e., copied, mimetically reproduced) in any given statement or utterance. So what we have are fixed, structuralist categories; each in their own way, then, and in combination with other structural imperatives, not only limit (frame, close off) the range of potential statements a system (or book-body) can generate, but give a coherent and rational unity to language, itself, which can then be scientifically isolated. In effect, the

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<sup>71</sup> In the following passage, Greg Lambert provides a short recounting of the shift to the structuralist paradigm in literary critical discourse, which I will unpack in detail over the pages that follow: “[T]he entry of structuralist categories into the study of language and literature after the 1950s marks the beginning of a scientific function which has dominated the major movements of literary criticism from that period onward; however, the need to guarantee a constancy of the object of knowledge (which is a major trait of structuralist and narratological theories of Gérard Genette, in particular, but also Gerald Prince, Michel Riffaterre, and Robert Scholes) shares many of the same attributes of what Deleuze-Guattari describe as ‘Royal Science.’ Thus literary criticism of this type may indirectly serve to inscribe the normative value of literary expression within an apparatus of specialisation, one that also bears a political function consonant with the institutional determination of its subject” (“Uses” 140). In Part 2, I contrast the idea of criticism being a “Royal Science” with it being a “minor” or “nomad” science (Deleuze-Guattari, *Plateaus* 368).

<sup>72</sup> Somewhat cryptically, Deleuze-Guattari define the former, the *genetic axis*, as “an objective pivotal unity upon which successive stages are organized” (*Plateaus* 13), and the latter, the *deep structure*, as “more like a base sequence that can be broken down into immediate constituents, while the unity of the product [i.e., the book] passes into another, transformational and subjective, dimension.” While the more commonly known concept of a “deep structure” has many wide-ranging applications in (especially) Saussurean and Chomskian linguistics, the cognitive and information sciences, rationalist philosophy, and elsewhere, the idea of a ‘genetic axis’ would seem to relate more directly to Chomsky’s notion of a generative grammar—an issue that we will pick up on in a moment.

linguist collects data, separates the essential from the accidental (or merely contingent), and makes clear determinations about the so-called *universal* aspects of language. Brian Massumi (following Deleuze-Guattari) sees little value in such administrative pursuits, arguing that “the challenge is to conceptualize the *real conditions of production of particular* statements ([e.g.,] how does the system move from one unique permutation to the next? How is it forever becoming other than itself?)” (*User’s Guide* 43). In other words, the challenge is to shift the focus away from what a given set of linguistic or grammatical constants (i.e., a genetic axis or deep structure to language) will *allow*—vis-à-vis habitual utterances or habitual meanings/understandings. The question then turns (1) to what actually does happen in the singular “*production of particular* statements”; and, more importantly, (2) to what might happen—i.e., the question of pure potential.

One of Deleuze-Guattari’s primary targets in this matter, beyond Saussure’s systematization of language and of *sign* (i.e., sound-image) relationships, is Noam Chomsky. In particular, they target Chomsky’s transformative or generative grammar and its systematic efforts to decipher the human mind—or rather, the innate cognitive capacities of the individual, especially as those capacities directly relate to language use<sup>73</sup>—by describing how, for example, children or native speakers of a given language are able to access a set of rational heuristics in order to learn and make use of the formal (*read*: context-free) syntactic structures of their own language, and thus speak grammatically. Chomsky’s generative grammar also explains how speakers with limited linguistic or grammatical *competence* are not only able to reproduce the formal syntactic structures of a given language, but are able to modify and/or extend the extant syntactic markers of that language through the rational or cognitive application of complex

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<sup>73</sup> For Chomsky, linguistics is a branch of cognitive psychology.

transformative rules. Deleuze-Guattari, for their part, characterize Chomsky's transformative rules as an "arborescent schema" (*Plateaus* 323)—or rather, linguistic *arborescence*—and contrast their own open-ended, rhizomatic conceptions of language and the book with Chomsky's obviously closed, and highly prescriptive, grammatical method. Deleuze-Guattari argue that "[t]here are no points or positions in a rhizome, such as those found in a structure, tree, or root" (8), and that "what constitutes arborescence is the submission of the line to the point" (323). What this means is that Chomsky's arboreal model reduces the sign (or sign-becoming) to something like a fixed *sign-coordinate*, which can be readily located in, and interpreted through the lens of, an overarching "grammaticality" (148). So individual statements and utterances, individual uses of language, become predictable copies or *tracings* of a central order and fixed grammatical unity. Put another way, the speaker has access to, and makes use of, a "pre-traced destiny, whatever name is given to it—divine, anagogic, historical, economic, structural, hereditary, or syntagmatic" (13), which, in turn, *overcodes* (and hence organizes) any and all linguistic or grammatical constructions.

So speakers or language users derive the capacity to competently generate and transform specific grammatical constructions through their rational access to a "supplementary dimension" of language, which is transcendent and wholly autonomous in nature. In short, they draw upon (as previously suggested) "a root command structure," given that "all of tree logic," according to Deleuze-Guattari, "is a logic of tracing and reproduction" (*Plateaus* 12), or a logic of infinite reproduction of the same. Moreover, "all of tree logic" depends on deep structural homologies (or correspondences) unfolding



in regulated and predictable ways between the lexicon and the abstract operations of a Universal Grammar. So Deleuze-Guattari conclude the following:

In linguistics as in psychoanalysis, [the] object [of study] is an unconscious that is itself representative, crystallized into codified complexes, laid out along a genetic axis and distributed within a syntagmatic structure. Its goal [that of linguistics or psychoanalysis] is to describe a *de facto* state, to maintain balance in intersubjective relations, or to explore an unconscious that is already there from the start, lurking in the dark recesses of memory and language...[Reaching that goal] consists of tracing, on the basis of an overcoding structure or supporting axis, something that comes ready-made. The tree articulates and hierarchizes tracings; tracings are like the leaves of a tree. (12)

Chomsky's "great Object of contemplation" is a syntactic or linguistic "unconscious," which, as suggested in the passage above, is "crystallized into codified complexes, laid out along a genetic axis and distributed within a syntagmatic structure." Related objects of study for Chomsky include the underlying mental reality (or human essence) that this representative unconscious denotes in the speaker (or language user), and even the whole notion of *competence* itself—the concept that Chomsky effectively substitutes for Saussure's primary object of contemplation, *langue*.

In any case, the point I wish to emphasize is that, just like the linguist or psychoanalyst, the critic comes into full possession of his own object of contemplation by viewing the book, or its component parts, as "particular instances of a type" (Massumi, *User's Guide* 96)—or rather, particular instances of more *universal* types, either

structural, aesthetic, grammatical, generic, narratorial (or what have you)—and hence by grasping the book-body, itself, “solely from the point of view of [its] generality.” In so doing, the critic restricts the operations of the book to a set of organizational dictates, i.e., the judgment of God, which not only involves subjecting the book to certain normative (and normalizing) unities, but to the oppressive tyranny of the signifier (or signifying regime of signs), as well. Deleuze-Guattari argue, for example, that textual unity—or, at least, the *image* of such—takes shape through “the tripartite division between a field of reality (the world) and a field of representation (the book) and a field of subjectivity (the author)” (*Plateaus* 23). The book-body, then, is enclosed by these various fields, unable to escape the proliferating controls/confinements of a powerful institutional apparatus.

The discourse of literary criticism has a long history, extending as far back as antiquity, of attempting to regulate critical encounters *with* the book (e.g., poetry, drama, and eventually the novel)—the apparent goal of which was to coordinate the activities of critics, so as to mitigate the possibility that they might make entirely *subjective*, if not simplistic, misguided, unproductive, investments in the text—an issue to which we will turn in the next section. The idea of a fixed object of contemplation has hardly abated in the intervening millennia between Plato and the present—“the long history of an illusion.” Aristotle, even more than Plato (his teacher), would be the first to really give weight to this illusion of an objective essence (or objectality) to the play. That is, Aristotle would shift the critical focus away from the more extrinsic matters of morality and social responsibility as they relate to questions of literature (or literary influence)—which Plato had so carefully sought to pull into focus—and toward a systematic delineation of the material aspects of the text, that is, its generic or stylistic elements

(e.g., plot, character, diction, rhythm or meter), and the principles of literary construction. Aristotle, in short, makes those aforementioned aspects of the poem, and their formal combination within the poem itself, a true and legitimate object of study in its own right; with that, he advances the notion that the poet must be as much condemned for inadequate diction and meter, ineffective characterization, a lack of formal unity, and poor plot construction, as for immoral renderings of the Gods, and general acts of dissimulation—Plato’s bugaboos.<sup>74</sup>

By the twentieth century, (Russian) Formalism, New Criticism, the Chicago School (or New Aristotelians), Archetypal Criticism, Genre Criticism, (French) Structuralism, Structural Linguistics, and even some branches of Rhetorical Criticism, would go a long way to reviving and expanding upon the Aristotelian project. For example, archetype critic Northrop Frye writes, “We discover that the critical theory of genres is stuck precisely where Aristotle left it” (13). The Chicago School (e.g., R. S. Crane, Elder Olson, etc.), in anticipation of Frye’s landmark work in the area of genre criticism, would explore the question of generic classifications (e.g., lyric, novel, etc.), and of different types of plots (comic, tragic, etc.); they would also (at times) draw upon an Aristotelian vocabulary, as in their conception of literature—or rather, certain aspects of such—as imitative or mimetic. Of particular note, though, is the Chicago School’s critical emphasis on Aristotle’s notion of a fourfold *causality* (e.g., material, formal,

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<sup>74</sup> It should be noted, however, that Plato, in *Phaedrus*, not unlike Aristotle, draws attention to the need for artful execution in speech-making and poetry (sects. 277–78). Moreover, in *Laws*, Plato’s main character, simply named “Athenian,” rhetorically asks the following question: “may we not say that in everything imitated, whether in drawing, music, or any other art, he who is to be a competent judge must possess three things;—he must know, in the first place, of what the imitation is; secondly, he must know that it is true; and thirdly, that it has been well executed in words and melodies and rhythms?” (sec. 669a–b). In these ways, Plato maps out the requirements of the poet, and on this last point, Platonic and Aristotelian concerns converge: i.e., they both agree that poets must be educated in the tools of composition. For Plato, such knowledge is a direct outgrowth of rational inquiry and conceptual understanding.

efficient, final), and its application to questions of poetic structure, or what Crane calls the “concrete wholeness” (qtd. in Shereen 239) of the literary artefact—which points the way to the more general influence of Aristotle on literary criticism. That is, Aristotle’s own “poisoned gift” most fully reveals itself in the appeal to what Deleuze-Guattari call “the great Object of contemplation,” among so many twentieth-century critics (and/or schools of criticism)—in this case, that object is the autotelic or self-generating book—and the related analytical pursuit of *intrinsic* modes of criticism.

A widely held conceit among the New Critics, which has its roots in the work of British critic I. A. Richards, was that the poem operates as a complex, autonomous *whole*, and that it does so by organically synthesizing a set of ambiguities, ironies, or paradoxes at the level of, say, attitude, impulse, image, symbol, feeling, connotation, and so forth. So within the New Critical canon, the poem, in and of itself, offers up a coherent, moral, even therapeutic image of balance and harmony: a welcome respite, perhaps, in a time of world wars and the horrors of modernity. New Critic Cleanth Brooks would argue that the poem structures itself through “a pattern of resolved stresses...[a] pattern of resolutions and balances and harmonisations” (203), and that it need be analyzed as an internally consistent, self-contained unity: an autonomous whole. So leaving aside for the moment Richards’ own, fairly idiosyncratic psychological orientation to questions of the literary artefact, for the New Critics (e.g., Brooks, John Crowe Ransom, W. K. Wimsatt, Alan Tate), the poem becomes its own guarantee: a symbolic or linguistic monism that does not recognize literary types or genres, and that provides its own criteria—e.g., the complex linguistic handling of its multiple (read: paradoxical, ambiguous) meanings, the interdependency of its parts—for its evaluation or *close reading*.

According to Terry Eagleton, New Criticism would mark the “beginnings of the ‘reification’ of the literary work” (*Literary* 44), which means that the New Critics would, by and large, excise social dialectics from the literary critical equation, i.e., the sorts of authorial (or biographical), historical, psychological, referential information/data—the extra-literary markers—that might come to inform, and thus confuse or distort, the critic’s own close reading of the text.<sup>75</sup> In downplaying such matters, the poem *qua* poem becomes what Wimsatt calls the “verbal icon,” which, like the Bible, is not so much an indicator (or index) of some external referent, but an actualization of the word (and judgment) of God, in and of itself. So the New Critics lift (or *detrterritorialize*) the poem from the realm of worldly things—or at least from the prevailing discursive, historical, political, and/or socio-cultural contexts in which it may find itself—and re-locate (or *reterritorialize*) the poem, newly essentialized, in a “supplementary dimension” (allegedly) of the poem’s own making.<sup>76</sup> Within that idealized milieu, then, the poem reveals itself by way of its unities, its forms of order and organization. Or, put another way, the critic knows, and is able to analyze, the poem as a literary organism—i.e. a determined and self-same whole, complete with its own set of organizing principles. So the New Critic, by viewing the poem through the lens of its extracted/abstracted objectivity, owns the poem. Enslaves and incarcerates it. The book-body now becomes the stuff of obsession—of control and mastery. Is this how to make a dead writer sad? Critic as fetishist? As dominatrix? Critical practices as “automatized interpretations”

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<sup>75</sup> Many New Critics would eschew the question of *efficient* cause (or cathartic effect), as it relates to the poem, and the Platonic focus on the potentially deleterious effects of such on an unsuspecting spectator—themes that nonetheless would play a prominent role at other points in the discourse of literary criticism.

<sup>76</sup> Deleuze-Guattari’s dual concepts of *detrterritorialization-reterritorialization*, in this context, speak to the New Critical act of wresting the art object from whatever territories thought to have conditioned/informed its production—e.g., its social, political, discursive, authorial, etc. groundings (or territorializations)—and re-inscribing (or re-territorializing) the book body on to new capital markets, thus exposing it to new forms of exploitation and control, new ownership.

(Baldick 116) and classroom orthodoxies? The book as self-contained, self-sufficient organism: its own body of knowledge, its own judgment of God?

But the New Critics would only mark the beginning of this descent into what I would deem criticism's psychosexual affair with the book-body, and the book's related plunge into its own acts of self-flagellation. That is, the pursuit of the *great object of contemplation* would arguably reach its apogee in the twentieth century in the work of both the (Russian) Formalists and (French) Structuralists, where the object of study becomes something so abstract that it transcends not only authorial intention and its own politico-discursive situation (claims already on the table with the New Critics), but even the book, itself. In other words, a commonly held conceit among many Formalists and Structuralists is that the book becomes a material record of (especially) the various linguistically-derived rules that govern its organization and constrain its development. The book combines and juxtaposes a variety of semiotic resources that pre-exist and, to a large extent, predict the material form that the book will take.<sup>77</sup> So these formal, meaning-making resources now become the object of study, in part because of their capacity to inform how audiences will read, and thus orient themselves to, the book—which incidentally points the way to the second of the three critical trajectories dealt with in this chapter, the *subject of reflection*. But staying with our current focus, the object of contemplation in these schools is typically viewed through the lens of, and reduced to, the extant categorical distinctions of the linguist. So eschewing any direct concern for, or

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<sup>77</sup> Though to be fair, certain branches of structuralism would be quick to point out that the text in fact transgresses its structural elements (i.e., its social context), meaning that the text transgresses the inscribed (prescribed, presupposed) limitations imposed on it by various social/literary structures, codes, genres, registers, etc. and thereby re-makes those things in the process. Barthes' *S/Z* is a case in point.

contact with, the book-body itself, the focus now turns to any or all of the following (typically linguistic) abstractions:

- (1) the self-regulating, internally-generated system of differential relations that situate signs and render them intelligible—i.e., Saussure's *langue*;
- (2) the unconscious rules of association or combination that govern the synchronic (or systematic) structure/organization of words (or better, signs), as instantiated in concrete speech acts;
- (3) the minimal units of signification (semes, memes, lexemes, mythemes, narremes), which correspond in meaning to what the phoneme means in linguistics: when meaningfully combined these units enable various relations (syntactic, semantic, socio-cultural, familial, narratorial);<sup>78</sup>
- (4) the operations of various binary oppositions (signifier/signified; syntagmatic/paradigmatic; synchronic/diachronic) in the text/narrative;
- (5) the question of surface structure as opposed to that of deep structure;
- (6) the action/operation of various narrative or literary codes;
- (7) the formulation of various narratorial or genre-based typologies;
- (8) the influence of various structural ideologies, socially, textually, or what have you.<sup>79</sup>

There are a number of key figures who would pursue these sorts of agendas in their work, including, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Roman Jakobson, Vladimir Propp, Roland Barthes, Gérard Genette, and Jonathan Culler. Jakobson, for example, would argue that

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<sup>78</sup> In terms of narrative, Barthes calls this “functional syntax” (“Introduction” 269), or, the grammar of narrative, which isolates the rules for combining basic narratorial units “along the narrative syntagm.”

<sup>79</sup> On this, Roland Barthes is again a pivotal figure; also, Mikhail Bakhtin and his idea that “form-shaping ideology” (Morson and Emerson 283)—e.g., of the novel, the lyric, genre—becomes the object of inquiry.

“Poetics deals primarily with the question, ‘What makes a verbal message a work of art?’” (1258)—and by asking such a question, he would locate poetics under the wider purview of linguistics, and would duly subordinate conceptions/analyses of the poem to “the problems of verbal structure” or, more precisely, to the operative dynamics of, on the one hand, synchronics and diachronics, and, on the other hand, metaphoric selection and metonymic combination. Throughout his work, Jakobson variously conceived of the object of study as the “poetic function” (or rather, “poeticalness,” the “grammar of poetry”), also “defamiliarization”<sup>80</sup> and what he called “literariness.”<sup>81</sup> By way of these terms/concepts, Jakobson would place the critical focus squarely on the formal, autotelic devices of the poem (e.g., rhyme, imagery, character)—devices that yield poetic effect and bring formal unity to the poem: in other words, for Jakobson, the poem’s form *is* its content, and his general focus on linguistic universals would be widely influential in many formalist and structuralist conceptions of literature. Meanwhile, Russian Folklorist Vladimir Propp’s object of study, the *narreme*—i.e., minimal narratorial units (generic characters, action types), predictably arranged/ordered—would form the basis of his 31-part typology of narrative structures. Gérard Genette would offer an even more systematic (or schematic) rendering of a kind of narratorial syntax—e.g., tense, mood, voice; and the numerous sub-categories (and sub-sub-categories) that derive from those primary fields (i.e., order, frequency, duration; perspective or focalization, narrative voice; the act/effect of narration, and so forth). Genette would tie these narrative invariants, and their rule-bound combination, to the genetic or structural axes of the book.

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<sup>80</sup> Which basically highlights poetry’s capacity to deviate from, or *make strange*, normal uses of language.

<sup>81</sup> Roman Jakobson, in 1919, claimed that “the object of literary science is not literature but *literariness*, that is, what makes a given work a literary work” (qtd. in Todorov70).



Common, in fact, among many structuralisms, beginning with Frye's archetypal criticism, was the focus on the underlying codes, unconscious structures, integrated sign systems, and organizing principles (i.e., the rules of combination and juxtaposition in language use and storytelling) that collectively overcode (read: unify, centralize, finalize) the book. Roland Barthes, who, early in his career, sought to generate a structural analysis of narrative, pursued the goal (like so many others) of a science of literature. Following the lead, then, of structural anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss—and the latter's focus on the universal (i.e., recurring, "quasi-objective"<sup>82</sup>) structures of myth, and again the cognitive rules (e.g., binary oppositions) governing the meaningful combination of mythological invariants (or *mythemes*), Barthes would similarly define the object of study as the wider cultural semiotic or system of meaning (e.g., fashion, sport) that renders texts (and actions) meaningful—though, as we will see, Barthes would break with this early emphasis in important ways. Finally, critic Jonathan Culler, also in an early phase of his criticism, would posit the idea of "literary competence" (owing, in large part, to Chomsky's influence on his way of thinking) as the object of study in an effort to delineate the rules and conventions that make meaning (or rather, interpretation) possible, but here again the mole of the transcendent begins to shift from the *object* of contemplation to the *subject* of reflection—a point to which we will return below.

So the common link between these various twentieth-century currents of literary criticism—and their nineteenth-century progenitors in aestheticism, mounting the widespread cry of "art for art's sake"—was the effort to contain and control the book, to wrest it of its power to act in ways independent of the organizing principles that bring

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<sup>82</sup> In discussing Lévi-Strauss' work, Terry Eagleton claims that "Myths have a quasi-objective collective existence, unfold their own 'concrete logic' with supreme disregard for the vagaries of individual thought, and reduce any particular consciousness to a mere function of themselves" (*Literary* 104).

order to the book. These criticisms would collectively subordinate the book to a set of critical values (linguistic, narratorial, semiotic, structural, generic, registerial, discursive), and hence to the sorts of organizational schema and prescriptive models consistent with criticism becoming, as Northrop Frye had hoped, “a structure of thought and knowledge existing in its own right” (5). So an evolving “apparatus of specialization” (Lambert, “Uses” 140) would set the basic terms of critical engagement with the book; it would create the codes (or better, the passwords) for return visits to the book, and duly pervert the latter (1) by the extraction of a plane of transcendence (or, judgment of God) from its material undercurrents; (2) by the strictures of internal resemblance; and (3) by its “signifying power takeovers” (Deleuze-Guattari, *Plateaus* 13). The book, then, devolves into what Deleuze-Guattari call the “image-book” (22)—i.e., that which imposes structure *on* the world, “a set of points and positions” (21), and hence an enduring set of representational images and semiotic coordinates that serve a powerful State apparatus.

### ***Second Trajectory: Universals of Reflection***

In this second mode of stratigraphic criticism, the mole of the transcendent now shifts from the *object* of contemplation to the *subject* of reflection (i.e., the subject as represented to itself). Deleuze-Guattari argue that Kant, by way of the critical subject, “discovers the modern way of saving transcendence” (*What is?* 46), but also add that “no one needs philosophy to reflect on anything” (6); no one needs (or waits for) philosophers to reflect on—and hence pass judgment on, analyze, assess—for example, art, music, math, or what have you. In a similar light, writers—e.g., novelists, poets—neither require, nor wait for, the literary theorist to reflect upon either their work or the affections their work generates in the mind of the critical subject. Nevertheless, in this paradigm,

the subject is thought to bring a conventional *unity* (e.g., structural, linguistic, historical, narratorial, discursive, etc.) to the book-body (1) through the despotic powers associated with “the signifying regime of the sign” (Deleuze-Guattari, *Plateaus* 124);<sup>83</sup> or (2) through the critical *response*—i.e., aesthetic judgment—that art provokes in the sensual faculties of the reader. Whatever the case, the order and organization of the book are now guaranteed by various *subjective*—read: cognitive, analytical, semiotic, hermeneutic, axiological (i.e., values-based), “readerly/writerly”<sup>84</sup>—layerings (or striations) of the literary organism, or through what Deleuze-Guattari otherwise refer to as “the art of reflection” (*What is?* 6).

In *Criticism in the Wilderness*, Geoffrey Hartman writes that “fiction imposes on us, by a subtle or blatant seduction. We are always surprised or running to catch up or wishing to be more fully in its coils” (22). And so, as Hartman goes on to claim,

Literary commentary is comparable to the detective novel: confronted by a bewildering text, it acts out a solution, trying various defences, various interpretations, then pretending it has come to an authoritative stance—when, in truth, it has simply purged itself of complexities never fully mastered. Seduction, then, in fiction or life seems to contain the promise

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<sup>83</sup> The introduction to this dissertation discusses the “signifying” *regime of the signs*, in particular. We recall that in signifying regimes, signs emanate from the critic-despot or critic-bureaucrat, and spiral outwards in endless cycles of signifier production (*signifiance*) and continuous interpretation (*interpretosis*). But it is important to note that, for Deleuze-Guattari, there are—at minimum—four ideal sign regimes (e.g., pre-signifying, signifying, post-signifying, and counter-signifying), which mix together in any society, system, or State at any given time. Collectively, though, they are all forms (or formalizations) of expression, and they all operate “as determining and selective agents... in the constitution of languages” (*Plateaus* 70).

<sup>84</sup> Roland Barthes, in *S/Z*, uses these terms to index the different *types* of investment a reader makes in a text. So while the “readerly” text largely restricts reader involvement to the passive consumption of a set of fixed textual coordinates, the writerly text demands more active or productive investments by the reader. However, one should recall that for Barthes the reading subject emerges at the nexus of various codes.

of mastery or, paradoxically, of joining oneself to an overwhelming intent even at the cost of being subdued.

From a Deleuzo-Guattarian perspective, this textual *seduction*—or what Socrates, in *Republic*, calls “the natural charm of poetry” (X.601b)—results in the book, itself, and *not* the otherwise unsuspecting audience (contra Socrates-Plato), falling prey to the gravitational forces of a critical “black hole,”<sup>85</sup> that is, a set of significations, circularities, interiorities, and interpretative traps that admit no light, no escape. In fact, the formation of this *black hole* owes much to the capacity of the critical subject—i.e., the subject of reflection—to purge difference and variation from critical conceptions of the book, and from literary critical practices, in general.

Michel Foucault writes that, in “transcendent terms,” the so-called *task of the critic* conforms to “the religious principle of the hidden meaning (which requires interpretation) and the critical principle of implicit significations, silent determinations, and obscured contents (which give rise to commentary)” (“Author?” 380). Governed by these principles, the critic-hermeneut will likely reduce critical practices, themselves, to a set of necessary confrontations, even aggressions—those between author and critic, literature and criticism, literary language and the language of critical commentary, problems and solutions, subjects and objects. These dualisms are then doubled by a dialectical agenda of division and selection (following Plato) that unfolds among literary

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<sup>85</sup> In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze-Guattari repeatedly return to the image of what they call “the black hole of subjectivity” (186). They contend, for example, that “Subjectification is never without a black hole in which it lodges its consciousness, passion, and redundancies,” and add that “One can form a web of subjectivities only if one possesses a central eye, a black hole *capturing everything* that would exceed or transform either the assigned affects or dominant significations” (199; my emphasis). Incidentally, though, in a nod to Anglo-American literature, Deleuze-Guattari commend authors such as Hardy, Melville, Lawrence, and Henry Miller for “[knowing] how difficult it is to get out of the black hole of subjectivity, of consciousness and memory” (207). For “[how] tempting it is,” they argue, “to let yourself get caught, to lull yourself into it, to latch back onto a *face*” (i.e., a set of enduring significations).

scholars on the academic stage, in the enduring struggle to secure institutional stake. James Joyce, in his renowned (perhaps apocryphal?) skewering of the critical profession, anticipates the role that this particular triumph of the judgment of God would play in relation to his own work. When asked to schematize *Ulysses*, Joyce is said to have remarked, “I have put in so many enigmas and puzzles that it will keep professors busy for centuries arguing over what I meant, and that’s the only way of ensuring one’s immortality” (qtd. in Ellmann 521). So, in other words, Joyce (if we are to trust Ellmann’s recounting of the matter) assumes his immortality as a writer depends on the capacity of the book to fend off those who would wish to *re-present* it—i.e., reduce the book to what it signifies, denotes, alludes to, allegorizes, or symbolizes. But equal to the task, professors, like big-game hunters, will track signifiers, hunt down significations, *capture* the machinic flows of the book, and so forth—all in an effort to tame or conquer their prey through practices that wrest the book of its material substrate: i.e., its intensities, its becomings (or untapped potentials), its power to act, etc.

Maurice Blanchot, who, perhaps more than most, would challenge the legitimacy of such stultifying critical preoccupations, writes,

What an abundance of explication and a frenzy of interpretation; what exegetical fury, be it theological, philosophical, sociological, political, or autobiographical; how many forms of analysis, allegorical, symbolic, structural, and even (anything can happen) literal! And so many keys: each employable by the one who forged it, each opening one door only to close others. Where does this delirium come from? Why is reading never

satisfied with what it reads, incessantly substituting for it another text,  
which in turn provokes another? (*Infinite* 391)

The simple answer may be that literary critics have long been inspired (even flattered) by the Platonic/Arnoldian assignment of selective and distributive powers, which has duly compelled the critical community to link their interpretative prowess, their subjective investments, their projection of a “*face*” on to the book, as Deleuze-Guattari say, to a kind of social and moral responsibility. In other words, by maintaining a *disinterested* critical demeanour, by fending off the natural charms of the book (contra the rhapsode), by coordinating the activities of the critic, by convening the *specialist’s tribunal*, and, as Blanchot says, by subjecting the book to “an abundance of...exegetical fury,” critics would both define their role and defend their worth on the academic stage.

### ***Authorizing the Subject of Reflection***

Matthew Arnold would be the first modern critic to legitimize literature as an *object of study* in its own right, and his efforts in that regard would open the door to the institutionalization of the literary critical enterprise in the twentieth century. Arnold would declare that poetry, as a kind of cultural and intellectual *touchstone*, and as a displaced form of religion, has a vital role to play in the stability of the state. But of note here is the equally vital role that literary critics would come to play in what Arnold famously calls the “*disinterested endeavour to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world*” (824). In other words, Arnold links the growing prominence of literature on the public stage to the ascension of those who would “propagate the best that is known and thought,” or—as he would later add in what begins to read like a *sermon*—

those who would save us from our fate to “die in the wilderness” by delivering up “the promised land” (825)—this time, in the form of the righteous literary artefact. He writes,

Judging is often spoke of as the critic’s one business, and so in some sense it is; but the judgment which almost insensibly forms itself in a fair and clear mind, along with fresh knowledge, is the valuable one; and thus knowledge, and ever fresh knowledge, must be the critic’s great concern for himself. And it is by communicating fresh knowledge...that the critic will generally do most good to [*sic*] his readers. Sometimes, no doubt, for the sake of establishing an author’s place in literature, and his relation to a central standard. (824)

With this, Arnold assigns a moral, if not quasi-religious, agenda to the literary critic—one that depends on the critic being of both “fair and clear mind” to determine “the best that is known and thought.” The competent critic will then disseminate that knowledge to a world gone astray and urgently in need of *good news*.

However, given the resilience of Platonism in literary critical discourse, critics have long feared the charge of relativism in their encounters with the book, and so have struggled with the possibility that critical judgment (or the critic’s *own* judgment) might be mired in what Terry Eagleton blithely refers to as “aestheticist chit-chat” (*Literary* 44), that is, a kind of critical sophistry—recall Deleuze’s comment that “what Plato criticizes in the Athenian democracy is the fact that anyone can lay claim to anything” (*Essays* 137). So for critic-arbiters to ultimately succeed with their Arnoldian agenda intact, they would first need fresh schooling in the proper procedures of selection and division. That schooling would, in turn, spawn the critic-as-sage motif (i.e., literary criticism’s answer

to the philosopher-king), whereby the book's meaning, interpretation, and value is left to the privileged insights of a select few—i.e., those who are more morally responsible and critically astute than the average reader or, say, literary enthusiast (like Ion). Nowhere historically is this motif more fully evident than in Alexander Pope's efforts to fashion the elite critical mind in his neo-classical tour de force, *An Essay on Criticism*. Therein, Pope makes the case that the critic ought to be a man of judgment (ll. 12–20, 233–4, 657–8); of learning (ll. 15–29); of taste and good breeding (ll. 572–7, 635); of good and common sense (ll. 25, 28);<sup>86</sup> of wit (ll. 36–40, 298–9); of high moral standards (ll. 152–5, 560–3) and reasoned moderation (ll. 48–9, 201–4), and thus in no way vulnerable to the excessive, rhapsodic flourishes of what he calls “half-learn'd Witlings” (l. 40)—i.e., those powerless to formulate sound critical judgments.<sup>87</sup>

The timeless assault on those *half-learn'd Witlings* would arguably reach its apogee in the modern era of literary critical discourse. Of particular note here is I. A. Richards' attack on so-called “defective scholarship” (185) in his book *Practical Criticism*, wherein one of Richards' primary aims is “to provide a new technique for those who wish to discover for themselves what they think and feel about poetry... and why they should like or dislike it” (3). In general, Richards sought to delineate, in systematic fashion, both the causes of failed critical analyses and the assorted impediments to what he would characterize as *sound* critical judgment. His overall objectives in this regard would include (1) reforming critical procedures, (2) refining

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<sup>86</sup> For Deleuze, in *Difference and Repetition*, good sense and common sense are the “two essential functions” (33) that drive judgment and guarantee the subject of reflection: through common sense, we create correspondences and coordinate things; through good sense, we sets priorities, forge hierarchies.

<sup>87</sup> I would argue that literary criticism—regardless of its perhaps countless renderings of the critical task—has never strayed far from the realm of elites, nor from Pope's conception of the critic as a man of taste and discerning judgment. This is no more true than in the twentieth century, where strict disciplinary boundaries come to the fore, just as critics begin to find a cushy, institutional home in the academy.



techniques of discussion, and (3) quelling so-called “erratic opinions” (292). But his more tacit purpose was to coordinate, if not regulate, critical encounters with the book, itself. To that end, Richards sought to present a unified (and ultimately integrated) conception of *how* the critical subject ought to interpret or make sense of the literary artefact.

In line, then, with Richards’ various intuitions on these matters—and those of most *all* the New Critics who would follow—many mid-century currents in literary critical discourse (e.g., Formalism, Structuralism), despite their differences with the New Critics, would similarly pursue the goal of coordinating the activities of the critical subject, again in their flight from the charge of relativism. Northrop Frye, for example, would contend that literary value should not be derived from the subjective musings of the critic (no matter how refined that individual may be), and so posed a schematic—i.e., scientivizing, though *not* scientific<sup>88</sup>—orientation to the book. Hence Frye (following Matthew Arnold in this regard) would criticize those who would seek “to bring the direct experience of literature into the structure of criticism” (28), and would link the problem of *direct experience* to the vagaries of “private memories, associations, and arbitrary prejudices”—all of which upset the fixed, aesthetic coordinates of the book, if not the methodological legitimacy of literary criticism itself. So what Frye labelled the problem of *direct experience*, New Critic Cleanth Brooks would term “the heresy of the paraphrase,”<sup>89</sup> and W. K. Wimsatt the “affective fallacy” (21). That is, Wimsatt (really,

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<sup>88</sup> Frye, T. S. Eliot, the Russian Formalists, and most all the New Critics, would hold to the basic proposition that critics need to be both objective and rigorous in their analysis of, and orientation to, their primary object of study. But they would also believe that literature offers a special kind of knowledge, unrecognizable to the sciences, proper. So many twentieth-century critics would paradoxically seek to legitimize their quasi-scientific practices—Frye, for example, would write, “There is a place for classification in criticism. . . [and] schematization in poetics” (29)—while at the same time differentiating themselves from the positivist.

<sup>89</sup> Brooks raises this problematic in his book, *The Well Wrought Urn*. By “the heresy of the paraphrase,” Brooks means to highlight the limits of the reader’s impressionistic representation of the poem, given that it

Wimsatt and collaborator M. C. Beardsley) would claim that the analysis of the structured internalities of the book (i.e., its paradoxes, ambiguities) mitigates the relativist threat posed by a critical apparatus mistakenly concerned with the *effect* of that work on, and/or interpretative proclivities of, the critic or reader.

In any case, most mid-century literary critics would be staunchly anti-humanist in their critical orientation to the book—there may be some question as to whether or not the New Critics themselves were anti-humanist; clearly, in some respects they were—and would thereby decisively fend off charges of the sorts of relativism (or subjectivism) that many, including the New Critics, believed threatened to derail the literary critical enterprise as it sought to secure its institutional home. Securing that home, though, and the related institutional privilege accorded the critic, would not only involve fixing the object of study, and unifying the efforts of the critical community, but also displacing the authorial subject (the *role* of the author), as well. Roland Barthes would argue, in a well-known essay, that “the birth of the reader must be at the cost of *the death of the author*” (“Death” 148; my emphasis)—a death that even by the time of Barthes’ essay may have long been foretold. That is, Nietzsche, in *The Birth of Tragedy*, would be (one of) the first to entertain the idea that because the Dionysian artist ends up “silencing” all vestiges of “the individual will and desire” (48), “everything subjective vanishes into complete self-forgetfulness” (36); in other words, the artist shatters the illusion of individuation and ultimately triumphs over subjectivity. But in a subsequent perversion of Nietzschean ethics, many Formalists, New Critics, and Structuralists, in their collective efforts to undermine the (largely unavailable) intentions, meanings, or values of the author, and

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organizes itself as an aesthetic complex of interrelating parts that have no need for supplementary paraphrases to render it meaningful.

further isolate their object of study, would either tacitly or openly sanction the idea of what Wimsatt-Beardsley call the *intentional fallacy* (3).<sup>90</sup> Still the author—despite the New Critical assault—would still have some life.

Arguably, thought, the silver bullet in this context would be Michel Foucault's seminal statement, "What is an Author?" Therein, Foucault challenges a number of extant propositions concerning the author-function in the text, among them the idea that

the author provides the basis for explaining not only the presence of certain events in a work, but also their transformations, distortions, and diverse modifications (through his biography, the determination of his individual perspective, the analysis of his social position, and the revelation of his basic design). The author is also the principle of a certain unity of writing—all differences having to be resolved, at least in part, by the principles of evolution, maturation, or influence. The author also serves to neutralize the contradictions that may emerge in a series of texts: there must be—at a certain level of his thought or desire, of his consciousness or unconscious—a point where contradictions are resolved, where incompatible elements are at last tied together or organized around a fundamental or originating contradiction. Finally, the author is a particular source of expression that, in more or less completed forms, is manifested equally well, and with similar validity, in works, sketches, letters, fragments, and so on. (384)

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<sup>90</sup> Despite the distinction Wimsatt-Beardsley pose, "The outcome of either Fallacy, the Intentional or the Affective, is that the poem itself, as an object of specifically critical judgment, tends to disappear" (21).

Deleuze reminds us in his book on Foucault (published shortly after the latter's death) that Foucault, throughout his work, "continually submits interiority to a radical critique" (*Foucault* 80). In terms of the book, an enduring source of that interiority would, of course, be the author-function (and the related critical appeal to the author's *perspective*), which restricts the book from escaping the intentions of its author. We recall that for Deleuze-Guattari, "[a] book exists only through the outside and on the outside" (*Plateaus* 4); moreover, the sort of reading for which Deleuze himself advocates (in his letter to Cressole) "relates a book directly to what's Outside," so as to affirm that book's variable status as "a little cog in much more complicated external machinery." Similarly, we need recognize that Foucault's arguments in this context serve to open the book to its outside, or rather, its own becomings, by releasing such from the confines of the author-function.

But displacing the author as the singular source of creative expression and textual unity would have the paradoxical effect—at least among certain critics—of not so much opening the book to its *outside* (which is what Foucault and Deleuze want), but of re-asserting the privilege of the *inside* (which is precisely what they do not want). That is, Foucault himself would anticipate just such a move in his claim that the "[*subject of*] reflection," if left to its own devices, "tends irresistibly to repatriate" the outside (or the experience of such) "to the side of consciousness...the form of an imagined outside" ("Thought" 427). Which is to say, Foucault acknowledges that the so-called *death of the author* would likely shift any accountability for the unity, structure, meaning, aesthetic organization—in short, the stratification—of the literary organism to a perceiving subject. So with the author finally out of the picture, the stage would be set for the emergence of the *critical* subject of reflection, and for yet another "triumph of the judgment of God."

## *The Critical Subject*

The “subject of reflection”—at least in the way Deleuze-Guattari understand this (largely) Kantian figure in their mapping of the “triple illusion” of transcendence—judges its sensual experience of art (or nature) beautiful in and through the unconscious conceptual structures and organizing principles of the mind, which then give rise to all possible experience. For Kant, in *Critique of Judgment*, art is no longer objectively guaranteed, but rather subjectively deduced (as a judgment of beauty) through the novel representation of that object in the mind of the perceiving subject; which is to say, the subject of reflection judges as pleasing the *form* of the representation itself. So aesthetic judgment does not, in fact, depend upon there being an object (either real or imagined) separate from the mind (or observing subject) that then gives rise to the judgment of beauty. Think, for example, of the individual who takes pleasure in the experience of, say, a glacier, an alpine meadow, or a Jackson Pollack. For Kant, such experiences, if sufficiently intense, trigger the free-play of the imagination, the emotions, the understanding (§20), with the point being that unhinged, unregulated perceptions of this sort are inherently pleasing to the subject of reflection.<sup>91</sup>

So Kant essentially concerns himself with what goes on in the various faculties of the perceiving subject when caught in the throes of aesthetic judgment. He wants to get at the immediacy of the unprovoked, or even *involuntary*, judgment of beauty. I use the word “involuntary” in this instance because aesthetic judgment, in Kant’s philosophy, operates *disinterestedly*, i.e., without self-interest, without foreknowledge, expectation, or culturally-conditioned values (such as taste) informing that judgment (§12). Kant claims

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<sup>91</sup> My thanks to Bruce Baugh for assisting me with this formulation of Kant’s theory of aesthetic judgment.

that the subject of reflection intuits what he calls the “purposiveness”<sup>92</sup> of the objects of experience, which is to say that the subject intuits something *like* a purpose, something that seems to have greater import, but that cannot be objectively known as purposeful.

Wordsworth captures just such a feeling in the following lines from “Tintern Abbey”:

And I have felt  
A presence that disturbs me with the joy  
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime  
Of something far more deeply interfused. (ll. 93–6)

Wordsworth’s narrator, at this point, goes on to describe what he senses or intuits as

A motion and a spirit, that impels  
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,  
And rolls through all things. (ll. 100–2)

This is the subject reflecting on itself, on its own experiences. Similarly, in the Kantian schematic, our experience of *things* (in art or nature) unfold in and through the sensual faculties of the perceiving subject. In fact, this form of cognition operates without, or in the absence of, a corresponding concept (i.e., the *cognized*) (§21), and without an external or self-same object of contemplation to guarantee that cognition—as was the case with Plato. Instead it falls upon the critical subject to bring internal resemblance to the aesthetic body—i.e., a supposed consistency across its multiple variations. Nevertheless, the book is once again identified (recognized, classified, categorized) by the enduring judgment of God, only now that judgment is grounded in the critical subject, and in that subject’s own *reflection* on the unregulated play of its senses. So in Descartes, and later

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<sup>92</sup> Strictly speaking, Kant defines this concept of *purposiveness* as the intuition or sensation of something “without purpose” (§15); because that something is inherently satisfying, or because it provokes the free-play of the mind and imagination, it invokes the feeling of something *like* a purpose.

Kant, the critical subject evolves as a direct correlate to the “I think,”<sup>93</sup> which guarantees the subject’s conceptual explanation of its experience, and the synthetic or analytic unities that the subject extracts from its experience. The net effect here—as with all arms of the “triple illusion” of transcendence—is the basic denial of difference: that is, a basic denial of the impersonal forces that insist upon the mind, or upon states of affairs (both physical and psychological). Put simply, the critical subject pays little attention to what exceeds the various cognitive or sensory inputs she reflects upon, and ignores the related idea that a given art object, like the book, operates—as Deleuze insists—as “a little cog in much more complicated external machinery.”

In any case, questions concerning the productive role (or what one might call the critical *performance*) of the critic/reader, and also the processes of cognition that inform literary interpretation, have long been an object of scrutiny in the discourse of literary criticism—e.g., in the phenomenological criticism of Roman Ingarden, the structuralism of Jonathan Culler, and the semiotics of Umberto Eco; but this has especially been the case among American Reader-Response critics (e.g., Stanley Fish, David Bleich, Norman Holland), and among their European counterparts in Reception Theory (e.g., Wolfgang Iser, Hans Robert Jauss). For theorists in these fields, the reader becomes (to varying degrees) an active participant in both the meaning-making processes and aesthetic unity of the text—a role, I might add, that requires a certain amount of critical *competence* on the part of the reader. That is, following Chomsky’s notion that users of any given language have a tacit mastery of a universal grammar (e.g., the ability to make sense of

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<sup>93</sup> In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze writes, “The ‘I think’ is the most general principle of representation” (138). That principle expresses itself in and through mental/cognitive acts of identification, recollection, judgment, and perception. Or, put another way, that principle is expressed in and through a critical subject that generates comparisons, analogies, and internal resemblances between bodies.

novel utterances, to recognize mistakes in the ways sentences are syntactically produced or combined), Jonathan Culler posits the related notion of “literary competence,” arguing that capable readers have an implied mastery over the generic conventions and structural rules that govern literature. Culler links competency in this context to an “implicit knowledge” (136) of “a set of conventions for reading literary texts” (137). He argues, on the one hand, that “conventions of poetry, the logic of symbols, [and] the operations for the production of poetic effects, are not simply the property of readers but the basis of literary forms” (136)—a classic structuralist position—but, on the other hand, “it is easier to study [those forms] as the operations performed by readers.”<sup>94</sup> Similarly, for Umberto Eco, the reader must acquire a type of cultural competence—a competence in part determined by textual exigencies—in order to complete the meaning of the text (as open system). Similarly, Wolfgang Iser (following phenomenologist Roman Ingarden) posits a kind of critical competency through the notion of an “implied reader”—i.e., the sort of reader a text actively requires in order to productively “concretize” (i.e., give shape to) its various indeterminacies, so as to enable the text to realize or achieve its full intentions.<sup>95</sup>

However, a number of American reader-response critics have seemed more determined than their European counterparts to shift the focus away from the book, as an object of contemplation, in order to advance the idea that *readers*—not texts—produce meaning and value. For example, David Bleich puts forward the concept of a “subjective criticism,” arguing that readers complete the meaning of the text; they elucidate it, bring

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<sup>94</sup> Culler adds, “poetics is a theory of reading” (149), and so “literary competence” involves being able “to restate propositions about poetic or novelistic discourse as procedures of reading.”

<sup>95</sup> Though to be accurate, the aesthetic object, even among phenomenologists like Iser and Ingarden, unfolds at a point of convergence between reader and text, through acts of cognition within the reader. So the reading itself becomes a *structured act* in this paradigm, in that the text has some *say* (or role to play) in how the reader makes meaningful the text. So the subject is neither purely autonomous, nor wholly reflective, in critical phenomenology and reception theory.



it into the full light of being, through their own subjective, associative, axiological, and psychological investments. Similarly, Norman Holland (Bleich's teacher) would pursue a form of psychological criticism that analyzes the emotional and/or subjective dynamics of literary response—an analysis that, at points, goes so far as to *oedipalize* the reader's engagement with the text. Critic Stanley Fish also assigns a productive role to readers—i.e., to those who actively shape texts and generate meanings; however, Fish grounds readers in pre-existing interpretative communities (e.g., legal, political, academic, etc.)—communities that inform or condition their discursive investments in the text. So, for Fish, readers (and their readings) are ultimately regulated by what Deleuze-Guattari call the “universals of communication”—an issue to which we will turn in the next section.

So, to sum up, in some formulations (e.g., Jauss, Ingarden), the critical subject is thought to play an active role not only in the historico-discursive processes of interpretation and value assessment, but in creative transformations of the literary artefact as well; for others, the reader tends to be viewed as a textual strategy (Iser), or structural effect (Barthes), located at the nexus of various literary, linguistic, and cultural codes; for still others, the competent reader is responsible for bringing a meaningful organization to the book through acts of structural encoding (Culler). On the whole, though, critics beholden to this paradigm draw attention to the *work* of the reader (or of the reading) in one or more of the following ways: (1) by bracketing the book's objective reality, so as to make room for the critic's own cognitive investments in the sensual and/or rational object of its experience; (2) by tying the book to a critical cogito, a constitutive “I think”; (3) by linking the interpretations of the reader (or critical subject) to extant signifying regimes, where everything is accounted for, everything means; and (4) by organizing (or bringing

some degree of order to) the text, itself, through readerly codes located within the text. Overall, then, the critical subject of reflection will tend to embody certain values, beliefs, assumptions about the book, and even the non-book (i.e., extra-literary values), and to that extent renews Plato's "poisoned gift." However the enduring legacy of Kantian subjectivity may *not* be strictly confined to, for example, the theoretical models put forward by reception theorists or reader-response critics. Certainly, the subject has an essential role to play in these critical contexts—that which unfolds in relation to the text, its history of reception, or the communities that *decide* (consensually, intersubjectively) upon the criteria of evaluation applied to the text. But my point here is that the Kantian subject (understood, generally, as the subject in control of itself, reflecting on its own modes of interpretation) most likely finds its modern correlate in the institutional critic, and the structures of authority that not only guarantee this figure, but that promote coordinated critical activities and unified, pan-critical assessments in and across the wider critical community. In other words, the subject of reflection makes essential contributions to both the institutionalization and progress of critical discourse in the 20th century.

### ***Third Trajectory: Universals of Communication***

Communication...only works under the sway of opinions in order to create 'consensus'.

—Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (*What is Philosophy?*, 6)

In *What is Philosophy?*, Deleuze-Guattari express contempt for the idea that communicational paradigms in philosophy, and their predictable store of conversational constants—i.e., the socio-political concerns (e.g., freedom, culture, civil society, human rights, democratic institutions, political representation, etc.) that *we* (e.g., philosophers, critics, politicians, citizens) tend to talk about or debate in the academy, or on the public

stage—could ever be an adequate substitute for, or structured form of, philosophical activity.<sup>96</sup> They argue that paradigms of this sort effectively subordinate philosophy

- (1) to the rhetorical activities of conversation and consensus-building;
- (2) to the furtherance of communal rivalries—i.e., rival claims to the truth;
- (3) to the dialectical pursuit, and ultimately mutual recognition, of some sort of triumphant, majority opinion (*doxa*); and
- (4) to the idealization of both “common sense” and “good sense.”<sup>97</sup>

In short, this is philosophy in the *business*—literally: the marketing, the promotion, the buying and selling<sup>98</sup>—of generic subjectivities, or what Deleuze-Guattari otherwise call “intersubjective idealism” (*What is?* 7). This is philosophy that succumbs to the dogma of mutual affections, shared knowledge, shared values, and the liberal-democratic hope of *friendly* disputation—i.e., “pleasant or aggressive dinner conversations at Mr. Rorty’s” (144), where “rival opinions at the dinner table” become “the object of a struggle.”

To be clear, the problem is not that philosophy concerns itself with the question of communication, or that human beings, for their part, do not *communicate* (or, for that

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<sup>96</sup> Outside philosophy, communicational paradigms have found an institutional home in social and political theory, discourse analysis, psychology, cultural criticism, etc. Reader Response critics have made important contributions to this debate. For example, Stanley Fish, in an effort to account for “the stability of interpretation (at least among certain groups at certain times)” (171), points to the interpretative conventions of specific discourse communities. Those “who share interpretive strategies...[which] exist prior to the act of reading” (14), he argues, “will necessarily agree because they will see (and by seeing, make) everything in relation to that communities’ assumed purposes and goals” (15).

<sup>97</sup> In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze argues that the dual orthodoxies of *common sense* and *good sense* “constitute the two halves of the *doxa*” (169–70)—i.e., the so-called “image of thought” from which philosophy ceaselessly strives to extricate itself. *Common sense*, for its part, “contributes the form of the same” (134), or the mutually recognizable. For Kant, the “validity” of all “judgments of taste” predicate themselves upon the “subjective principle” of *common sense* (§20). Comparatively, *good sense* contributes a “norm of distribution” (Deleuze, *Difference* 169), which cancels the differential element (i.e., that which cannot be normalized) and in doing so reinforces the universality accorded to hierarchical judgments.

<sup>98</sup> Of note here is Deleuze-Guattari’s contention that so-called “communicative action” is inseparable from a persuasive *marketing* of the opinion-cum-concept. That is, concepts are not so much invented or created in conversational settings as owned, exchanged, bought and sold. They ask: “Are we not led back in this way to the simple opinion of the average Capitalist?” (*What is?* 149).

matter, *reflect* or *contemplate*), but instead that communication, itself, or what Jürgen Habermas calls *communicative action*<sup>99</sup>—and its enduring appeal (1) to a set of talking points, or to a *global* conversation (which not only reinforces a communitarian or communication-based agenda, but a capitalist one, as well); and (2) to the relatively stable lens of a unified subject negotiating its identity on the public stage—can never be a suitable stand-in for philosophy, as it is for Habermas. Why? For Deleuze-Guattari, the basic reason is that philosophies that raise communication to the level of transcendent universal typically disregard the vital importance of concept creation,<sup>100</sup> and do so by emphasizing the repetition and reinforcement of the *same*: the same stock opinions and values, the same points of inquiry, the same political agendas. If nothing else, philosophies of this sort succumb to a kind of creative “inertia” (Colebrook, *Deleuze* 16), or even the very “failure of thinking” itself. So for Deleuze-Guattari, communication becomes a poor substitute for *thinking anew*; for new encounters (and the becomings they engender); for new resistances, new mappings, new openings onto the world. Put simply, communication remains ill-equipped, they argue, to deliver up “a new earth and [a] people that do not yet exist” (*What is?* 108). That which then weakens the active and creative nature of thinking not only flattens difference and dispels variation, but condemns thought (or better, thinking) to take up residence in a set of broad or well-worn generalisations. Deleuze-Guattari further contend that “[w]e do not lack communication. On the contrary, we have too much of it. We lack creation. *We lack resistance to the present.*” We lack, in other words, the capacity to overcome ever-present dogmas (in the

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<sup>99</sup> For Habermas, communicative action is a subset of social action, whereby certain values or norms—presupposed by the speaker—are foregrounded, discursively negotiated, and mutually validated. So action of this sort is a tool of communication used by social agents to reach rational, intersubjective agreements.

<sup>100</sup> Recall that for Deleuze-Guattari, the primary role of philosophy is to invent *concepts*.

form of majority opinions), and thus the capacity to think differently. Deleuze also claims (in a late essay on a phenomenon he refers to as “control society”), that what we need is “something different from communicating. The key thing may be to create vacuoles of non-communication, circuit breakers so we can elude control” (*Negotiations* 175)—or so we can elude the sort of *opinioneering* and/or political programming that regularly find its way into conversational paradigms and their preset conceptual agendas.<sup>101</sup>

### *A “new Athens”*

I begin the mapping of this third and final reconfiguration of Deleuze-Guattari’s *mole of the transcendent* with the suggestion that there is still more evidence of “the triumph of the judgment of God,” more evidence that Plato’s “poisoned gift” continues to wreak havoc on the discourse of literary criticism, in the very inability of that discourse to extricate itself from ongoing debates over the legitimacy (moral, social, psychological, epistemological) of the poets and their work. In the following passage from *Republic*, Socrates offers a challenge to those who would disagree with his position on the arts:

Lest we be charged with a certain harshness and boorishness...it should be said that...if poetry that aims at pleasure and imitation has any *argument* to bring forward to prove that it must have a place in a well-governed city,

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<sup>101</sup> It is for this reason, according to Deleuze-Guattari, that “philosophers have very little time for discussion. Every philosopher runs away when he or she hears someone say, ‘Let’s discuss this.’ Discussions are fine for roundtable talks, but philosophy throws its numbered dice on another table. The best one can say about discussions is that they take things no farther, since the participants never talk about the same thing. Of what concern is it to philosophy that someone has such a view, and thinks this or that, if the problems at stake are not stated? And when they are stated, it is no longer a matter of discussing but rather one of creating concepts for the undiscussible problem posed. Communication always comes too early or too late, and when it comes to creating, conversation is always superfluous. Sometimes philosophy is turned into the idea of a perpetual discussion, as ‘communicative rationality,’ or as ‘universal democratic conversation’...But those who criticize without creating, those who are content to defend the vanished concept without being able to give it the forces it needs to return to life, are the plague of philosophy. All of these debaters and communicators are inspired by *ressentiment*. They speak only of themselves when they set empty generalizations against one another. Philosophy has a horror of discussions” (*What is?* 28–9).

[we] should be glad to welcome it...[and, if persuasive] it is right that [poetry] should come back from exile after making its *defence* in lyric or any other meter (*Republic*, X.607b–d; my emphasis)

Socrates then goes on to add,

We should also give its champions who are not poets the opportunity to speak on its behalf in prose to the effect that it not only gives pleasure but is useful to cities and to human life. We shall listen to them in a friendly spirit, for we shall certainly benefit if poetry is shown to be not only pleasant but useful. (X.607e)

So in keeping with the agonistic sensibilities of Ancient Greece, those who would speak on behalf of poetry (e.g., the poets, the rhapsodes, the sophists or proto-critics of the time) can argue their case before a public tribunal of sorts—if they so choose. However, given the controlling interests of Socratic rationalism in this context, all are compelled to judge poetry in terms of (1) its usefulness or benefit to the republic; (2) its aesthetic merit; (3) its psychological impact on the uninitiated; (4) the knowledge it offers; (5) the virtue (or vice) it promotes, and so forth. In a sense, these are the *talking points* of the debate. So to make a reasonable case for poetry’s “place in a well-governed city”—i.e., to legitimize poetry on the public stage—its “champions” (so-called) must somehow speak to these various matters both to rhetorically authenticate their claims and establish their ethos. For Habermas, “we are constantly making claims, even if usually only implicitly, concerning the validity of what we are saying, implying, or presupposing,”<sup>102</sup> which in this case means that the champions of poetry are accountable for the *validity* of their

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<sup>102</sup> I cite this passage from translator Thomas McCarthy’s introduction to the first volume of Habermas’ *The Theory of Communicative Action* (p. x).

claims—i.e., the mutually agreed upon foundations of communicative interaction—in order to make their case for poetry both rational and persuasive.<sup>103</sup>

Habermas offers a useful conceptual vocabulary for understanding this latest renewal of the mole of the transcendent. On the one hand, his philosophy disentangles itself from “the constitutive capacities” (Edgar 139) of the rational agent—e.g., the Cartesian ego, Kant’s subject of reflection—but does so, on the other hand, to re-locate that same transcendence—or what I have been calling, following Artaud and Deleuze, *the judgment of God*—in the rational structures of communication. So what Habermas calls *communicative reason* (and its appeals to universalism and Enlightenment rationalism) becomes the modern substitute for the epistemological turns of what Richard Rorty refers to as a “subject-centered reason” (67). Kenneth Baynes adds, “Kant’s ideas of a single world, the soul, and the *unconditioned* (or God)... correspond to the suppositions, in Habermas’ work, of a common world, accountable subjects, and context-transcending validity claims” (195). In his theory of communicative rationality (discussed primarily in his seminal, two-part *The Theory of Communicative Action*), Habermas links the very possibility of mutual understanding and even shared experience, to the speakers’ ability to demonstrate the normative framework implied by any given speech act, if called upon to do so; hence, rational communication depends upon the speakers making concessions to the validity dimensions of language: “Every consensus rests on an intersubjective recognition of criticisable validity claims” (*Theory* 1:119). But if the speech acts of rational agents cannot (for whatever reason) be justified, through mutually recognized

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<sup>103</sup> For Habermas, this concept of “validity claims” specifically refers to the idealized and shared assumptions among speakers (1) about language, (2) about the good will of the other, and (3) about the nature of rational argument. So, in short, each actor in the conversation *is* (or ought to be) accountable for her claims through good, recognizable reasons. Habermas links communicative reason to emancipation because it coordinates the actions of social agents, and also forms the basis of all mutual understanding.

reasons, those agents may be tagged as irrational. For Habermas, then, it is what I would call “the regimes of justification”<sup>104</sup> that become universal, which means that free and unfettered communication—in any context—derives from, or is founded upon, a set of rational agreements among speakers about the validity of the claims being made.

So here we again come up against the idea of *competence*—specifically, the idea of communicative competence—which has roots in Chomskian grammar, but breaks with the more restricted focus of that grammar in important ways. That is, Habermas links his notion of competence, which figures prominently in his “Universal Pragmatics” (Edgar 138–40), to a tacit mastery of the rules that people draw upon in everyday exchanges to

- (1) communicate their desires, intentions, and feelings;
- (2) forge connections with the *world* around them;
- (3) justify (and assume accountability for) their arguments/claims;
- (4) interpret and make judgments (Habermas, *Theory* 1:130);
- (5) “carry out decisions on the basis of binding norms” (*Theory* 2:180);
- (6) reach consensus or a mutual understanding about things;
- (7) coordinate plans of action in accordance with what Habermas calls the *life-world* (i.e., the cultural, discursive, and socio-political contexts—or shared spaces—in which meanings are produced and exchanged, social identities are recognized, values are established) (*Theory* 1:112).

Rational communication, then, requires that we intuitively, and pragmatically, make use of these rational structures of communication, and that we do so in good faith. Again, we are always accountable for the validity (normative value, truth, honesty) of what we say.

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<sup>104</sup> I borrow this phrase from Ian Mackenzie (in *The Idea of Pure Critique*). I will return to this notion.



Literary critical operations beholden to the structures of rational communication ultimately stratify the book and delimit its capacities by contributing to what one might (perhaps impudently) refer to as an intersubjective mind-meld, that is, a type of group-think that contains and controls the book through a set of mutually recognized opinions (i.e., ways of talking about the book). In fact, the very capacity to construct agreements and negotiate values involves what Deleuze (in a late interview) calls “the art of interrogations”<sup>105</sup>—a phrase that he glosses as “a demand for one’s opinion, an interrogation...that ward[s] off any real questions.”<sup>106</sup> In other words, despite it “[being] tempting to see philosophy as an agreeable commerce of the mind...which, from the point of view of a lively, disinterested sociability of Western democratic conversation, is able to generate a consensus of opinion and provide communication with an ethic” (Deleuze-Guattari, *What is?* 99), the basic problem with this philosophical trajectory has to do with the fact that well-argued *opinions* (or rather, impulses, inclinations, assumptions) are made to assume the mantle of some sort of normative framework or majority rule, while fuelling that intersubjective mind-meld or group-think. For Deleuze-Guattari, “a generic subject experiencing a common affection” (145)—or rather, a society of friends chatting, discussing, fighting over an abstract or universal opinion—has become “the Western democratic, popular conception of philosophy,” which leads them to ask, “is this not the eternal Athens, our way of being Greek again?” (144–45).

I would argue that conversational constants concerning the legitimacy of the literary artefact have had a lasting impact on the discourse of literary criticism, right up to

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<sup>105</sup> Charles Stivale, in his summary of *L’Abecedaire de Gilles Deleuze*, refers to Deleuze’s particular comments on this point as follows: “philosophy has strictly nothing to do with communication. Communication suffices very well in itself, and all this about consensus and opinions is the art of interrogations” (“U as in *Un*”—One).

<sup>106</sup> See: “Q as in Question,” *L’Abecedaire de Gilles Deleuze*.

the present day. That is, literary criticism has historically been unable to extricate itself from the so-called “regimes of justification,” and within that basic discursive framework has followed one of two critical paths: (1) validation—e.g., the defence of literature, the authorization of the poet, the rationalization of extant literary or generic forms; or (2) vilification—e.g., what Michael Jarrett calls “spanking writers,” typically for their adherence to, and/or reproduction of, dominant ideologies.<sup>107</sup> But in either of these historical guises (i.e., apologist or censor, arbiter or judge), critics have continued to debate the legitimacy of literature (or of the poet/writer), and this, I would argue, owes much to the insatiable appeal of Platonic sensibilities, not only for those critics who would wish to monitor high culture, but those who would wish to patrol the back allies of popular culture, as well.<sup>108</sup> Critics—in their contributions to what Antonio Gramsci calls

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<sup>107</sup> In a contemporary context, many “schools of criticism” (e.g., feminism, deconstruction, new historicism, post-colonialism—to name but a few) have collectively pursued a line of inquiry that has sought to *expose* or, at least, problematize the literary artefact, and (in some cases) the “culture of expertise” (Habermas, “Modernity” 9) that has grown up around that artefact. Random elements of this wider critique include (1) the supposed autonomy or self-legitimization of literature; (2) its appeal to, and/or reinforcement of, certain structures of power (patriarchal or otherwise); (3) its representations (i.e., distortions, simplifications, obfuscations, even fetishizations) of the “other”—i.e., other cultures, other histories, other people—and the cultured or gendered underpinnings associated with those representations; (4) its debasement or denial of the body; (5) its so-called “unreadability” (de Man); and (6) its positionality—or rather, its lack of reflexivity about its own historico-discursive situation, its own productive or material pre-conditions, its own circulations and/or disseminations on the public stage. Historically, critics from Aristotle and Horace to Philip Sidney, John Dryden, and Samuel Johnson would take the poets to task (1) for breaking with aesthetic, generic, or otherwise *formal* literary conventions; (2) for a lack of stage decorum (i.e., unjust, disturbing, or artificial imagery); (3) for their lifeless representations (or for not being “true to life”); and (4) for a failure to provide sound moral instruction (i.e., “to teacheth virtue,” as Sidney says).

<sup>108</sup> While efforts to legitimize literature have remained a persistent motif in literary critical discourse, the charges of, say, moral equivocation and the negative influence of popular art levelled against artists and their work have yet to lose their currency, right up to the present day, on the public stage—a fact that only further attests to the persuasive power of Platonic doctrine on critical, if not socio-political, sensibilities. In particular, I am thinking of the so-called “culture wars,” and of how so much public or political debate seems geared toward protecting the innocence or moral fibre of the community, while mitigating the effects of cognitive and/or perceptual desensitization through long-term exposure to (say) acts of violence in the media. Yet escalating rates of both youth suicide and aggressive or antisocial behaviour invariably results in charges levelled by politicians or public advocacy groups against various forms of media and popular art. The usual suspects here are typically *violent* video games, *sexually explicit* images in movies and on television, the *incendiary* lyrics of rap artists, the *demonically-influenced* music of heavy-metal artists from Led Zeppelin to Marilyn Manson. Moreover, concerns are repeatedly raised about (1) the way the

the professional “strata of intellectuals” (5)—have historically become “experts in legitimation” (Said 172). In other words, whenever they find themselves mired in the pursuit of discursal agreements about the validity or legitimacy of the literary artefact, critics open the door to the unexpressed, yet persistent, hope of what Deleuze-Guattari call “a new Athens” (*What is? 7*)—however naïve or misguided that hope might be—wherein the most reasonable arguments or opinions hold sway. But of added note here is that the question of legitimacy, itself, comes to implicate more than just the artists and their art: it implicates the critic, as well, as the value or necessity of the (literary) critical enterprise, itself, is put on trial, especially (though not exclusively) in the modern and postmodern eras—an issue to which we now turn.

### ***Functional Crises***

Criticism today lacks all substantive social function. It is either part of the public relations branch of the literary industry, or a matter wholly internal to the academies.

—Terry Eagleton (*The Function of Criticism*, 7)

Critical discourse (or what one might otherwise refer to as critical *action*)<sup>109</sup> has long been in the business of justifying itself, both institutionally, and also in the court of public opinion. In his *Essay on Criticism*, Alexander Pope sought to validate the literary critical enterprise, in large part by authorizing the critic-gentleman of the time through his capacity for wit and judgment, or through his refined and judicious character—in short, through a set of shared (or at least mutually recognized) eighteenth-century values. So

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entertainment industry markets its wares to children and teens—and this, despite warning labels on music and video games; and (2) the way mass entertainment represents, for example, bodies, women, visible minorities, etc. in and through what Feminist critic Susan Bordo refers to as “the empire of images.”

<sup>109</sup> Following Habermas’ lead on this point, I define *critical action* as a subset of communicative action, which reflexively takes *itself*, either tacitly or overtly—and its own *raison d’être*, its own goals and objectives, its own values, its own critical presuppositions, its own validity or rationale—as its own object (of study), even while critics, themselves, may still be immersed in the problematic of the text.

Pope was clearly in conversation with the critical community of his day, and the success of his argument in this context would have depended upon its *reasoned* appeal to a set of stable neo-classical values deemed important for the critic to possess. In the nineteenth century, Oscar Wilde would assign a creative and even artistic value to the critical act itself, and would thereby validate his claims about the critic by appealing to the prevailing aestheticism of his day. Wilde writes, “Criticism is itself an art...[and] is really creative in the highest sense of the word. Criticism is, in fact, both creative and independent” (904). In effect, he proposes the novel idea of *criticism for criticism’s sake*.

Since Matthew Arnold, though, the discourse of literary criticism has rarely strayed—at least for any protracted period of time—from the question of its own validity, or rather, from the perceived need among critics, themselves, to differentiate what Habermas calls the “validity claims” of their (literary) critical endeavours.<sup>110</sup> So beginning with Arnold’s renowned nineteenth-century inquiry into “the function of criticism at the present time,” the larger critical community would be beset by a series of *functional* crises, vis-à-vis the norms or the validity of critical action, in general—crises that have hastened a discursal turn into communicative action. By this I mean that critics (again, in a post-Arnoldian universe)—by posing such questions as, (1) *what is the role or purpose of criticism?*, (2) *are critical practices useful or socially relevant?*, (3) *is criticism a legitimate undertaking at this point in time?*—have effectively called upon their fellow hermeneuts, or better, the critical intelligentsia (writ large), to explain or defend their actions, to demonstrate the rationality of their various presuppositions, to validate their claims, their purposes, and so forth. Consequently, a number of celebrated critical theorists over the last century (or more) have either taken up the Arnoldian

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<sup>110</sup> I bracket the “literary” in this context for reasons that will be made clear below.

question directly (e.g., T. S. Eliot, Northrop Frye, Terry Eagleton), or have posited a kind of functional impasse related to *the task of the critic*, and have done so (I would add) with no less a fervent interest in trying to clarify and ultimately legitimize what defines (or at least what *ought* to be) the enduring aims of the literary critical enterprise. Some familiar examples in this context include the following: Richards' *Practical Criticism*, Cleanth Brooks' *The Well Wrought Urn*, and William Empson's *Seven Types of Ambiguity*;<sup>111</sup> Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism*;<sup>112</sup> Harold Bloom's *The Anxiety of Influence*;<sup>113</sup> Stanley Fish's *Is There a Text in this Class?*;<sup>114</sup> Paul de Man's *Allegories of Reading*;<sup>115</sup> Edward Said's *The World, the Text, and the Critic*;<sup>116</sup> Terry Eagleton's *After Theory*<sup>117</sup> (and *The Function of Criticism*—a book to which I will return); and Homi Bhabha's *The Location of Culture*<sup>118</sup>—to name but a few *function*-oriented treatises.

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<sup>111</sup> In their collective efforts to professionalize literary criticism, the New Critics would strive to coordinate (even homogenize) critical practices, largely around the autonomous figure of the text, the rhetorical or poetical devices of *paradox* or *ambiguity*, and a pan-critical commitment (at the time) to close reading.

<sup>112</sup> Frye both builds upon and goes further than the New Critics, by tying the functional need for criticism to certain epistemological imperatives. He writes, "To defend the right of criticism to exist at all... is to assume that criticism is a structure of thought and knowledge in its own right, with some measure of independence from the art it deals with. (4–5).

<sup>113</sup> In particular, I am thinking of Bloom's "Manifesto for Antithetical Criticism," and its suggestion that criticism is a kind of "prose poem" (95), and like poetry, is an "achieved anxiety" (96) to the extent that critics—like poets—are engaged in acts of creative misprision in relation to their critical forbearers.

<sup>114</sup> Fish, as we know, focuses on the constitutive role of discourse communities in interpretative practices, and holds that one recognizes the interpretative strategies of another through the appeals, of that *other*, to what Habermas calls the same *validity claims*.

<sup>115</sup> de Man claims that "[a] literary text simultaneously asserts and denies the authority of its own rhetorical mode" (17)—i.e., it "asserts and denies" its own fixed meanings, while it "puts into question a whole series of concepts that underlie the value judgments of our critical discourse" (16). He then adds that "criticism is the deconstruction of literature, the reduction to the rigors of grammar of rhetorical mystifications" (17), and it is this "reduction" that puts us "in a mood of negative assurance that is highly productive of critical discourse" (16)—all welcome news to someone like de Man, given the *rhetorical* skeletons in his closet.

<sup>116</sup> In opposition to Yale deconstruction, Said advocates for the sort of criticism that locates the book in "the world," or in the powerful historico-political contexts from which it derives its meaning. Critics, he holds, need attend directly to those contexts, while eschewing the orthodoxies of contemporary critical models.

<sup>117</sup> Like Said, Habermas, and Rorty, Eagleton ties a functional necessity to a populist, politically-engaged criticism, one that serves the interests of human solidarity, collective action, and the *good life* (125–29), in general, while it dispenses with the sort of vapid, jargonistic "patois of contemporary criticism" (75).

<sup>118</sup> In his essay, "The Commitment to Theory," Bhabha calls for the "erasure of the traditional boundary between theory/politics" (30). He asks "what the function of a committed theoretical perspective might be"

But my point here is that these shifting functional exigencies—which again are linked to historically-situated critical practices—are rationalized (and hence guaranteed) through the so-called *validity dimensions* of language. In other words, the critical community will need to have reached an agreement or general consensus about the *possible* ways that critical discourse can validate itself, and thereby justify its claims, at any given point in time. So, as we saw, Pope validated the critical enterprise (and his conception of the critic) through a rhetorical appeal to certain eighteenth-century values (e.g., wit, judgment, reasoned moderation); similarly, Wilde validated his claims concerning criticism through an appeal to the prevailing aestheticism of his day. Matthew Arnold, then—whose views would (in some respects) anticipate those of the New Critics and Northrop Frye in the mid-twentieth century—validates the critic’s engagement with literature by viewing the literary artefact as a displaced form of religion, or a kind of gospel unto itself.<sup>119</sup> As Arnold famously believed, criticism is “*a disinterested endeavour to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world*” (824), and this “endeavour,” then, translates into what he calls “the function of criticism at the present time.” But of note here is that Arnold further legitimizes this “disinterested endeavour” by highlighting the critic’s various credentials, those that include (1) the “fair and clear mind” of the critic, attuned to the elevated ideals, values, etc. reflected by (or in and through) the literary artefact; (2) the critic’s commitment to a kind of epistemological

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(21), as far as “the activist agent or the intellectual *agent provocateur*” (30) is concerned? Bhabha holds that theoretical discourse (if properly calibrated) can force “the *passage* of history” (25), and do so in a way that “overcomes the given grounds of opposition and opens up a space of translation: a place of hybridity... where the construction of a political object that is new, *neither the one nor the other*, properly alienates our expectations, and changes, as it must, the very forms of our recognition of the moment of politics.”

<sup>119</sup> Arnold writes that “while the multitude imagines itself to live by its false science, it does really live by its true religion” (819), and later adds, “The epochs of Aeschylus and Shakespeare make us feel their pre-eminence. In an epoch like those, no doubt, is the true life of literature; there is the promised land, towards which criticism can only beckon...[lest we resign ourselves to] die in the wilderness” (825).

agenda, one that promotes the manufacture of what Arnold calls “fresh knowledge” for the sake of a society gone astray, both morally and spiritually (Frye would advance this point in his *Anatomy*); and (3) the critic’s unique capacity to fuel “a current of true and living ideas” (825) that will ultimately serve the wider *needs* (e.g., cultural, educational, moral, etc.) of English society, and thus guarantee its progress or long-term stability.

The New Critics, for their part, would attempt to validate literary criticism by assigning a quasi-scientific legitimacy to its various practices, guaranteed (1) by the self-contained object of critical scrutiny (e.g., Wimsatt’s “verbal icon”; Brooks’ “well-wrought urn”); and (2) by the coordinated empirical activities and methodological rigour (i.e., close reading) of the critic. In *Principles of Literary Criticism*, I. A. Richards further extends the New Critic’s commitment to this cause (i.e., quasi-scientific legitimacy) by appealing to the so-called *soft* science of behavioural psychology, and to what he calls literature’s “emotive use of language” (250)—i.e., the fact that literary language cannot be reduced to fixed referents—as a way to explain the paradoxical interpretations of readers. But the *scientivism* of literary critical discourse would arguably reach its apogee in formalism,<sup>120</sup> and later in the linguistically-based structuralisms (or structuralist sciences) of the mid- to late-twentieth century, wherein the dream of deriving objective knowledge (or empirical truths) from the book held sway for many prominent scholars at the time (e.g., Propp, Frye, Lévi-Strauss, Todorov, Genette, Barthes).

But the (supposed) scientific rigour that had once validated literary critical practices would steadily be replaced, or at least challenged, by the value progressively

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<sup>120</sup> Boris Eichenbaum, in *The Theory of the Formal Method*, writes, “the so-called ‘formal method’ grew out of a struggle for a science of literature that would be both independent and factual” (1062). Meanwhile, Formalist Roman Jakobson would write, “linguistics is the global science of verbal structure, [and] poetics may be regarded as an integral part of linguistics” (1258), and, by extension, part of that global science.

accorded to certain socio-political agendas/orthodoxies over the last several decades. In fact, since the 1960s, there has been a pan-critical resurgence of social dialectics within the discourse of literary criticism, reinforced by predictable, conflict-free *norms* of critical action (a point to which I will return in a moment). Or, put another way, from a Habermasian perspective, the validity dimensions—or better, the ways of differentiating (and hence arriving at) the validity dimensions—of critical theory and practice have been re-configured by the critical community. The worm has *turned*; and, on this point, the work of Terry Eagleton provides a representative case in point. What follows is a passage—which I quote at length—from his aptly titled book, “The Function of Criticism,” wherein Eagleton laments the failings of the modern literary critical agenda:

I began this essay by arguing that modern criticism was born of a struggle against the absolutist state. It has ended up, in effect, as a handful of individuals reviewing each other’s books. Criticism has become incorporated into the culture industry as a ‘type of unpaid public relations, part of the requirements in any large corporate undertaking’ [...]...it is arguable that criticism was only ever significant when it engaged with more than literary issues—when, for whatever historical reason, the ‘literary’ was suddenly fore-grounded as the medium of vital concerns deeply rooted in the general intellectual, cultural and political life of an epoch. The period of the Enlightenment, the drama of Romanticism and the moment of *Scrutiny* are exemplary cases in point. It has only been when criticism, in the act of speaking about literature, emits a lateral message about the shape and destiny of a whole culture that its voice has



compelled widespread attention. It was only when ‘culture’ became a pressing political project, ‘poetry’ a metaphor for the quality of social life, and language a paradigm of social practice as a whole, that *criticism could claim any serious title to exist*. Today, apart from its marginal role in reproducing the dominant social relations through the academies, it is almost entirely bereft of such a *raison d’être*. It engages at no significant point with any substantive social interest, and as a form of discourse is almost entirely self-validating and self-perpetuating. It is hard to believe that, in a nuclear age, the publication of yet another study of Robert Herrick is justifiable. Should criticism, then, be allowed to wither away, or can some productive role be discovered for it? (107–8; my emphasis)

So Eagleton pens but one example of the contemporary call—by any number of critics and schools of criticism—for the discourse of literary criticism to again justify itself by re-capturing its more traditional “*raison d’être*,” as he says. That is, Eagleton expresses nostalgia for (among other things) eighteenth-century periodicals (e.g., Steele’s *The Tatler*, Addison’s *The Spectator*, Johnson’s *The Rambler* and *The Idler*, and also Smollett’s *Critical Review*), and their opinion-based, socio-political interventions in what Habermas calls “the public sphere.” In the contemporary scene, though, Eagleton argues that institutions have struggled to place (or create space for) the more politically engaged critics, those committed to some type of activist agenda—such as the Marxist critic Raymond Williams—which leads Eagleton to raise serious questions about the enduring validity of, and/or justification for, what he views as the bourgeois pursuits of the modern critic, and the very rationale for the continued presence of literary criticism within the

academy. Pragmatically speaking, Eagleton calls for (1) a set of shared, or at least widely accepted, standards about the validity that ought to be accorded to certain forms of critical action; and (2) a shared context of understanding through which to coordinate various critical agendas, with minimal dissent or misunderstanding among critics. So communicative action of this sort, through its regulatory grounding in what Habermas calls universal validity, coordinated action, and fundamental agreements between critics, becomes the guarantor of liberal hope in a secular age.

Habermas, in his essay “Modernity—an Incomplete Project,” makes his most direct contribution to the discourse of literary criticism through his critique of expert systems—i.e., professional critics who “step outside the modern world” (13) and “into the sphere of the far-away and the archaic”—and his related critique of “the decisive confinement of science, morality and art to autonomous spheres separated from the lifeworld and administered by experts” (14). Habermas, like Eagleton, critiques the self-legitimization of the literary artefact, or rather, the modes of aesthetic isolation that have come to dominate literary critical discourse in the wake of the New Critics; he further challenges criticism’s “exclusive concentration on one aspect of validity alone and the exclusion of aspects of truth and justice” (12). The problem, according to Habermas, is that specialist (or expert-oriented) forays into the art object (as aesthetic unity) have both separated reason from the lifeworld of everyday action (decision, social practice, etc.), and colonized that lifeworld, as well, through specialist knowledges. Habermas believes that the road out of this impasse involves coordinated action, shared agreements, universal validity—in short, communicative reason. In other words, the isolation of the aesthetic and cultural spheres from the lifeworld, and the related fragmentation of various

instrumental knowledges from that world, are at the forefront of Habermas' concerns in this area, and so he argues that we need to "dispense with the usual concentration upon art" (7). As a cure, then, for the sort of "dogmatism" (11) and "moral rigorism" that has resulted in the professionalization of taste and critical judgment within the critical community, Habermas advances the need for the absorption of aesthetic experience back into the lifeworld, back into history, back into the problems of everyday life. To that end, critics must renew their various socio-political commitments—those primarily concerned with (1) the "demands of moral-practical justification" (14); (2) "the inherent justice of dialogical reason" (Edgar 39); (3) the question of unequal or unjust socio-political structures (of power); (4) the naturalization of certain social or institutional norms; (5) the securing of legitimacies (i.e., good reasons) for communication and action, and so forth. The Habermasian critic, then, will not allow herself to be distracted by a self-contained, self-sustaining aesthetic object which colonizes the lifeworld, advances the need for a specialist knowledge, and promotes the sort of self-reflective activity that inhibits just and free-flowing communication. Instead, the Habermasian critic disturbs what is natural in art (or what renders the art object autonomous from the lifeworld), by asking where its emancipatory potential lies. But, to reiterate, my point here is that critics beholden to some form of communicative competency (or intersubjective idealism) once again renew the judgment of God, this time through their idealization of the regimes of justification.

I would further contend that the widespread subordination of the *literary* within the critical community, as a whole, becomes a significant indicator of this functional shift toward the more socio-political forms of legitimacy that Eagleton (in Habermasian fashion) called for, beginning in the 1980s. In other words, for feminists, new historicists,

discourse analysts, cultural critics, and post-colonialists the study of literature would become but a singular node in a much more wide-ranging critical programme. Consequently, it may not be unusual (at this point in time, anyway) to encounter critics or theorists who seem loathe to identify themselves with what may seem—at least to them—to be a more antiquated or politically naïve focus on works of literature alone. However, this is not to suggest that literature, as an object of study, no longer has any critical purchase, but that because various schools of criticism have sought to mount a sustained attack on the narrowly defined category of “literature,” or on the “literary text,” and on the perceived autonomy and/or self-sufficiency of such (which, in some quarters, turns the text into a microcosm of the State), they are no longer wont to identify the figure of the literary as a politically neutral participant on either the public or institutional stage. In short, “literature” has become a hotly contested space. It has become a prominent site of cultural and political struggle, where both social and national identities are regularly bought and sold, or where ideologically-motivated forms of *common sense* morph into the hierarchical structures of *good sense*—i.e., the fixed image of the good, the right, the just, the true—and thereby end up reinforcing a powerful State apparatus. Richard Rorty picks up the point as follows:

The word ‘literature’ now covers just about every sort of book which might conceivably have moral relevance—might conceivably alter one’s sense of what is possible and important. The application of this term has nothing to do with the presence of ‘literary qualities’ in a book. Rather than detecting and expounding upon such qualities, the critic is now expected to facilitate moral reflection by suggesting revisions in the canon

of moral exemplars and advisers, and suggesting ways in which the tensions within this canon may be eased. (82)

So for many contemporary currents of literary (or, more broadly, social) criticism, the focus has turned to some version of what Rorty himself calls “solidarity,” wherein public needs “and the rise of liberal institutions and customs” (68) take precedence in the discourse, along with a renewed commitment to social responsibility and the liberal-democratic hope of a diminishment of cruelty (63).

While perhaps sympathetic to such ideals, Deleuze-Guattari remain unconvinced by the likes of Rorty and Habermas:

What social democracy has not given the order to fire when the poor come out of their territory or ghetto? Rights save neither men nor a philosophy that is reterritorialized on the democratic State. Human rights will not make us bless capitalism. A great deal of innocence or cunning is needed by a philosophy of communication that claims to restore the society of friends, or even of wise men, by forming a universal opinion as *consensus* able to moralize nations, States, and the market. (*What is?* 107)

So how, in the end, can we eschew the rational, communication-oriented modes of criticism, without returning to the conservatisms of the past, such as, the self-sustaining autonomy of the book? The answer, as I will argue in Part 2 of the dissertation, is an immanentist orientation to the book, and a turn away from the various forms of transcendence (and their associated idealisms) that in the end, despite their outward appearances, are all *stratigraphic* modes of criticism: they each, in their own way, give voice to the enduring judgment of God.

### ***Conclusion: Criticism in a Major Key***

Semiotician Umberto Eco argues that “frequently the overcoded entities [e.g., literature, the book] float—so to speak—among the codes, on the threshold between convention and innovation. It is by a slow and prudent process that a society [or perhaps, a school of criticism] admits them to the ranks of the rules upon which it bases its own very *raison d’être*” (134). Deleuze-Guattari, in *A Thousand Plateaus*, put a finer point on Eco’s ethereal image of “overcoded entities” floating “among the codes”; that is, they argue that, above all else, overcoding practices invoke a certain “Unity [that] always operates in an empty dimension supplementary to that of the system considered” (8). In this chapter we have seen that over time any number of critical values have similarly ascended “the ranks,” as it were, and become universal in and through the discourse of literary criticism. With that guarantee of universality, these different values have begun to operate with near God-like authority and autonomy in an “empty dimension” of sorts—i.e., a privileged and ideal realm—wherein they have become the enduring *rules* of literary critical engagement. Put another way, they have become the dogmatic purveyors of a compulsory unity, and have done so through what Massumi calls the “infolding of a forcibly regularized outside” (*User’s Guide* 112) into the interior spaces of the book.

This chapter has attempted to show that the “triple illusion” of contemplation, reflection, and communication have historically spawned what Deleuze-Guattari (in *A Thousand Plateaus*) refer to as a “royal science” (368) tradition in the discourse of literary criticism, or, more generally, *majoritarian* modes of criticism (i.e., criticism in a major key). In so doing, this triple illusion—which I have collectively characterized as a stratigraphic critical agenda—has long suppressed the expressive capacities of the book

and hence its capacity to become-other. So this chapter has explored the underlying principles that inform a transcendent orientation to not only the book, but to various conceptions of criticism, as well (i.e., Sussman's *task of the critic*). I have further argued that while this orientation derives largely from the enduring spectre of Platonism, the discourse of literary criticism has made essential and enduring contributions to this pernicious programming, as well, through its persistent renewal and reconfiguration of what Deleuze-Guattari call *the mole of the transcendent*. So, in short, the relentless critical assault of the transcendent orientation to the book has, I conclude, played a seminal role in fulfilling a Platonic destiny. In Part 2 of this dissertation, I will open up the question of how to think the book in a way that actively eschews the transcendent orientation at every turn, and that points to a new outside role for the critic, one that follows what I will be calling an *immanentist* (and hence more Deleuzean) orientation to the book. To this issue we now turn in earnest.

## Part 2

### The “Plan[e] of Immanence,” the “Plan[e] of Consistency”

Here, there are no longer any forms or developments of forms; nor are there subjects or the formation of subjects. There is no structure, any more than there is genesis. There are only relations of movement and rest, speed and slowness between unformed elements...We call this plane, which knows only longitudes and latitudes, speeds and haecceities, the plane of consistency or composition.

—Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (*A Thousand Plateaus?*, 266)

If the first response to the illusion of transcendence is to think all the different grounds, origins and foundations which have operated as ‘planes of transcendence,’ the second and far less easily achieved task is to think ‘THE plane of immanence’ as such.

—Claire Colebrook (*Gilles Deleuze*, 76)



In Part 1 of this dissertation, I sought to demonstrate how and in what ways “the poisoned gift of Platonism” (i.e., transcendence—or what Deleuze, following Artaud, calls “the triumph of the judgment of God”) has played an enduring role in the discourse of literary criticism, from Plato to the present. I argued that the transcendent orientation to literature most fully reveals itself through the sustained efforts of critics to submit literature (or, more broadly, the book) to different generalities of thought—e.g., preset methodological agendas and various discursual confinements (contemplation, reflection, communication). The cumulative effect of these ways of thinking about literature results not only in its overall abstraction, but in its “molar-moral” containment (Massumi, *User’s Guide* 119)—i.e., its normalization, its subjection to hierarchical values. By extension, the very capacity of the book to affect, to be affected (i.e., to vary in terms of its power to act), to transform or become-other—issues that will be explored in Part 2 of the dissertation—have all been severely curtailed, as well. In Part 1, I also showed that the transcendent orientation to literature has not only had lasting effects on literature, but—as far back as Plato’s *Ion*—on the perceived task of the critic.

So the basic question I ask—that which will determine the overall progression of Part 2—can be formulated as follows: Where does the critic go from here? Or, more precisely, how might the critic effectively re-map (or re-vector) her basic orientation to the book, and in a way that ultimately eschews transcendence at every turn? How might the critic think otherwise—not only about the book, but more importantly (at least for our purposes) about the role of criticism (or of critical practices), in general? The various challenges that confront any sort of Deleuzian criticism—or, new materialism<sup>121</sup>—include (1) overcoming the inclination (so prevalent within the discourse of literary

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<sup>121</sup> The form of materialism I have in mind will need to be carefully elucidated over the pages that follow.

criticism) to transcend, and thereby render abstract, the literary artefact; and (2) reviving the power of the book, itself, to *take flight*—or “to follow the witch’s flight,” as Deleuze-Guattari say—by amplifying its untapped potentials.<sup>122</sup> To meet these challenges, I posit a new, co-creative role for the critic, whereby the task of the critic (*vis-à-vis* the book) is newly re-conceived through the lens of what I call the *immanentist orientation*—an issue to which we now turn.

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<sup>122</sup> In *Dialogues*, Deleuze concludes—through his reading of D. H. Lawrence, Melville, Kerouac, and other Anglo-American writers he admires—that “the highest aim of literature” is “to leave, to escape...to trace a line” (36); he adds that for those aforementioned writers, “everything is departure, becoming, passage, leap, daemon, relationship with the outside.” I will discuss this question of “flight” in Part 2 of the dissertation.

## Chapter 3

### Criticism as “Enterprise of Co-Creation”

Life alone creates such zones where living beings whirl around, and only art can reach and penetrate them in its enterprise of co-creation.

—Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (*What is Philosophy?*, 173)

Criticism ceases being distinguished from the creative discourse of which it would be the necessary actualization.

—Maurice Blanchot (“What is the Purpose of Criticism?” 4)

Ernest: But is criticism really a creative art?

Gilbert: Why should it not be? It works with materials, and puts them into a form that is at once new and delightful. What more can one say of poetry? Indeed, I would call criticism a creation within a creation.

—Oscar Wilde (“The Critic as Artist,” 904)

## *Disrupting the Creative/Critical Divide*

It is precisely that purely functional notion of criticism, or that great divide between criticism and creation, which is now in dispute.

—Geoffrey Hartman (*Criticism in the Wilderness*, 204)

The discourse of literary criticism has long grappled with the *creative*<sup>123</sup> potential of the critic—in some instances that has meant blurring the line that divides literature from criticism (or commentary); artist (e.g., dramatist, poet, novelist) from critic; and so-called “primary” texts from “secondary” texts. Yale deconstructionist Geoffrey Hartman, who, along with Oscar Wilde, reduces the “English tradition in criticism” to a form of “sublimated chatter” (199), posits, in its place, the notion of “literary commentary as literature” (204). Hartman asks, for example,

Does the essay...and the literary essay in particular, have a form of its own, a shape or perspective that removes it from the domain of positive knowledge to give it a place beside art, yet without confusing the boundaries of scholarship and art? (191)<sup>124</sup>

As far back as the *Ion*, however, Socrates would reprimand the rhapsode—the proto-critic of his day—for what he took to be Ion’s vainglorious, performance-based contributions to the Homeric verses, and for Ion’s consequent lack of critical acumen with regard to how Homer’s work compares (in terms of the quality of his depictions) to that of the

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<sup>123</sup> It is with some reluctance that I use a word like “creative” in this context, let alone words like “artistic” or “experimental”—words sufficiently vague enough to account for any type of criticism that *seems* to deviate from some existing idea about what criticism *ought* to be. Following Geoffrey Hartman, I would hope “the barriers between the academic and the creative spheres” (183) can be broken down. I wonder, though, what it might mean to break down those “barriers”? Or what it even means to *be* creative in a critical setting? These matters, suffice to say, do not go without saying, and will be explored over the pages that follow.

<sup>124</sup> Yet those *confusions* abound, Hartman claims, in a work like Derrida’s *Glas*: “it is not only hard to say whether *Glas* is ‘criticism’ or ‘philosophy’ or ‘literature,’ it is hard to affirm it as a book. *Glas* raises the specter of texts so tangled, contaminated, displaced, deceptive that the idea of a single author fades” (204).

other Epic poets of the time. But clearly Socrates' complaints would in no way put to rest the creative aspirations of the critic: not for all time, not even in his own time. As discussed in Chapter 1, the irony has rarely been lost on philosophers and critics alike that Plato (Socrates' *boy*) would, historically, be so well known for his searing indictment of the arts, and yet be such a great dramatist and literary stylist in his own right. Following Plato's lead, some critics (e.g., Horace, John Dryden, Oscar Wilde, among them) would dabble in the dramatic (or dialogical) representation of their ideas.

In the eighteenth century, Alexander Pope would versify his views on (among other things) critics, criticism, and literature in his lyrical *tour de force*, "An Essay on Criticism," and thereby set a new standard for critical experimentation:

The gen'rous Critick *fann'd* the *Poet's Fire*,

And taught the World, *with Reason to Admire*.

Then Criticism the Muse's Handmaid prov'd,

To dress her Charms, and make her more belov'd. . . (ll. 100–3)

In this passage, Pope claims that a beneficent (albeit subordinate) critic enters into, shall we say, *functional* dealings with the poet: (1) by becoming "Handmaid" to the creative "Muse"; and (2) by "[dressing] her Charms," so as to "make her more belov'd." So Pope's critic-handmaiden (or is it *lackey*?) primps, dresses, adorns the poems, revealing them in their finest light; the critic fusses with particulars, smoothes the edges, and sets the stage for the poems' public showing. But the question to which Pope gives rise, less *in* his criticism than *through* his criticism (i.e., through his style, his mode of expression, the creative formulation of his ideas, and so forth)—a question that would re-assert itself

in more dramatic fashion in the centuries following the first publication of the *Essay*, in 1711, and in ways that Pope, himself, would neither have dreamed of, nor sanctioned—can be formulated as follows: can the literary critic actually “[*fan*] the *Poet’s Fire*,” as Pope says, without dousing the poems with water? Or, put another way, can the critic escape her purely functional or gate-keeping role, and thereby assume a more co-creative role in relation to, or alongside, the text? Can the critic, as Foucault suggests, “multiply” the book’s “signs of existence” (“Masked” 326)? Can she “summon” those nascent *signs*—i.e., “drag them from their sleep”—rather than simply pass judgement on a supposedly self-contained, self-sufficient *objet d’art*, and in a way that (as Foucault himself claims) puts the rest of us to *sleep*?<sup>125</sup> Finally, can criticism be re-conceived as both a cooperative and creative act in its own right?

As discussed in previous chapters, both art and artist have long been subordinated to the various controls and confinements of whatever the critic-cum-dominatrix allows at any given point in time. However, critics—in their turn—have unduly relied upon, even fetishized, the literary artefact as object of study. So the will to dominate in literary criticism is, to a certain extent, offset or counterbalanced by what Hartman calls “a psychology of dependence”:

the literary critic most of us know, the academy-grown variety, is a scholar of one candle who pores over texts, and at his most sublime chants a text (although obscure) that is an answer. This image of a task both ascetic and

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<sup>125</sup> I see a parallel between Pope’s claim that “The gen’rous Critick *fann’d* the *Poet’s Fire*” and Michel Foucault’s “dream” scenario—which we will discuss in more detail below—in which the latter asserts that a superior or more enlightened critical practice would, as he suggests, “light fires.” Now, I do not ignore the fact that Pope’s rational and rule-bound ‘fanning’ of the poetic fires involves something quite different than what Foucault, more than two and a half centuries later, would have meant by ‘lighting fires.’ All that I wish to draw attention to at this point is the impulse within criticism to creatively *intensify* literature—or as Foucault claims, bring it “to *life*.”

absorbing is not unattractive... It involves, however, a psychology of dependence, and of deepening dependence. (219)

Hartman adds that the ascetic scholar, or critic-hermeneut, “accepts too readily his subordinate function” (216), vis-à-vis the work of literature; he provocatively asks, then, whether or not “the barriers between the academic and the creative spheres [can be broken down] so that everything imaginative can find a place in the university?” (183). Now, I am not at all certain that the critic “accepts too readily” a purely “subordinate function,” as Hartman contends. Part 1 of this dissertation suggests just the opposite—that the literary artefact has historically fallen prey to a dominant critical apparatus. So while critics may be hopelessly mired in a self-defeating cycle of *both* domination and “deepening dependence,” I would agree, *pace* Hartman, that critics will—at minimum—need to shed their seemingly pious devotion to the text:

The basic question is that of creative criticism: what to make of... this phenomenon, which liberates the critical activity from its positive or reviewing function, from its subordination to the thing commented on, whether artefact or general theme. (191)

If, in fact, this so-called “creative criticism”—a phrase Hartman takes from T. S. Eliot—were able to liberate critics from their more administrative roles (vis-à-vis the text), then one certainly needs to ask, following Hartman: “what to make of this phenomenon” that liberates the critic by productively fusing the *creative* and the *critical*?

It would take the likes of Oscar Wilde, in “The Critic as Artist,” and (to a lesser extent) the *young* T. S. Eliot, in his 1923 essay, “The Function of Criticism”—an essay that stands as obvious rejoinder to Mathew Arnold’s nineteenth-century touchstone of

literary criticism, “The Function of Criticism at the Present Time”<sup>126</sup>—to perhaps *formally* challenge this propensity within the discourse of literary criticism to dissociate the movements (or actions) of the critical from those of the creative.<sup>127</sup> Eliot, for example, would claim that novelists/authors engage in a kind of “critical activity” (74), and that they possess “critical powers” of their own. He would also speak to what he calls “the polity of literature and of criticism...[noting that] there is the possibility of cooperative activity” (76); and following Wilde’s own excoriation of Matthew Arnold, Eliot would suggest that the latter “overlooks the capital importance of criticism in the work of creation itself” (73). But of particular note here is the fact that while Eliot was initially inclined to support the idea that criticism *should* form some sort of creative union with “the labour of the artist” (74), he would eventually renounce this way of thinking, rejecting it as a kind of youthful indiscretion on his part: “Eliot draws back from what seems to him an ultimate and dangerous sophistication... [arguing that] criticism cannot be a creative activity” (Hartman 190). This idea, then, that “creative activity” need be strictly partitioned from critical discourse—an idea we see at work in the New Critics, Russian Formalists, and French Structuralists, and, in particular, the work of I. A. Richards, Cleanth Brooks,<sup>128</sup> Northrop Frye, and parts of Roland Barthes, among others—would become an enduring dogma in and through twentieth-century criticism. As we know, many critics (and schools of criticism) would hitch their wagon to science

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<sup>126</sup> Interestingly enough, Wilde’s essay, “The Critic as Artist,” also takes on Arnold. Wilde had initially titled his essay, “The True Function and Value of Criticism, with Some Remarks on the Importance of Doing Nothing” (see “Introduction” to Norman Page’s 1998 edition of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, p. 24). In fact, at several points in his essay, Wilde comments—usually in disparaging fashion—on some of the key arguments in Arnold’s *Function*.

<sup>127</sup> Hartman points to an even earlier upending of the division between criticism and creation in romantic literature/art, which he characterizes as “a kind of avant-garde criticism” (190).

<sup>128</sup> Cleanth Brooks’ idea of “the heresy of paraphrase” serves as but one obvious example of this partitioning.



during this period in a sustained effort to fashion a *critical* science of their own. But this would be a Faustian bargain of sorts that would ultimately prove debilitating for (among *so* many other things) the perhaps nascent impulse within the discourse of literary criticism itself to move toward what Deleuze-Guattari call an “enterprise of co-creation” (*What is?* 173)—an impulse that finds its first fruits in the work of Oscar Wilde.

In “The Critic as Artist,” Wilde argues at length for the “importance of the critical element in all creative work” (900); then, in a somewhat creative turn of his own—one that harkens back to the dramatic structure of Dryden’s “*Essay of Dramatick Poesie*” and Plato’s dialogues—Wilde mounts a forceful challenge to the creative/critical divide:

*Ernest:* The highest criticism, then, is more creative than creation, and the primary aim of the critic is to see the object as in itself it really is not.

*Gilbert:* Yes, that is my theory. To the critic, the work of art is simply a suggestion for a new work of his own, that need not necessarily bear any obvious resemblance to the thing it criticizes. (907)

There are a couple of key points in this exchange, including the somewhat provocative suggestion that the work of criticism “need not necessarily bear any obvious resemblance to the thing it criticizes.” Does this mean the critic is summarily discharged of any and all responsibility, vis-à-vis the text, and free to do *whatever*? Or that criticism is a kind of free-for all? A wild(e) flight of fancy? A rambling flow of signifiers? Parody? Irony? A “proliferating absurdity” (Massumi, “Introduction” xv)? Is this the new orthodoxy?

Recall Ernest's initial prompt: "the primary aim of the critic is to see the object as in itself it really is *not*." The point here, it would seem, is not that the critic simply gives herself over to some sort of fitful delirium that ultimately side-steps the text altogether, but that criticism, in and of itself, becomes an elemental act of *falsification*—that, as Ernest remarks, involves, *seeing* "the object as in itself it really is not." Elsewhere in the essay, Wilde reinforces the point as follows: "the critic reproduces the work he criticizes in a mode that is never imitative," because criticism's "charm... consist[s] in the rejection of resemblance" (909). In the end, Gilbert concludes, "the critic is he who exhibits to us a work of art in a form different from that of the work itself" (910). So then we ask: what does it mean to eschew resemblances in this context—or better, to repeat the text in a differential way? First off, we need to recognize that critics actually *do* intervene; they encounter, experience, operate on the text, but do so—and this is key—with the goal of extracting something new, something different. So the goal is to unleash a pure potential from the text, rather than simply "lampoon" it through the neurotic display of "an 'unmotivated' excess of signification" (Massumi, "Introduction" xv–xvi). Art, in effect, goads the critic by offering itself up, as Wilde says, "a suggestion for a new work"—a work that may even be "more creative than creation." So, in a sense, art demands its own falsification. Put another way, critics are not tasked with simply mirroring the text by habitually (nay ritualistically) tracing its semiotic coordinates—who needs that? They are not tasked with assessing/assigning value, passing judgment, or rendering the work of art redundant to its secondary representation—critics should "not treat Art as a riddling Sphinx" (Wilde 910). Instead, they should affirm what Deleuze calls "the powers of the false" (*Cinema 2*:126):<sup>129</sup> "lying—as art—is the ethical practice of affirmation, the

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<sup>129</sup> Deleuze writes that it is Nietzsche who "substitutes the power of the false for the form of the true and

affirmation of life” (Zepke 27). This may involve (or result in), as Gilbert suggests, “[inventing] fresh forms” (901), in large part by side-stepping the *faculties* of “reason” and “recognition” (908); this may further involve “showing...the work of art in some new relation to our age” (911), because as Gilbert says, “the one duty we owe to history is to rewrite it” (903); or it may involve any number of other creative turns:

the one characteristic of a beautiful form is that one can put into it whatever one wishes, and see in it whatever one chooses to see; and the Beauty, that gives to creation its universal and aesthetic element, makes the critic a creator in his turn, and [does so through] whispers of a thousand different things which were not present in the mind of him who carved the statue or painted the panel or graved the gem. (907)<sup>130</sup>

In short, the critic, as if enthralled by the “whispers of a thousand different things,” puts art to work by plugging it into (or into *it*) “whatever one wishes... whatever one chooses.”

Deleuze makes a similar point, we recall, in his letter/reply to Michel Cressole.

That is, he calls for an “intensive way of reading,” which involves (among other things), “tearing the book into pieces, getting it to interact with other things, absolutely anything.”

The basic reason for machining the book in this way (i.e., plugging it into the “*absolutely*

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resolves the crisis of truth... in favour of the false and its artistic, creative power” (131). In *The Will to Power*, Nietzsche writes that “whenever man rejoices, he is always the same in his rejoicing: he rejoices as an artist, he enjoys himself as power, he enjoys the lie as his form of power” (§853). He then adds, “*We have need of lies* in order to conquer this reality, this ‘truth,’ that is in order to *live*...[so] man must be a liar by nature, he must be above all an *artist*” so as to take “flight from *truth*.” In *Twilight of the Idols* (“Expeditions of an Untimely Man”), Nietzsche disparages philosophers because their “entire trade demands that they concede only certain truths... truths of *practical* reason” (§42). Hence, “They know what they *have* to prove, they are practical in that — they recognise one another by their agreement over ‘truths.’—‘Thou shalt not lie’—in plain words: *take care*, philosopher, not to tell the truth.”

<sup>130</sup> At this point I should qualify my use of Wilde. While in some ways his work participates in historical efforts to overcome the transcendent orientation to literature, in some ways he renews that transcendence. Wilde’s idealism, or near spiritual aestheticism—clearly manifest in phrases like “the Beauty... that gives to creation its universal and aesthetic element,” or, “great works of art are living things... are, in fact, the only things that live” (911)—distances him from Deleuze, and the sort of materialist criticism I posit herein.

*anything*”) is to palpate difference, or to induce becomings in and through the book, itself, so as to ultimately “see,” as Gilbert claims, “the object as in itself it really is not.” And again, by attuning themselves to the “whispers of a thousand different things” (i.e., things not actualized), critics not only bring a “richer unity” or fuller aspect to the work, but ultimately promote the idea that all bodies, all “living things”—*materially* speaking—operate in and through their variable hook-ups, relays, connections, and conduits. *Life*, in fact, as I will show in our discussion of Kerouac (below), is effectively defined by its forms of passage and propulsion. So the ‘greatness’ attributed to certain works of art can be measured through the relative openness of those works to new inputs or new machines—e.g., “a war-machine, love-machine, revolutionary-machine . . . bureaucratic-machine” (Deleuze-Guattari, *Plateaus* 4)—that which stimulates (or sets in motion) the powers of affective variance and creative transformation. So while, *yes*, the art object may be a kind of leaping-off point for the critic—or better, a mobilization, a relay, a propulsion (“simply a suggestion for a new work”); a *middle*, Deleuze would say, not an end in itself—the fact that Wilde’s critic turns away from the fixed figures and structural logic of the text, so as “to see the object as in itself it really is not,” becomes an important affirmation of the art—a point that will require additional clarification as we proceed.

So Wilde, it would seem, retains Pope’s more abstract suggestion that “The gen’rous Critick *fan[s]* the *Poet’s Fire*,” but summarily drops, if not directly counters, the related claims that the critic has somehow “taught the World, *with Reason to Admire*,” and that “Criticism the Muse’s Handmaid prov’d.” For Wilde, whatever it might mean in practical terms to enflame or *intensify* a given work of art has little, if anything, to do with mastering that work (i.e., consuming it whole): “It must be perfectly easy in half an

hour to say whether a book is worth anything or worth nothing. Ten minutes are really sufficient, if one has the instinct for form. Who wants to wade through a dull volume. One tastes it, and that is quite enough” (902). Criticism also has little to do with bringing reason or rationality to the text (908), with noting its resemblance to other texts, or with interpreting and, by extension, demystifying its supposed truths (910). In short, Wilde’s critic need not pursue the *requirement* of disciplinary mastery—a requirement that, as we know, would first see the light of day in Socrates’ indictment of the rhapsodes (*Ion*, sects. 532–33). Not until the twentieth century, though, would the New Critics (and others) fulfill the dream of “the poisoned gift of Platonism,” in part by giving a powerful autonomy to the critical act—which admittedly is not inconsistent with Wilde’s position (at least generally speaking). The difference is that while many currents of twentieth-century criticism would make despotic use of that power to capture and contain the literary artefact (e.g. formally, structurally, generically), for Wilde, the critical faculty serves primarily to deepen or extend what he calls the *mystery* of art—a move that would resonate with the likes of Martin Heidegger and Maurice Blanchot. According to Wilde, the critic “will look upon Art as a goddess whose mystery it is his province to intensify” (910); and to “deepen its mystery” (909), the critic will “raise round it, and round its maker, that mist of wonder which is dear both to the gods and worshippers alike.” So again we ask: what does it mean, in practical terms, for the critic to “intensify” or “deepen” the “mystery” of literature? For Wilde, the short answer is that the critic exposes the work to difference. That is, the critic listens to (or intuits) the “whispers of a thousand different things”—*things* that as Wilde/Gilbert says, “were not present in the mind of him who carved the statue or painted the panel or graved the gem.” By then

expressing those real, yet unactualized, essences—i.e., by *differencing* the text—the critic intensifies its mystery, expands its purview, and amplifies its powers. In effect, the critic draws new variables, new potentials, new affects from the text, and thereby propels it into the realm of the unpredictable and the *anexact*.<sup>131</sup>

I acknowledge, however, that talk of deepening mysteries in this context carries with it some ideological baggage. In an age where critical practices are routinely dominated by the pressure to *de*-mystify, to recover historical precondition, to expose prevailing ideologies or other socio-political conceits, and to ultimately pursue the *art* of interrogations, the idea of deepening mysteries may seem on the surface somewhat suspect. But leaving aside the question of whether or not critical acts of de-mystification actually solve the problems of mystification—at best, it would seem, they exchange one set of ideological shackles for another—affirming and/or amplifying the mystery of the book has, to my mind, little or nothing to do with re-affirming the legitimacies of, say, colonialism, humanism, patriarchy, or enlightenment reason. There is nothing to hide, no secret to keep. Deepening the mystery, in fact, has little to do with burdening the text by way of some additional interpretative constraint. Instead, the goal here is to pry open the text, to expose it to its non-localized powers and potentials, and thereby free it from any and all critical constraint. In other words, this is an affirmation of the *lightness* of the book, and of its capacity to take flight, rather than a misguided effort to *load* the book “with the heaviest burdens” (Deleuze, *Nietzsche* 184)—those that include, “the weight of higher values” (185), “the postulates of being” (184), the “truth of the world,” “the self-

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<sup>131</sup> Deleuze-Guattari link the conceptual discovery of the “anexact” to Husserl: “It seems to us that Husserl brought thought a decisive step forward when he discovered a region of vague and material essences (essences that are vagabond, anexact and yet rigorous), distinguishing them from fixed, metric and formal, essences” (*Plateaus* 407).

sufficiency of the real,” and other “weighty consideration[s]” (186): in all, “*the burden of what is*” (185). Again, this is an opening up of the book to the unrecognizable, the unpredictable, or to what Deleuze-Guattari refer to as “unheard-of becomings” (*Plateaus* 240). As Deleuze himself writes, “unburden, unharness, and set free that which lives” (*Essays* 100), and in a way that expands the possibilities of the book, or at least channels those possibilities (if not the book, itself) into uncharted territories.

So, in summary, Wilde’s approach to criticism eschews enlightenment models, and even to this day stands in stark contrast to the sort of critical agendas that serve to tame or domesticate a work of art either by representing it; explaining or interpreting it; categorizing it (generically, structurally, etc.); reading it through the lens of certain aesthetic/literary values (or constants); or denouncing the so-called “sins” of the writer—i.e., the writer’s complicity with dominant ideologies—through, as we recall, a practice that Michael Jarrett caustically refers to as “spanking the writer.” In effect, critical practices of this sort put limits on the capacity of the book to act in the world—to act, and be acted upon; to be used, or put to work; to connect or hook-up; to enter into novel arrangements with things other than or *outside* itself; and ultimately to express itself in ways that extant critical or referential frames will simply not sanction.

So truly being creative in a literary critical setting would never involve something so trivial as parody, irony, or any other form of postmodern experiment, nor would it involve simply versifying or dramatizing one’s ideas about literature. The creativity of the critic is affirmed by nothing less than the mobilization (intensification, amplification) of the unactualized, though no less real, potentials of the book—a mobilization that ultimately enables the book to become-other. To anticipate the larger arguments of this

chapter, being creative means being able to bring the book to a point of crisis, whereby the book, itself, *goes* “critical.” To this point, though, we only get a preliminary sense from writers like Oscar Wilde that the movements of the *creative* and the *critical* are inextricably bound to one another; they are, it would seem, one and the same movement. But this point will need further clarification over the pages that follow.

### ***Signs of “A Life...”***

Following the *clarion call* of writers like Geoffrey Hartman, a wave of critical practices in recent decades that seek to confront the creative/critical divide have taken on a momentum of their own, especially in the wake of the excesses, the play, and (at times) “wilful absurdisms” (Massumi, “Introduction” xv) of postmodernism.<sup>132</sup> Foucault—though *not* a postmodernist himself—puts forward a post-modern vision of the future:

I can’t help but dream about a kind of criticism that would not try to judge, but to bring an oeuvre, a book, a sentence, an idea to life; it would light fires, watch the grass grow, listen to the wind, and catch the sea-foam in the breeze and scatter it. It would multiply, not judgments, but signs of existence; it would summon them, drag them from their sleep. Perhaps it would invent them sometimes—all the better. All the better. Criticism that hands down sentences sends me to sleep; I’d like a criticism of scintillating

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<sup>132</sup> In particular, I am thinking about the work of Jacques Derrida (e.g., *Glas; The Postcard*); Maurice Blanchot (e.g., *The Infinite Conversation*); Roland Barthes (e.g., *The Pleasure of the Text*). Other notable examples in the American context include—but are not confined to—John Cage (e.g., *Silence, Empty Words*); Avital Ronell (e.g., *The Telephone Book, Crack Wars*); Elaine Scarry (e.g., *The Body in Pain, Dreaming by the Book*); Greg Ulmer (e.g., *Tele-Theory, Heuristics*); and David Foster Wallace (*A Supposedly Fun Thing I’ll Never do Again, Consider the Lobster*)—to name but a few. I am also inclined to add writers such as Lance Olsen (*Sewing Shut My Eyes, Anxious Pleasures*) and Kathy Acker to this list. Though Acker may not be a literary critic, her fiction certainly involves a radical critical engagement with the likes of Charles Dickens, Cervantes, and Robert Louis Stevenson. But this picks up on the point raised in note 1, above, that coding critics as either “creative” (read: radical, avant-garde) or “traditional” (read: tedious, mechanical, unimaginative) strikes me as both arbitrary and unnecessary, that is, without a firm grasp on what these notions of *creativity* and *experimentation* really entail in a literary critical context.



leaps of the imagination. It would not be sovereign or dressed in red. It would bear the lightning of possible storms. (“Masked” 326)

Foucault dreams of a type of criticism that—rather than “[handing] down sentences” (or passing judgment)—tries to *do* something, or make something happen in and through the book. But what would it mean for the critic to bring “a book, an oeuvre, a sentence, an idea to *life*,” as he says? What would it mean to “multiply...signs of existence” in any or all of those realms (e.g., sentences, ideas, books, oeuvres)? Foucault does not set down anything programmatic, but does—somewhat cryptically—call for “a kind of criticism that would light fires, watch the grass grow, listen to the wind, and catch the sea-foam in the breeze.” Foucault wants to emphasize (albeit in a roundabout way) the need to experiment with the book, to put it to work, to foster connections between the book and its radical outside, to test the book (or rather, test its limits). So Foucault’s critic, then,

(1) *experiences* or *encounters*—i.e., the critic senses (e.g., *watches*,

“listen[s]”); she feels or experiences things (e.g., “the sea-foam in the breeze,” “the wind,” “possible storms”);

(2) *experiments*—i.e., the critic will “light fires,” “catch the sea foam,”

take “leaps,” “scatter,” “summon,” “drag,” “invent,” “bear the lightning”; and finally,

(3) *diagnoses* or *evaluates* what the book may be capable of—i.e.,

growth/becoming, a new expression of life.

By forcing the book to its limits, into a far-from-equilibrium state, the critic taps (into) its generative power—i.e., its capacity to produce, to affect, to express, to become, to self-organize—and thereby multiplies its variable “signs of existence.” This is precisely the

critical objective that Éric Alliez (Deleuze's student) sets for himself in his book, *Signature of the World*. That is, Alliez plans not to write a *commentary* on Deleuze-Guattari's *What is Philosophy?*—not a synopsis, not an interpretation—but what he calls a “commentary effect,” or, a mobilization of the expressive potential of the text: “All that's left for the reader is to become the artisan of his own reading, step by step...by multiplying marginalia; that will then be the guiding principle of this commentary effect” (1). So Alliez multiplies the book's “signs of existence” by “multiplying marginalia.”

Foucault, in any case, sets down the three pillars of a materialist criticism in the passage cited above: a criticism whose ultimate goal is the production of material *effects*.

***Experience/encounter → Experiment → Diagnose/Evaluate: ... Effect.***

More than that, Foucault eschews standard (and often standardizing) critical practices, those designed to contain and control the book through transcendent measures: “Criticism that hands down sentences sends me to sleep.” Foucault opts, instead, for a form of criticism that engages (or stimulates) the book's capacity for difference, for the production of the *real*, for intensive and unpredictable variance, for becoming-other (i.e., flight, transformation), and for self-organization. So by drawing upon Deleuze's oft-quoted Spinozian maxim, one might suggest that Foucault's “dream” critic is similarly committed to the idea that ‘*we do not even know what a book-body can do.*’ Put another way, Foucault hopes that critics who do not ignore the potential of the book, or who reject the sort of critical agenda that involves taking static inventories of the text (generic, discursive, narratorial), will instead resolve to be experimental in terms of their approach. In short, Foucault dreams of a criticism that is both creative *and* pragmatic.

We will deal with the above pillars of a materialist criticism in more detail below (in this chapter, and the Interchapter that follows). For the moment, let me stay with this idea that the critic could be called upon to bring *things* (e.g., “a book, an oeuvre, a sentence, an idea”) “to life,” as Foucault says. This life-giving or life-affirming orientation is what Deleuze (especially in his late work) characterizes as *immanentist*. That is, Deleuze entitles his final essay, published a few months before his death, “Immanence: A life...” Philosopher Giorgio Agamben, in his essay “Absolute Immanence,” offers an extended reading of this title, which explores in detail Deleuze’s intriguing use of the colon and the ellipsis—both marks of punctuation that suggest a kind of ‘*opening on*’ to something (e.g., the outside). The colon, for example, is often referred to as the mark of introduction, and so the word “Immanence” in Deleuze’s title effectively introduces (or again, *opens on to*) “A Life...” But significantly, the word “Immanence” retains a kind of purity in this word-diagram by being held to one side of the colon. That is, the “Immanence” of the title remains uncompromised by the life it makes possible. Deleuze “used a colon,” Agamben writes, “clearly because he had in mind neither a simple identity nor a logical connection” (223) between “Immanence” and “A Life...” In other words, Deleuze did not want to subordinate “Immanence” to a life by titling his work something like “Immanence *is* life.” Rather, immanence (as a first approximation of this concept) propels life (or “signs of life”); it provides an opening to life. It unleashes *life*.

Deleuze did, in fact, wish to draw attention to a certain passage or relay between “Immanence” and “A Life...” In other words, “A Life...” in this context refers not to living things, not to actualized bodies or organisms, not to empirically determined forms,

but to the potential of those things to vary, to become-other, to increase or decrease in power. “A Life...,” for Deleuze, is wholly affective: a “complete power, complete bliss” (*Pure* 27); and while impersonal and non-organic, it retains the power to topple hierarchies, to consume the living and the lived, and to “engulf entire armies” (29). With its deployment of the indefinite article “a,” “A Life...” indexes the “pure event” of life—i.e., “singular life,” or “absolute immanent life” (28). “A life...,” Deleuze concludes, unlike my life or your life, “contains only virtuals” (31); that is, it cannot be summarily reduced to any actualized form(s) of life—i.e., to subjects and objects, or “to the subjectivity and objectivity of what happens” (28)—that which it nonetheless traverses. Put another way, the book conveys, or makes felt, pure (read: unactualized) potential; and while that potential may be expressed in and through the book, either through the augmentation or diminishment of its powers of becoming, the book’s potential (i.e., its virtual aspect) always exceeds, or is always greater than, its actualization. So *life* conveyed in and through the book cannot be reduced to, nor exhausted by, specific empirical determinations of the book (e.g., character, plot, theme, genre); rather, the book remains a wholly determinate expression of the *transcendental*—i.e., the indeterminate source that conditions the book in a singular way, yet exceeds its empirical actualization: “The indefinite as such is the mark not of an empirical indetermination but of a determination by immanence or a transcendental determinability...[moreover, it is not so much] the indetermination of the person [at issue] only because it is determination of the singular” (30). Daniel W. Smith—citing Deleuze’s late essay “Literature and Life”—writes, “life is an impersonal and nonorganic power that goes beyond any lived experience...and if life has a direct relation to literature, it is because writing itself is ‘a

passage of life that traverses both the livable and the lived” (“Introduction” xiv). So, in other words, if tapped through writing (or art), immanence infuses lived or actualized bodies with that aforementioned “power and even bliss” (Deleuze, *Pure* 30) by opening up a passage for the relay or expression of *a life*, or of differential life.

Few writers (to my mind) demonstrate a deeper commitment to “a life of pure immanence” (Deleuze, *Pure* 29) and to the fact that the “life of the individual gives way to an impersonal and yet singular life” (28) than Jack Kerouac. *On the Road*, I would argue, maps the immanentist orientation, and its concomitant power—i.e., its power to induce becomings, to express singularities (or singular life).<sup>133</sup> That is, Sal Paradise (Kerouac’s alter ego) functions not so much as a narrator or passive chronicler of the early Beats, but as a kind of *mad* scientist. Sal encounters/experiences much along the road. But above all, he *experiments*, and does so (as is often stated throughout the novel) for “kicks.” Like Foucault’s critic, Sal “would light fires, watch the grass grow, listen to the wind, and catch the sea-foam in the breeze,” and would do so for similar reasons: because he wants *life*, or a purer expression of life. He wants new experiences—i.e., new ways of thinking and living. He wants to feel things; he wants “power and even bliss.” He wants “IT.” For example, talking to Dean Moriarty about jazz musicians (those they had seen play the night before), Sal says,

‘Now, man, that alto man last night had IT—he held it once he found it;

I’ve never seen a guy who could hold so long.’ I wanted to know what

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<sup>133</sup> When I speak of “singularities,” I mean that the book (as open system) registers something new or different, something unthinkable, something impersonal, and in so doing is propelled along a line of flight. In this dissertation, I equate the capacity of open systems, such as the book, to register and express singularities (or singular life) with the power or capacity of things to become-other—or better to go *critical*.

“IT” meant. ‘Ah well’—Dean laughed—‘now you’re asking me impon-de-rables.’ (206)

But it would be the pursuit of those very “impon-de-rables” that would propel Sal’s journey. What is IT? He never stops asking. He wants to know, wants to *experience*...IT.

So, in the novel, Sal pursues an experimental agenda. He is part catalyst. That is, he *machines* friends, people, places—plugging one into the other; he maps the transversal connections among them, and consumes their residual energies like a junky:

A tremendous thing happened when Dean met Carlo Marx. Two keen minds that they are, they took to each other at the drop of a hat. Two piercing eyes glanced into two piercing eyes—the holy con-man with the shining mind, and the sorrowful poetic con-man with the dark mind that is Carlo Marx... Their energies met head on, I was a lout compared, I couldn’t keep up with them. The whole mad swirl of everything that was to come began then; it would mix up all my friends and all I had left of my family in a big dust cloud over the American night. Carlo told him of Old Bull Lee, Elmer Hassel, Jane.... And Dean told Carlo of unknown people in the West... They rushed down the street together, digging everything in the early way they had, which later became so much sadder and perceptive and blank. But then they danced down the streets like dingedodies, and I shambled after as I’ve been doing all my life after people who interest me, because the only people for me are the mad ones, the ones who are mad to live, mad to talk, mad to be saved, desirous of everything at the same time, the ones who never yawn or say a commonplace thing, but burn, burn,

burn like fabulous yellow roman candles exploding like spiders across the stars and in the middle you see the blue centerlight pop and everybody goes ‘Awww!’ (7–8).

Critic John Leland points out that there is something Faustian about this passage, as perhaps evidenced by the somewhat anomalous question with which Kerouac follows up these words: “What did they call such young people in Goethe’s Germany?” Leland suggests that “Goethe’s story, like Kerouac’s, is about a quest for knowledge and revelation...[and, in Goethe] Faust is described as one who yearns for the impossible—one of the ‘mad ones’—[but] his yearning leads to disaster” (51). So Kerouac, it would seem, suggests a parallel between making a pact with Mephistopheles and making a pact with Dean Moriarty. Both are demonic figures (of a sort): they may offer insight into the “impon-de-rables”; they may promise deliverance/escape, and a deeper understanding or experience of *life*. Sal, like Faust, succumbs to the temptation, to the madness—“the whole mad swirl.” As the disciple, he “shamble[s] after,” taking notes (writing gospel?); he concludes his exaltation to “the mad ones” with an *amen*: “everybody goes ‘Awww!’”

Kerouac reinforces this same sort of religiosity in the following passage, wherein Sal defends Dean against the charges of *those* in his life (e.g., Ed and Galatea Dunkel, Roy Johnson, Camille, and others) who fail to appreciate the kind of power of which Dean is capable, and the kind of life (or life-force) that courses through his veins:

now he’s alive and I’ll bet you want to know what he does next and that’s because he’s got the secret that we’re all busting to find out and it’s splitting his head wide open and if he goes mad don’t worry, it won’t be your fault but the fault of God” (195).

For the likes of Galatea Dunkel, though, and Dean's wife (Camille) and daughter, Dean was irresponsible, a con-man, "the worst scoundrel that ever lived" (196), "the HOLY GOOF" (194), the subject of so much "bitterness" (195), so much recrimination. But no matter. The impersonal desire that ceaselessly consumes him invariably repels the stinging and stultifying judgments/accusations of the others:

standing in front of everybody, ragged and broken and idiotic, right under the lightbulbs, his bony mad face covered with sweat and throbbing veins, saying, 'Yes, yes, yes,' as though tremendous revelations were pouring into him all the time now, and I am convinced they were, and the others suspected as much and were frightened. He was BEAT—the root, the soul of Beatific" (195).

Dean, at that moment, was the living embodiment (or expression) of what Deleuze calls (from the Latin) "'Homo tantum'" (*Pure* 28)—i.e., a man stripped of recognizable qualities, mere man, singular man, "with whom everyone" (or most everyone at least) "empathizes," for he "attains a sort of beatitude" (28–9).

Deleuze would further liken these "tremendous revelations," pulsing in and through Dean, to a rush of *creative emotion*—a concept he derives from Henri Bergson. According to Deleuze, to be imbued with creative emotion is to "no longer [have] anything to do with the pressures of society, nor with the disputes of the individual... nor with a society that constrains" (*Bergsonism* 111); instead, the pure flow of creative emotion reflects the infinite movement of a "cosmic Memory, that actualizes all the levels at the same time, that liberates man from the plane (*plan*) or the level that is proper



to him, in order to make him a creator, adequate to the whole movement of creation.”<sup>134</sup>

Deleuze also notes the rarity of this phenomenon, tying it to “privileged souls,” while adding that “we pass from one genius to another, through the intermediary of disciples or spectators or hearers”—like Sal, who again chronicles not so much the movements of the individual, but the movements or expressions of the BEAT. Deleuze, then, concludes his comments on the matter through a statement that speaks directly to the sort of Beatific experience that consumes Dean: “If man accedes to the open creative totality, it is...by acting, by creating rather than by contemplating.”

In *What is Philosophy?*, Deleuze-Guattari argue that “pure immanence provokes a strong, instinctive disapproval in public opinion” (42), unlike the normalizing and regulatory powers associated with transcendence, which engender a taste for conformity, for dogma and indifference. But “to think,” or to think *differently*, “is always to follow the witch’s flight” (41). Why? Because “one does not think without becoming something else, something that does not think—an animal, a molecule, a particle—and that comes back to thought and revives it.” To this, Deleuze adds, “The life of [the individual or person] fades away in favour of the singular life immanent to a man who no longer has a name, though he can be mistaken for no other. A singular essence, a life...” (*Pure* 29). So here again, the “tremendous revelations...pouring into” Dean—or in and through Dean—transform him, or strip him of all marks of individuality and personhood: he becomes “something else...an animal, a molecule, a particle”—something inhuman, “something that does not think.” And in that state—ragged and pulsating, so far-from-equilibrium,

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<sup>134</sup> In this context, recall Sal’s stated attraction to “the mad ones” in the passage cited above, and especially his suggestion that they were “desirous of everything at the same time.”

yet plugged into what Deleuze-Guattari calls *the plane of immanence*<sup>135</sup>—Dean is simply incapable of orthodoxy, and powerless to placate the will of others. The immanentist orientation divorces Dean not only from his family, not only from himself, but from prevailing social codes and (let us say) *normal* or recognizable behaviors. In effect, he no longer knows what it would mean to be the responsible husband and father, or the principled and upstanding citizen. As the orientation changes from transcendence to immanence—or from containment and control to experience and experiment—so too his whole way of thinking, or way of life, changes. Dean transforms: becoming-animal, becoming-molecule, becoming-other. Deleuze-Guattari write,

For the affect is not a personal feeling, nor is it a characteristic; it is the effectuation of the power of the pack that throws the self into upheaval and makes it reel. Who has not known the violence of these animal sequences, which uproot one from humanity, if only for an instant, making one scrape at one's bread like a rodent or giving one the yellow eyes of a feline? A fearsome *involution* calling us toward unheard-of becomings. (*Plateaus* 240; my emphasis)

In this passage, Deleuze-Guattari speak not of the *evolution* of consciousness (or of bodies), nor of the defining developments of any known species, but of creative undoings and essential transformations—those that depend, following Nietzsche, upon the

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<sup>135</sup> Briefly, the plane of immanence is not so much an abiding foundation or ground, but more of a threshold, a doorway, a window (something like a *plane* of glass), that which registers the movements between inside and outside. From the perspective of the plane, only the passage itself matters, and not that which enters (from the outside), nor that which arrives (in the inside). In other words, the plane of immanence shifts the focus from identities-in-motion to pure movement itself—movement, in other words, fundamentally predicated upon the shedding of any and all recognizable identity. The plane of immanence might also be viewed as a kind of liminal space through which not only passage occurs, but transformations unfold or take shape. The plane thus potentiates specific processes of individuation, specific becomings. These movements, taken as a whole, hang together in a *consistent* way, thus resulting in a specific—though provisional—composition.

ceaseless return of critical difference. The authors speak not of established identity, nor of a linear progression toward a specific end or objective, but of “fearsome *involution*,” whereby all semblance of “form is constantly being dissolved, freeing times and speeds” (267). Deleuze-Guattari wish to draw attention to the idea of pure propulsion (minus the *thing* propelled), pure dynamism—again, not evolution, but a progressive differentiation of things heretofore unheard and unknown. “Becoming,” according to Deleuze-Guattari, “is involutory, [and] involution is creative” (238).

So Dean’s creative transformations and animal becomings are, in a word, *involutionary*, and by extension “fearsome” or terrifying to some; for Sal, though, Dean’s power lies in that very capacity to make *felt* the plane of immanence—or rather, make felt the force of the outside, the “unthought” (Deleuze-Guattari, *What is?* 59) in every thought—through singular expressions of madness and desire: i.e., through speed (e.g., fast cars, fast talk; at one point Dean says, “we’ve got a million things to talk about” (Kerouac 182)); also, through idiocy (“the HOLY GOOF”); through drink and debauchery; through excess (in all its forms). For Deleuze-Guattari, the “layout” of the plane—especially for those to whom Sal refers as “the mad ones”—involves “a sort of groping experimentation” (*What is?* 41):

We resort to measures that are not very respectable, rational, or reasonable. These measures belong to the order of dreams, of pathological processes, esoteric experiences, drunkenness, and excess. We head for the horizon, on the plane of immanence, and we return with bloodshot eyes, yet they are the eyes of the mind. Even Descartes had his dream. To think is always to follow the witch’s flight. (41)

Similarly, Dean would “resort to measures not very respectable.” He would fall prey to “pathological processes, esoteric experiences, drunkenness, and excess.” He would “head for the horizon, on the plane of immanence, and...return with bloodshot eyes”—or, as Kerouac writes, with “bony mad face covered with sweat and throbbing veins.” He would “follow the witch’s flight.” But, as Kerouac suggests, even in that state (again, so far-from-equilibrium), “Bitterness, recriminations, advice, morality, sadness—everything was behind him, and ahead of him was the ragged and ecstatic joy of pure being” (195).

Recalling, then, the title of Deleuze’s final essay—i.e., “Immanence: A Life...”—I would argue, in like fashion, that Deleuze ties the mark of omission (i.e., the ellipsis) to the phrase “A life...” in order to denote that same sort of enduring openness to what one might otherwise refer to as the “ecstatic joy of pure being” (Kerouac 195); in effect, the ellipsis indexes an infinite potential, and the ceaseless unfolding of life. But what life? Which life? The phrase is literally a suspended sentence, an adjournment. The indefinite article “a,” in this context, shifts the focus away from the fixed subject, away from the personal (e.g., *my* life, *your* life), and toward a more impersonal life or virtual existence—a life not so much known as felt or experienced: this is *a life* only hinted at, a life undetermined, undifferentiated, and becoming-actual: a life yet to come. The phrase “A Life...” draws attention to the “non-actualized (indefinite)” (*Pure* 31) events through which lived realities actualize themselves.<sup>136</sup> In other words, the incorporeal events that

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<sup>136</sup> To experience any sort of dynamic and incorporeal transformation (such as the *greening* of the tree) is to experience “a life” made actual through a given body or state of affairs (e.g., the *green* tree). Early in *The Logic of Sense*, Deleuze defines the *event* as an unfolding of incorporeal life, or of what he calls “extra being” (35), across the absolute surface of things (e.g., 6, 21, 35). Elsewhere, he adds, “A life contains only virtuals. It is made up of virtualities, events, singularities. What we call virtual is not something that lacks reality but something that is engaged in a process of actualization...The immanent event is actualized in a state of things and of the lived that make it happen” (*Pure* 31). So a phrase like “the tree greens” indexes a passage of life—i.e., the incorporeal event of a tree’s greening—but that passage is in no way exhausted at any point in time, by any one tree. We will pick up on this matter in the next chapter.

may filter in and through *my* life or *our* lives will thereby transform them either in mundane ways (e.g., through the greening of the tree), or in ways so powerful as to unseat empirical actualities, deflate social norms, uproot fixed identities, overthrow various forms of order and organization, or, as noted above, “engulf entire armies.” So these “signs of existence,” to which Foucault refers, at least when first actualized, retain a sort of revolutionary potential to induce “unheard-of becomings” in the book—that which derives from (1) their being *singular* (read: non-regulated) expressions of incorporeal events; and (2) their never having been assigned a fixed role or identity.<sup>137</sup>

So finally, the colon of Deleuze’s title—i.e., “Immanence: A Life...”—thrusts forward; it connotes passage, relay. Meanwhile, the ellipsis, even as it extends into the void (or better, into absolute immanence), connotes movement and trajectory—i.e., “a process of actualization” (*Pure* 31). But what is relayed? What is actualized? In a word, *life* (singular life): “We will say of pure immanence that it is A LIFE, and nothing else. It is not immanence to life, but the immanent that is in nothing is itself a life. A life is the immanence of immanence, absolute immanence: it is complete power, complete bliss” (27). In *On the Road*, Dean was able (in some way, and to some extent) to access, or at least channel, that “power,” that “bliss.” As Deleuze-Guattari would say, Dean “head[s] for the horizon, on the plane of immanence, and...return[s] with bloodshot eyes,” and ultimately ill health, because the impersonal life invariably brings one into contact with the sort of excess that overwhelms the body.

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<sup>137</sup> I see a useful comparison to be made here between immanent life and the life of the embryonic stem cell. That is, what stem cells *are* and what they might *become* are really one and the same question. So one might view the stem cell as vector, as direction or pure trajectory; and the so-called *life* of the stem cell, here, is ultimately defined (or definable) in and through its ‘movement toward’ some future, but as yet unknown, assignment.

But for an addict like Sal, Dean's true worth is measurable by the "kicks" he provides: "Dean uses Sal; Sal uses Dean; each man betrays the other" (Leland 55). For Sal, Dean is the vehicle. The release and rush of singularities. *The way and the light*. Dean goes mad, goes *critical*; and as Foucault says, he "bear[s] the lightning of possible storms." Sal, in his turn, not only feeds on those energies, but fears them, as well:

Suddenly I had a vision of Dean, a burning shuddering frightful Angel, palpitating toward me across the road, approaching like a cloud, with enormous speed, pursuing me like the Shrouded Traveler on the plain, bearing down on me. I saw his huge face over the plains with the mad, bony purpose and the gleaming eyes; I saw his wings; I saw his old jalopy chariot with thousands of sparking flames shooting out from it; I saw the path it burned over the road; it even made its own road and went over the corn, destroying bridges, drying rivers. It came like wrath to the West. I knew Dean had gone mad again...Everything was up, the jig and all. Behind him charred ruins smoked" (Kerouac 259).

Immanence = immolation. Deleuze-Guattari suggest a link between immanence and "fire" (*What is?* 45)—a self-consuming fire. That is, they argue that immanence "captures everything, absorbs All-One, and leaves nothing remaining to which it could be immanent." So as Dean—described in the passage above as "a burning shuddering frightful Angel"—makes his latest pass across the plain/plane, "with thousands of sparking flames," he consumes everything along that path; he burns roads, destroys bridges, dries rivers. Like a vengeful God, Dean spreads wrath across the land, leaving only "charred ruins" in his wake. This is the enduring danger posed by immanence:

Immanence can be said to be the burning touchstone of all philosophy because it takes upon itself all the dangers that philosophy must confront, all the condemnations, persecutions and repudiations that it undergoes.

This at least persuades us that the problem of immanence is not abstract or merely theoretical...it is not easy to see why immanence is so dangerous, but it is. It swallows up sages and gods. (Deleuze-Guattari, *What is?* 45)<sup>138</sup>

In fact, any orientation to immanence—such as that which consumes Dean—carries with it explicit “dangers”; for immanence not only “swallows up sages and gods,” but destroys temples, challenges authority, re-writes laws; as a result, its advocates may be charged as immoral relativists by institutional authorities.<sup>139</sup>

One wonders, then, if the affirmation of literary immanence—or of a uniquely immanentist orientation to the book—would similarly be subject to those same “condemnations, persecutions and repudiations”? For the critic who commits to literary immanence eschews, as we know, all normative (read: transcendent) measures, all forms of order and organization.<sup>140</sup> In his monograph on Spinoza, Deleuze defines *immanence*

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<sup>138</sup> The translation of this passage was modified by Daniel Smith (“Deleuze” 62) from the original English translation—by Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell—in slight, but important ways.

<sup>139</sup> Daniel Smith points out that Spinoza and Nietzsche, the two great philosophers of immanence, were condemned as atheists, and as immoral: “A potent danger was sensed to be lurking in the *Ethics* and the *Genealogy of Morals*: without transcendence, without universals, one will fall into the dark night of chaos, reduced to a pure ‘subjectivism’ or ‘relativism.’ A philosophy of immanence, it is argued, far from resolving the question of justification, seems to shift the problem onto an unresolvable terrain. It seems unable to put forth normative criteria by which certain modes of existence can be judged as acceptable and others condemned as reprehensible and winds up espousing a kind of moral nihilism in which all ‘differences’ are affirmed in their turn” (“Place” 252).

<sup>140</sup> However, to be clear, the immanentist orientation is not entirely free of its own standards, or of what Deleuze (following Spinoza) calls the “natural right” (*Expressionism* 257) of any given body—like a book—to “[extend] its power as far as it can” (269), to augment its affections, to pursue compatible relations with other bodies, to maximize its joy and minimize its sadness. Deleuze insists that in *The Ethics*, Spinoza “judges feelings, conduct and intentions by relating them, not to transcendent values, but to [immanent] modes of existence they presuppose or imply...*A method of explanation by immanent modes of existence* thus replaces the recourse to transcendent values. The question is in each case: Does, say, this feeling, increase our power of action or not? Does it help us come into full possession of that power?”

not in terms of “a power of participating,” but a power of “being participated [in]” (*Expressionism* 170). So, on this point alone, the immanentist orientation to the book defies the capacity of the critic to assert or maintain the constancy of the book (generically, structurally, etc.) across its multiple variations. Because the immanentist orientation shifts the basis of power from that which is posed from without, or that which *enters* (e.g., the critic, the external judgment), to that which is *entered* or “participated” in (i.e., the book), the latter is now understood in terms of its capacity to envelop, to contain or capture, its own outside, and to express that formerly foreign presence differentially. So what then becomes of those transcendent measures? They burn up in the fire. The book—extrapolating from Deleuze-Guattari—“captures everything.” It “absorbs All-One”; it devours, and “leaves nothing remaining.” In other words, the book leaves nothing untouched, nothing that transcends it, nothing to which it remains subordinate—e.g., the critic, the “judgment of God.” Immanence, for its part, consumes its outside: it “absorbs All-One”; it devours and “leaves nothing remaining.” In fact, any transcendent measure of the book (any “judgement of God”) cannot, on the one hand, *participate* in, alter, or control the book, from without, while at the same time retaining something of itself, something essentially unscathed, in the process: critical judgments cannot remain intact; they cannot remain transcendent. Rather, they are destined to “burn, burn, burn like fabulous yellow roman candles exploding like spiders across the stars.” But how?

### ***Hölderlin’s Bell***

Speaking before the University of Freiburg, in 1943, on the poetry of Friedrich Hölderlin, Martin Heidegger confesses that “we still do not know to this very hour what



Hölderlin's poems truly are" (222).<sup>141</sup> At first blush these words have a familiar ring to them, one not uncommon in literary critical circles (e.g., a requisite nod to the master, a show of humility). We might then expect him to follow with a demonstration of his own superior critical skills—i.e., his capacity to wrestle the literary artefact to the ground: to track it, trap it, and bag it, like a *big game* hunter. But, in this instance, Heidegger seems to be making a comment about the essential remoteness or inaccessibility of Hölderlin's poetry, that which holds *all* critics at bay. His complete statement on the matter reads,

in spite of the names 'elegy' [e.g., Hölderlin's "song of mourning"] and 'hymn' [e.g., Hölderlin's "song of praise"], we still do not know to this very hour what Hölderlin's poems truly are. The poems appear like a shrine without a temple, which preserves what has been made into poetry. [Then] amid the noise of "unpoetic languages" (IV, 257) the poems are like a bell that hangs in the open air and is already becoming out of tune through a light snowfall that is covering it. (222)<sup>142</sup>

Heidegger's point here is that, for various reasons, the poems frustrate the analytical and interpretative *overtures* of the critic—those that may involve, for example, the tracing of certain generic, structural, and/or tropological patterns in and through the object of study; or that may involve the tracking of signifiers, or the reproduction of authorial intent (or the intentions of the competent reader). Whatever the case, the poems resist this type of overcoding;<sup>143</sup> they resist representation, and all related measures of control and

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<sup>141</sup> These comments were later reproduced in an appendix to the second edition of Heidegger's collected essays on Hölderlin, entitled, *Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry*.

<sup>142</sup> Note: The cited phrase, "unpoetic languages," in this passage comes from a late, untitled fragment by Hölderlin: "...he has strewn / Our land with many languages, unpoetic, and / This rubbish continues / To this very hour" (qtd. in Heidegger, 148).

<sup>143</sup> Which, as we know, means that they resist "phenomena of centering, unification, totalization, integration, hierarchization, and finalization" (Deleuze-Guattari, *Plateaus* 41).

containment. In short, the poems resist the critic, and by extension reveal the limits of critical methodologies designed to abstract, generalize, or unveil essential truths about the text. So after acknowledging the limitations of the critical community (vis-à-vis the Hölderlin oeuvre), Heidegger cryptically describes the poems, first, as “a shrine without a temple,” and second—referring to Hölderlin’s poem “Columbus”—as “a bell that hangs in the open air.” Taken together, these suggestive and somewhat complex meta-critical images shift the focus from transcendence to what I call the *immanentist orientation* to literature. Over the next few pages I plan to make liberal use of these provocative phrases to further map the coordinates of the sort of Deleuzian (or materialist) criticism I propose herein—an objective that admittedly moves us far-a-field from Heidegger himself.<sup>144</sup>

To describe a set of poems, then, as “a shrine without a temple” is to suggest—at least from a Deleuzian perspective—that just as the sanctified space of the shrine somehow contains or *enshrines* something greater than itself, something other than, or outside, itself—that which may be expressed in a singular way (as a state of becoming) across the absolute surfaces of the shrine, though never fully possessed, nor rendered intelligible, by such—similarly, Hölderlin’s poems express something that not only exceeds the generic or structural tags conventionally attributed to those poems (e.g., “*elegy*,” “*hymn*”), but the capacity of the rational mind to interpret or make sense of them, as well. So while the critic might be *affected* by her experience of the poems, and

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<sup>144</sup> While I—much like Maurice Blanchot (as I will discuss below)—find Heidegger’s images in this context entirely useful for exploring the sort of critical landscape that concerns us here, Heidegger’s “nostalgia” for *being-in-the-world* (i.e., “Dasein”), or, as Derrida would say, for a “metaphysics of presence,” really has no place in this discussion. That is, we are in no way concerned with questions of essential being, or with the elucidation of texts, but with the capacity of the book (1) to encounter its radical outside, and (2) to become-different. Most assuredly, these are *not* Heidegger’s questions, though his relationship to Deleuze remains an open question in Deleuze scholarship. For example, Lawlor provocatively argues, “I think that it is no exaggeration to say that *Difference and Repetition* is Deleuze’s *Being and Time*” (*Thinking* 96).

by the attendant feelings they generate—what Wordsworth (in *Tintern Abbey*) describes as “a sense sublime / Of something far more deeply interfused” (ll. 94–6)—any ensuing knowledge or rational appreciation of a given set of poems only takes shape at a latter stage of conscious reflection through various acts of objectification and representation (e.g., identifying the poems; cross-referencing them; assessing their resemblances to, and/or opposition from, similar forms; linking them to some sort of discursive or critical framework, and so on). While knowledge evolves through fixed practices, habitual associations, and expected outcomes—i.e., models of recognition—affective encounters take shape or unfold through singular experiences of the poems, in the here and now.<sup>145</sup>

Before we discern meaning, then, in any context, experience, or encounter—artistic or otherwise—before we recognize form, we intuit *forces*, or better, an ensemble of impersonal and non-human forces (time, weight, gravity, pressure, germination, electro-magnetism, information, dissipation, attraction/repulsion, contraction/expansion, constitution/dissolution, etc.—the list is surely long); we intuit forces through their *effects*, both variable and transformative, on/in/through the body in question (e.g., movement, propulsion, speed/rest, inertia, vibration, agitation, fear, trauma, pain, convulsion, deformation, exhilaration, sympathy/antipathy, loneliness/seclusion). That is, all forces are non-localized—i.e., neither possessed by, nor reducible to, the bodies, themselves (nor to any actualized form): “Newton did not see gravity. He felt its effect: a pain in the head” (Massumi, *Parables* 160). So forces operate virtually, ceaselessly

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<sup>145</sup> I am not, though, proposing a simple return to empirical models, whereby the intelligible is said to derive from sensible forms or sensory impressions. Nor am I arguing (following Kant) that experience of the poems is rationally mediated by set categories of the mind, and thereby guaranteed by the perceiving subject, or the “I.” Instead, following Deleuze’s concept of “transcendental empiricism,” I am placing the emphasis on the transformative relations between “the concrete richness of the sensible” (Deleuze-Parnet, *Dialogues* 54) and the contingent, yet unthought, conditions of all singular experience. This emphasis, as I will show, truly affirms *life* or life-force—i.e., the power and untapped capacities of the poems.

colliding, interacting with, and reciprocally determining one another: “A ‘force’ is the set of invisible, untouchable, self-renewing conditions according to which certain effects can habitually be expected to appear.” As those habitual reactions increase, the effect or charge of the force (in and through the body) is effectively dampened or quelled—just as institutional, transcendent-oriented criticism dampens the forces upon literature (or the book). But as forces are registered anew, the body is newly charged or re-vitalized (e.g., feelings grow stronger, capacities swell, the “pain in the head” intensifies).

So how, then, are forces registered in and through poetry (or through art)? Forces can be intuited, as Massumi argues, through repeatable force-effects (*Parables* 161). Forces add to reality; they extend or augment reality; they are *of* the wider make-up of reality, but are not, strictly speaking, *in* reality. They are neither actualized, nor actualisable, and so require some conduit of expression, some conveyance device. Deleuze labels that device *sensation*: forces are the contingent condition of all sensation. But the story does not end there. Just as forces require some form of conveyance, similarly sensation—i.e., that which conveys force—requires a material medium of its own through which to be expressed or distributed. In an artistic milieu, sensation expresses itself through the various materials employed by artists (words, paints/colours, sounds, etc.); and those materials are the logical conduits for some form of sensory expression because they, themselves, cannot be owned by, or reduced to the actions of, a single artist or a single work of art. That is, language, sound, clay, stone, metal, wood, colour, and so forth—again, the various materials employed by artists—are all open systems. They each, in their own way, retain the capacity to be plugged into, or machined by, their non-actualized outsides, and to be effectively stressed by those outsides. They

each retain the capacity to both register and transform the forces thrust upon them through non-mimetic channels of sensation. I say “non-mimetic” in this context because the various sensations of which a material body is made or composed in no way represent, copy, or imitate the forces they embody. While the body indexes the action of a forcible stimuli, that which suggests the play (or working) of a radical, non-actualized outside—because again we only *know* that outside through the effects it produces in and through a given material—that material, in its turn, will have its own unique way of expressing those forces.

But there is one final stage to the process. Sensations, themselves—though registered materially, in and through *any* body, in *any* context or setting—have a mode of expression particular to art itself. In *What is Philosophy?*, Deleuze-Guattari refer to the sensory relays of the artist—i.e., the passage of sensation in a uniquely artistic milieu—as compounds of *affect* and *percept*. These concepts will be discussed later in the dissertation, so let me just say, briefly, that for Deleuze-Guattari all art, and the aggregates of percept, affect, and sensation from which that art is composed, has an ontology of its own—an aesthetic ontology. In fact, Deleuze-Guattari refer to works of art as “beings of sensation” (165): “we paint, sculpt, compose, and write with sensations. We paint, sculpt, compose and write sensations” (166); and through the rendering of that sensation—again, in and through the uniquely artistic languages of affect and percept—art “must stand up on its own” (164), independent of all external support. Put another way, art is in no way subordinate to the non-actualized forces it registers—in the way that the book (among critics committed to the transcendent-orientation) is invariably rendered subordinate to, say, various generic, structural, or narrative constraints, by being thought

an extensive copy or instantiation of those abstractions. Rather, art has its own integrity, its own set of powers. Art slows down and channels (i.e., gives a material rendering to) a set of contingent forces; it takes an accounting of those forces—or better, *preserves* them in variable states of action and reaction, strength and weakness. So for Deleuze-Guattari, all art is defined by its actualization of those non-actualized forces: art preserves, and, by extension, gives consistency to, the variable forces it embodies. In essence, art is defined through its basic acts of preservation and expression, and so too poetry—i.e., poetry preserves forces; it “preserves,” as Heidegger says, “what has been made into poetry.”

To summarize: all forces act on one another, and do so in ways that leave those forces either strong or weak, active or reactive; the poems (or whatever the art in question) *express* the relative power of those forces, and in ways that the actual materials (e.g., language, paint, etc.) of the artist will allow. So, in the case of poetry, force is actualized through language: through words, grammar, and syntax. In painting, force is actualized through colour; in sculpture, through clay or stone; in music, through sound, and so forth. Whatever the case, all artists are tasked with “making the invisible forces visible in themselves” (Deleuze-Guattari, *What is?* 182), and doing so (as I will show) by stimulating the expressive capacities of their chosen materials—i.e., forcing them to their limits—so as to see what they can do, or better, what they might *become*: “the artist is always adding new varieties to the world” (175).

We return, now, to this image of the “shrine without a temple.” To detach the shrine from the temple (in this metaphor) is to attribute an ontological independence to the work of art, whereby it becomes what Deleuze-Guattari call a “being of sensation”? In *What is Philosophy?*, for example, they argue that “the only law of creation is that the

compound must stand up on its own. The artist's greatest difficulty is to make [art] *stand up on its own*" (164). That is, art must stand up independent of both the artist and the critic (or audience); independent of representation; independent of the formal, generic, structural, narratorial, etc. forms imposed on it, from without; and ultimately, independent of the various idealisms discussed in Part 1 of the dissertation. Deleuze-Guattari claim that art "is no less independent of the viewer or hearer, who only experience it after" than it is "of the creator through *the self-positing of the created*" (my emphasis). The "created" is "self-positing," they argue, precisely because the sensations, affects and percepts, of which all art is composed, "are *beings* whose validity lies in themselves and exceeds any lived." In other words, works of art do not require subjects (of reflection)—ideal or otherwise—nor can they be reduced to formal objects (of contemplation), in order to validate or authorize them. Nor are they authorized through *doxa*, or critical opinion, as a condition of either their production or reception. So the point remains that regardless of how critics actually interpret the literary artefact, because works of art, as Deleuze-Guattari contend, must ultimately stand up on their own, as "beings of sensation," and because they remain perpetually open to non-actualized forces, their meaning or value will always exceed or escape the grasp of the critic. So, of course, we "still do not know to this very hour what Hölderlin's poems truly are": in fact, we can never *know* anything conclusive, but this is of no concern to the materialist critic.

We should recall that Heidegger characterizes the poems not just as a "shrine," but as "a shrine *without* a temple." From a Deleuzean perspective, the temple—with its centralized and hierarchical structures of authority, its dogmatic interpretations (of biblical scripture, of culture and society, of politics, of moral law, of heaven and hell, and

so forth), and its power to codify and/or standardize those interpretations—not only houses the shrine, but extracts—or, in Deleuzo-Guattarian parlance, *detrterritorializes*—the secret of the shrine (or at least the semblance of secrecy), and makes that secret its own. In other words, the shrine is *reterritorialized*<sup>146</sup> in the temple, where its history will likely be re-written (i.e., re-conceived, re-evaluated, with parts of it altered or suppressed) in accordance with the temple’s own moral and/or socio-political imperatives. Deleuze-Guattari might also suggest that the temple authority *captures*<sup>147</sup> the shrine—again, territorially speaking—in order to extract from it a kind of “proprietary rent” (*Plateaus* 442), and thereby profit from its purely emotive power, its related suggestion of hidden knowledge, and its capacity to “work” on (stimulate, express) the passionate commitments of the people, before then channelling those surplus values back into its own coffers. The shrine, for its part, becomes woven into both the narratorial and historical fabric of the temple, and hence the wider religious tradition to which the temple authority belongs. So by capturing the shrine, cloaking it in a veil of the temple’s own social or institutional authority (i.e., its own legitimacy), promoting or ramping up its holiness (by, for example, consecrating the ground upon which it stands), and assuming the capacity to authorize or validate any and all interpretations of the shrine, the temple redirects that powerful semiotic back towards itself (as keeper of the shrine), in a ceaseless feed-back loop of *holy* energies.

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<sup>146</sup> Reterritorialization is the process whereby newly decoded (or deterritorialized) *flows*—e.g., the flow of desire, of signs, of production, of commodities, etc.—are re-invested, often (but not exclusively) in the political and/or socio-economic landscape, or in realms where ownership and control are acknowledged.

<sup>147</sup> In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze-Guattari view the State, itself, as an “apparatus of capture” that operates by (1) taking hold of given territories—such as, the territory of the shrine; (2) *overcoding* those territories by unifying their differential codes (semiological, moral, etc.) under the strict purview of a centralized authority; and, as Bonta and Protevi argue, (3) “channeling their flows into a centralized organism [e.g., the temple] or system” (52).



What I propose, in any case, following Deleuze-Guattari, is a kind of criticism—or what might best be described as a *critical mapping*—“entirely oriented toward an experimentation in contact with the real” (*Plateaus* 13). This form of experimentation does not reproduce an unconscious closed in upon itself; it constructs the unconscious. It fosters connections between fields, the removal of blockages on bodies without organs, the maximum opening of bodies without organs onto a plane of consistency... The [critical] map is open and connectable in all of its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification. It can be torn, reversed, adapted to any kind of mounting, reworked by an individual, group, or social formation. It can be drawn on a wall, conceived of as a work of art, constructed as a political action or as a meditation. (13–4)

The opportunity to produce “art” or to stage some form of “political action” becomes a potent counter-balance to the forms of critical transcendence that have long dominated the discourse of literary criticism. For example, the critic does not simply “reproduce” or trace, say, the historical unconscious of the book, but actively and *creatively* “constructs the unconscious” anew. How? By fostering novel connections between the book and its outside; by removing blocks, maximizing openings, and unleashing new powers (or new potentials) along a line of flight. The critic, in short, operates from the premise that the book-body “absorbs [an] excess of potential” (Massumi, “Introduction” xxxii)—too great to be expressed—and assumes the task of unfolding that potential, or of carrying forward the felt intensities of the book, so as to “[magnify] its creative momentum” (xxxix). The critic, in a sense, becomes a catalyst, by propelling the non-actualized forces of the book:

To tend the stretch of expression, to foster and inflect it rather than trying to own it, is to enter the stream, contributing to its probings: this is co-creative, an aesthetic endeavour. It is also an ethical endeavour, since it is to ally oneself with change: for an ethics of emergence. (xxii)

So again, the critic acts not on the book, but on the non-book, or the outside-book, through the non-mimetic mapping (i.e., activation and propulsion) of a field of potential. This involves *not* representation, but an elemental “shift” in focus, as Bosteels claims, “from textuality to territoriality” (147), in an effort to construct anew the textual cartographies of the book.

To begin to understand the role of the critic in this material re-mapping of the book, we need recall Heidegger’s second characterization of the Hölderlin’s poems, as “a bell that hangs in the open air.” This image, in fact, is a paraphrase from a late poetic fragment by Hölderlin, entitled “Colombo,” which reads as follows:

Put out of tune  
By humble things, as by snow,  
Was the bell, with which  
The hour is rung  
For the evening meal. (qtd. in Heidegger, 22)

On this point, renowned French novelist and literary critic, Maurice Blanchot<sup>148</sup>—in a brief, yet dense essay, “What is the Purpose of Criticism?”<sup>149</sup>—picks up the narrative:

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<sup>148</sup> Blanchot was also a journalist, political dissident, philosopher, social and cultural critic. He contributed widely to French journals on the work of various authors (e.g., Mallarmé, Proust, Kafka, Hölderlin, Heidegger, Sartre, Levinas, Bataille), on classical figures or myths (e.g., Orpheus, the Furies, Siren’s Song), and on certain questions of literature that, to varying degrees, have since become familiar concerns for literary criticism (e.g., writing, reading, authorship, the book, presence/absence, inside/outside, literary language, narrative, the gaze, the other, friendship, conversation, singularities, and, most notably, death).

This empty movement [of the falling snow upon the bell], impalpable and a bit icy, disappears within the heated agitation it instigates. Here, critical discourse, having neither lasting effect nor reality, would like to dissolve within creative affirmation: it is never criticism that speaks, when it speaks, it is nothing. This is impressive modesty, and yet, on the other hand, perhaps not so modest. Criticism is nothing, but this nothingness is precisely that in which the literary work, silent and invisible, allows itself to be what it is. (4)

So Blanchot claims that the *shearing forces* of the critic, much like the chance effects of a light snowfall, will disturb the deep, interior silences of the poem—its stillness, its equanimity; in so doing, the critic (or better, the critical encounter) activates the text, enabling it (in some way, and to some unknown extent) to ring in an *untimely* fashion (more on this in a moment). Blanchot further claims that the critic, upon forcing the book to its limits, quickly absents herself from the *space* (or “zone of indeterminacy”)<sup>150</sup> opened up by the book’s becomings. But is this mere “modesty”? No. The critic’s “penchant for self-effacement” (3) in this context reflects the effort to simply not stand in the way, or to occlude, the book’s positive openings—those wrought by the activation of its own critical function (or capacity to *go critical*).<sup>151</sup> So after having opened the book up to its own becomings, thus enabling it to overcome its outwardly imposed controls (or transcendent orientation)—i.e., its textuality, its discursual constraints, its semiotic

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<sup>149</sup> Blanchot’s essay was written as a short preface and appended to the 1963 republication of his work, *Lautréamont and Sade*—a book of criticism, originally published in 1949.

<sup>150</sup> Massumi writes, “A crack has opened in habit, a ‘zone of indeterminacy’ is glimpsed in the hyphen between the stimulus and the response. Thought consists in widening that gap, filling it fuller and fuller with potential responses, to the point that, confronted with a particular stimulus, the body’s reaction cannot be predicted” (“User’s Guide,” 99).

<sup>151</sup> Or what I prefer to call, following Brian Massumi, its own “criticality” (*Parables* 109).

capture by various institutional regimes, its interpretative history, etc.—*only then*, with the book’s assertion of its own difference, does the critic dissolve or disappear into the background: “This is impressive modesty, and yet, on the other hand, perhaps not so modest.”

Of note in the Hölderlin excerpt, quoted above, is the fact that the snow puts the bell “out of tune”—out of tune, not only in the sense of sounding different, or better, sounding *difference* (i.e., giving difference itself a sonorous hearing), but also, I would argue, in the sense of being *out of time*. That is, the snow triggers the ring of the bell, and in doing so causes the bell to ring in an “untimely” fashion, to borrow a term from Nietzsche.<sup>152</sup> Deleuze, who was himself fond of this notion of the *untimely*, likens the concept to what he calls *pure becomings*. In *Negotiations*, Deleuze argues that “Becoming isn’t part of history; history amounts only to the set of preconditions, however recent, that one leaves behind in order to ‘become,’ that is, to create something new. This is precisely what Nietzsche calls the Untimely” (171). So the untimely ring of the bell in Hölderlin’s poem is important for the discord or dissonance it introduces into the historical *and* social situation of the community. That is, the sounding of the bell had, historically, marked the dinner hour, and had, in turn, set in motion a specific set of actions (or reactions) within the community related to the rituals of dinner; in so doing, the bell had come to play a pivotal role in the development of a communal order.

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<sup>152</sup> In *Untimely Meditations*, Nietzsche suggests that his work, his “meditation too is untimely, because I am here attempting to look afresh at something of which our time is rightly proud—its cultivation of history—as being injurious to it, a defect and deficiency in it; because I believe, indeed, that we are all suffering from a consuming fever of history and ought at least to recognize that we are suffering from it” (60). I have similarly argued that the “cultivation” of organized histories in and through the discourse of literary criticism may also be “injurious” to the expressive capacities of the book.

Now the snow, silently falling, strikes a new chord. On this point, we borrow a phrase from *Hamlet*—a phrase that Deleuze was also fond of—“the time is out of joint” (I.V.206). That is in the latter stages of Hölderlin’s poem, he equates the untimely ringing of the bell, “By humble things, as by snow,” with a kind of heavenly impatience; he writes, “The earth grew angry, and hurried, while they cried / Manna and Bread from Heaven” (ll.23–4). With the falling of the snow, then, the bell is put “out of tune” by the hungry gods, crying “Manna and Bread”: in effect, the gods hasten the dinner hour. So being *out of tune* in this context not only means sounding different/difference, but also means *being out of step* with the community in terms of its rituals and customs, its forms of order and organization. The bell, then, until this purely fortuitous point in time, had been ‘tuned in’ to the operations of the community in very regulated and enduring ways. As suggested, the sound of the bell had always meant something very specific to the people, and had always functioned in lock step with the communal clock. But it would take little more than a *humble* snow to scramble those codes. As Blanchot claims, the snow “disappears within the heated agitation it instigates” (“Preface” 4); and so, with no particular designs of its own, the snow, by chance, lands on the bell and to a sufficient degree sets it in motion—i.e., the snow agitates the bell. That slight release of energy then melts the snow. Put another way, the bell acts—it agitates, it heats, it sounds, and it melts the snow.

To be clear, the important question here is not so much what does it mean for Hölderlin’s poetry to be constructed (imagined, recognized, etc.) in these ways, but what does it mean for the critic to approach poetry (or, more broadly, literature or the book) in a way that deliberately departs from or disrupts the sort of institutional critical models

represented in the first of Heidegger's two images by the transcendent figure of the *temple*? That is, I view these images as provocations, even aggressions, directed squarely at the critic. The question now becomes, *how* do critics engage (i.e., orient themselves to, operate upon) the book in ways that not only eschew the temple, but affirm the expressive capacities of the book, and hence, what I call the immanentist orientation to literature—an orientation that Heidegger himself never reached? And to be clear, Blanchot, like Heidegger, remains committed to the idea that criticism “lack[s] in almost any substance of its own” (2); that “it must obliterate itself,” and that “in the end it disintegrates,” “drifts into transparency,” or simply “disappear[s]” (“Preface” 4). On these points, he and Heidegger are in lock step. Blanchot further reveals his Heideggerian colors when he claims, for instance, that by absenting herself from the text, the critic (or the criticism) “allows [the text] to be what *it is*” (my emphasis), or allows it to come into the full light of its own being. He also suggests that criticism “seeks to disappear...so that [the] poem may truly appear.” So as suggested above, impulses such as these are very far-a-field from the sort of Deleuzian criticism that interests us here.

But saying, as Blanchot does, that criticism “lack[s] in almost any substance of its own,” is not the same as saying that criticism is some kind of illusion, or is somehow unreal, or that critics and their work do not exist. Of course, critics, criticism, et al. are entirely real, and in fact play a seminal role in relation to literature, but that role (or better, that *humble* task) involves opening up literature to its own becomings—i.e., its own capacity to become-different. As I will show in Chapter 4, the critic is tasked with clearing *space*, or with clearing what Blanchot calls (in a phrase highly reminiscent of Deleuze-Guattari) a “space of resonance” (“Preface” 4)—i.e., an “open space into which

the poem moves.”<sup>153</sup> In *effect*—and ‘effect’ alone—the poem vibrates, and within the brief spatio-temporal interval created by that vibration, it opens up to its own potential, its own expressive capacities. In that sense the materialist critic makes pivotal, even essential, contributions to what Blanchot calls the very “possibility of literary experience” (5) by activating the auto-critical processes of the text; when active, then, that criticality asserts itself “as one of [the text’s] essential moments.”

So while, on the one hand, criticism may be tasked with “catalyzing the very creation process” (Blanchot, “Preface” 4), on the other hand, criticism *effectively* disappears with the completion of that task. In other words, after sending a quick charge in and through the text (i.e., catalyzing it), the materialist critic, just as quickly, vacates the premises, lest her criticism(s) interrupt, suspend, or disrupt the catalysis—i.e., the unfolding reaction. In other words, critics need to be self-effacing, but this is precisely the impulse that they have struggled with in the discourse of literary criticism. In a word, critics *loiter*. They won’t go away. They never go away. They become groupies, insufferable hangers-on, fuelling the cult of (literary) celebrity. Or maybe they just love too much? They shadow, they stalk. Blanchot writes, “Is the critic there to add something to the literary work: to bring out its latent meaning (present as an absence) and to indicate its development within history, little by little raising it toward truth, where in the end the work may become stagnant? But why might the critic be necessary for this task?” (2–3). *Why*, indeed? The fact is literature does not need the critic, *except* perhaps in the way the flower needs the bee. That is, criticism might be thought of as an act of pollination—an

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<sup>153</sup> Blanchot’s complete statement reads, “If criticism is this open space into which the poem moves, if it seeks to disappear in front of this poem, so that this poem may truly appear, this is because this space and this movement toward self-effacement (which is one of the ways in which this space manifests itself) may already belong to the reality of the literary work and also be at work within it, while it takes shape, only moving outside it when it has achieved its purpose and to accomplish that purpose” (“Preface” 4).

act which is *essential* to the continued growth or unfolding life of the plant. The problem is that unlike the bee, the critic does not know (when) to leave. The critic hangs around, admiring his handiwork. But as Blanchot makes clear, “criticism does not manifest literature. Criticism is not one of the ways in which literature asserts itself” (1). That is, literature—even while it may bear the weight of the judgment of God, or of the logic of representation, and even while it may, at times, be hard to distinguish from the various fogs and miasmas (i.e., the enduring organizational standards) that have historically diminished or diluted it—does not express or affirm itself through the transcendent measures of the critic. It escapes those standards. But “such a disparaging view as this one,” according to Blanchot, “does not fluster criticism. It openly welcomes it, as if, on the contrary, this very lack revealed its deepest truth” (2). As we will see more clearly in Chapter 4, critical experiment has a vital role to play in relation to the text. That is, it makes an entirely productive contribution to the very capacity of literature to flower (*behold, the critic-pollinator!*). This is why, as Blanchot claims, the critic may not be “so modest”; that is, there may be no more dramatic and ultimately powerful contribution that the critic can make to the text than to open it up to its own becomings, its own difference.

### ***Conclusion: The Thought of Immanence***

As we know from Part 1 of this dissertation, the immanentist orientation can be eclipsed or occluded; it can be denied, though never fully extinguished. The enemy of immanence in a literary critical setting is habitual, static, or merely redundant modes of thought, what Deleuze, in *Difference and Repetition*, calls “the dogmatic image of thought” (158)—that is, a set of fixed presuppositions about *why* we think, or about *what* constitutes critical thought. The dogmatic image remains partial to certain fixations of the



mind that invariably follow, and hence reinforce, specific conventions, rules, and pre-established norms, which serve primarily to control thinking (or thought) from without.

Comparatively, though, the immanentist orientation becomes a matter of what Deleuze-Guattari describe as “finding one’s bearings in thought” (*What is?* 53); that is, it involves “a sort of groping experimentation” (41) with the outside of thought, with the *un*-thought, whereupon any semblance of fixed meaning or understanding remains either provisional or illusory. When we think critically—or when we *actually* think, and not just go through the motions—we think not from a secure foundation that somehow escapes or transcends our perception of, or engagement with, the world. In fact, as Deleuze claims in *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, “immanence is the very vertigo of philosophy” (180); and later, with Guattari, he argues that “a re-orientation of the whole of thought”—on *the plane of immanence* (cf. note 13, above)—“is in principle penetrated by a certain delirium” (*What is?* 52–3), such that “the needle of every compass goes mad” (52). This notion of “vertigo” suggestively links immanence to a kind of mental or physical disorientation, to instability, and to a generalized sense of confusion. Hence, in a state of vertigo, there are no fixed points of reference in the surrounding environment, nothing to seize hold of, no fixed ground upon which to stand. Similarly, the concept of “delirium” reinforces the link between immanence and, for example, hallucinatory experiences, or feelings of unreality, confusion, etc. So, to this point, the immanentist orientation I pose is fuelled by altered states of consciousness—e.g., by vertigo, delirium, madness, irrationality, esoteric experience, dreams, drunkenness, excess, and so forth. The coherence of critical perspectives, or of the critic’s own identity, which is typically associated with fixed subjects grounded in specific subject positions, quickly dissipates.

The immanentist orientation *is*, first and foremost, an active, fully absorbed, fully integrated mode of thinking that in no way conforms to the requirements of any overarching or transcendent principle of thought external to the movements of thinking itself. So where transcendence informs (i.e., organizes, patterns, governs) the critic's particular orientation to the book, again through fixed parameters in and through which thought occurs, immanence not only frees the critic from those conceits, but opens the critic to her own becomings, her own bodily capacity to intuit the non-actualized forces (or *life*) of the outside-book.

In this chapter, I have advanced an image of literature as conduit or relay for what Deleuze calls “a passage of life”—i.e., for something that exceeds language and overrides conventional associations. Moreover, I have sought to make the case for a kind of criticism that maximizes the expressive powers of the book, and to that end have highlighted a dynamic set of relations, or “enterprise of co-creation,” between critic and text, thereby blurring the lines between the movements of the critical and those of the creative. The basic thesis with which I have been working can be formulated as follows:

*From the perspective of immanence, “criticality”—i.e., the movement of the critical—is no longer the province of the critic, but as Blanchot claims, “an essential moment of the work.” Criticality is involutory, and hence it manifests in and through the creative transformation and becoming-other of the text. So the critic’s twofold task involves both the propulsion and mapping of the critical.*

If literature as a whole is to be understood in terms of its capacity to complexify (or *go critical*), then critics will need to pursue a relationship to literature that endeavours to extract difference (from the plane of immanence), primarily by opening the book to its

own powers of becoming. Kerouac's Sal Paradise was himself a critic—the kind of critic I have in mind in this essay—for two basic reasons: (1) he did not judge; and (2) he sought new possibilities of life by opening passages, forging relations, and tracing lines of flight. *On the Road* is what Deleuze-Guattari call an *assemblage*, both “a machinic assemblage of bodies” (e.g., people, places, vehicles—mixed together, forging new consistencies) and “a collective assemblage of enunciation” (e.g., a way of speaking, a set of gestures, a regime of signs—the sound and expression of a people, both diffuse and circulating; a people yet to come). By plugging bodies into one another, Sal unleashed desires, if not diabolical powers: “My arrival was somewhat like the coming of the strange most evil angel...Apparently Dean had been quiet for a few months; now the angel had arrived and he was going mad again” (Kerouac 183). Sal crossed lines; he extracted new trajectories. He never stopped asking: what's possible?

So from the perspective of immanence, the *critical*—or rather, the singular, “morphogenetic”<sup>154</sup> points (e.g., the points of bifurcation, of intensification, of instability; the phase shifts; the lines, trajectories, and series; the forces and fluctuations) in and through which the text goes critical, releasing something new, something novel vis-à-vis the genesis of textual form—becomes essential to the unfolding text, and to *how* the text, both effectively and necessarily, takes shape in a wholly singular fashion. The critic, as I have argued, *maps* essential movements of the text, or of textual production—that which appears in the moment when creative transformations of the text, in the here and now,

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<sup>154</sup> Deleuze scholar Manuel DeLanda contrasts what he calls the intensive, “inherently dynamic” processes of *speciation* (i.e., the generation of species) with what he calls the “basically static” essentialist accounts of species. In a literary critical context, the concept of “species,” I would argue, finds its rough correlate in the idea of, let us say, literary *genre*. DeLanda writes, “while an essentialist account of species is basically static, a morphogenetic account is inherently dynamic. And while an essentialist account may rely on factors that transcend the realm of matter and energy (eternal archetypes, for instance), a morphogenetic account gets rid of all *transcendent* factors using exclusively form-generating resources which are *immanent* to the material world” (*Intensive* 10).

become separated from the cumulative and collective judgment(s) of critics. In these moments—these truly *creative* and *critical* moments—the very *life* of the text, that which had heretofore been trapped (hidden, restricted, subordinated) under the weight of competing critical judgments, is released and allowed to manifest as an affective power.

Pursuing a form of criticism that affirms literary immanence reflects, I would hold, a certain ethical commitment to literature—a commitment that reveals itself in a threefold way: (1) by affirming immanence, we weaken (if not altogether remove) the critical capacity to subordinate literature to certain categorical imperatives (e.g., meaning, value, significance, genre, and so forth), or, more generally, certain forms of critical representation that get laid, grid-like, overtop of literature, thus partitioning it in certain ways (i.e., ordering and organizing it according to a certain set of critical mandates). As a consequence of this critical overlay, readers are ultimately separated from the concrete, here-and-now reality of the text, and denied their own potentially novel encounters with, or experiences of, literature; (2) by affirming immanence, we divert critical attention away from the transcendent operations of judgment and representation—operations carried out by scholars, in territories completely foreign, completely unrecognizable, to the realms of literary production; instead, critical attention now turns toward the task of bringing literature to its own limits (in ways I will describe later), and exposing it to its own outside; finally (3) by affirming immanence, we affirm the capacity of literature to become-different, and hence to ceaselessly unfold its own unactualized potentials.

Let me say, then, in summary fashion, that moving beyond literary critical transcendence—or rather, the transcendent orientation to the book—involves nothing less than moving beyond (critical) *subjects* and *objects* (of scrutiny); also beyond mutual

understandings, regimes of justification, claims to validity; beyond what Massumi calls “molar-moral containment”; beyond all signifiers and signifieds, identities and categories, interpretations and representations, rules and regulations, abstractions, judgments, generalizations, forced unities, codings and over-codings, authorities and authorizations—in short, all forms of constraint, and hence beyond the ceaseless renewal of Plato’s “poisoned gift.” Criticism that maintains an adherence to transcendence will typically devolve into lecture, into accusation or denunciation, what Jarrett calls “spanking the writer,” or what Foucault calls “[handing] down sentences” from on high (through “the judgment of God”). The book, as I have been arguing, retains an essential capacity for criticality, a capacity to *go critical*. Just as the snow is to Hölderlin’s bell, or the heat is to a boiling pot of water, or the sun is to the greening of the plant, the critic *is* to the book. That is, the critic strives to induce creative transformations in the book, to machine the book (or make it work), “to tend the stretch of expression,” as Massumi says, and thereby open the book to new possibilities. The critic, in fact, must think beyond the book as actualized, or as a visible state of affairs, and instead must orient herself to what Deleuze-Guattari call the “absolute ground” (*What is?* 41) of the book—the so-called “plane of immanence”—in order to re-invest or re-singularize the book, to counter-actualize it, to tap into its expressive power, its power to differ (or become-different), so as to ultimately give the book a new consistency. Our task, then, is to see this kind of criticism in action, which we will do in Chapter 4 of the dissertation. First, though, we pause to take a closer look at the question of materialism.

**Interchapter—**

## **On the Materialist Paradigm**

**A book has neither object nor subject; it is made of variously formed matters, and very different dates and speeds. To attribute the book to a subject is to overlook this working of matters, and the exteriority of their relations. It is to fabricate a beneficent God to explain geological movements.**

**—Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 3)**

## *The Greening of the Plant*

The wisdom of the plants: even when they have roots, there is always an outside where they form a rhizome with something else—with the wind, an animal, human beings...

—Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 11)

I pause in this abbreviated chapter—what I call an “Interchapter”—(1) to provide a brief overview of a number of Deleuzian concepts, which will be put to work in the next chapter; and (2) to plot the primary coordinates of a materialist criticism. Concepts discussed below include the *book*, the *outside*, the *BwO*, the *encounter*, *force*, *singularity*, *affect/sensation*, *expression*, and *becoming*.<sup>155</sup> We will augment our discussion of these concepts, and of materialism, in general, through a brief consideration of an issue well-known to Deleuze: the greening of the plant.<sup>156</sup>

In mapping the complex relational processes associated with acts of *prehension*,<sup>157</sup> Deleuze, in *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, offers the following series of images:

The plant sings of the glory of God, and while being filled all the more with itself it contemplates and intensely contracts the elements [from] whence it proceeds. It feels in this prehension the *self-enjoyment* of its own becoming. (78)

Deleuze—in this somewhat Whitmanesque<sup>158</sup> passage—ties the material processes of the plant to a kind of spiritual testimony (or a bearing-witness to God), and to the consequent

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<sup>155</sup> Other Deleuzian concepts *not* discussed herein, but that will be invoked in the next chapter, and in the Epilogue to this dissertation, include, “*Visions and Auditions*” and the *major/minor* distinction.

<sup>156</sup> Deleuze primarily discusses this matter in *The Logic of Sense*, in relation to his seminal concept of the *event*. See Chapter 3, note 136, for a brief overview of Deleuze’s unique handling of this issue.

<sup>157</sup> In general, the concept of *prehension* refers to the various processes by which bodies grasp, absorb, contract, or somehow make use of things, and has wide-ranging applications in such fields as robotics, neuroscience, biomechanics, optics, mathematics, educational theory, theology, etc. The term would gain prominence in philosophical circles largely through the work of Alfred North Whitehead.

feeling of “*self-enjoyment*.” As well, Deleuze highlights the plant’s capacity to *contract* “the elements” from “whence it proceeds,” or rather, to prehend its source energy through a process he characterizes as *contemplative* in nature. So the plant feels; it thinks; it “sings of the glory of God.” But what is really going on here? Are we trucking in metaphors? Not exactly.<sup>159</sup> Let us take a closer look at this somewhat cryptic statement through a materialist lens.

Sunlight *qua* sunlight remains entirely foreign to the plant, and hence unusable as such; yet that solar energy, in the first of a two-step biochemical process, stimulates the plant in such a way so as to trigger the production of photosynthetic cells—i.e., cells designed to absorb light energy; the plant then converts that unusable solar energy into usable chemical energy (or glucose). In this light-reactive phase, commonly described in terms of “light dependency,” light energy vibrates the surfaces of the plant at productive frequencies through a process/reaction known as “electron excitation.” This first phase of the process then gives way to a second “light-independent” phase of so-called *dark reactions*, whereby the plant converts the energy it receives into carbohydrate or biomass through a process commonly referred to as “carbon fixing.” Stored fuels are then

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<sup>158</sup> I say “Whitmanesque” because I am recalling Deleuze’s claim in a later essay that Whitman “makes something pass between the human body and the tree, in both directions, the body receiving ‘something of [the tree’s] elastic fiber and clear sap,’ but the tree for its part receiving a little consciousness” (*Essays* 59).

<sup>159</sup> In *Dialogues II*, Deleuze-Parnet write, “It is never a matter of metaphor; there are no metaphors, only combinations [of words/signs].” (117). According to François Zourabichvili, “Deleuze undertakes a general critique of metaphor” (194), and does so, in large part, because metaphor blocks the affective becoming of language (i.e., the capacity of words to vary, to become-other). Metaphor closes in upon language—i.e., closes it off, limits its capacities, reduces it to a purveyor of resemblances (through the banal transfer of meaning from one body to another). Metaphor drains language of its vitality. Deleuze-Guattari argue that “The importance some have accorded metaphor and metonymy proves disastrous for the study of language. Metaphors and metonymies are merely effects” (*Plateaus* 77). Elsewhere they add, “*Grasp the world*, instead of extracting impressions from it; work with objects, characters, events, in reality, and not in impressions. Kill metaphor.” (*Kafka* 70). In short, Deleuze concludes that metaphor “just confuses matters and has no real importance” (*Negotiations* 29).



circulated to all parts of the plant, while oxygen (i.e., the plant's primary waste product) is released into the atmosphere through the process of "cellular respiration."

So, in this example, the plant encounters its radical outside, in the form of light energy. That light then stirs the plant to life—or, more precisely, unleashes a series of otherwise nascent biochemical reactions in and through the plant. The plant, then, (1) converts the light energy forced upon it into viable stores of consumable glucose deposits (i.e., food); (2) circulates that glucose through the body of the plant, through a series of intercellular energy transfers; (3) exhales oxygen into the atmosphere; and (4) expresses itself in singular ways in the form of, say, deeper greens, richer blooms, etc.

Moreover, the solar radiation produced by the sun immolates just as its effects are registered or recorded on the surfaces of the plant, which suggests an important link in this context between the immanentist orientation of the sun—reflected by way of various biochemical processes/reactions unleashed in and through the plant, itself—and "fire" (Deleuze-Guattari, *What is?* 45), i.e., immanence as immolation. Put simply, a relation unfolds between the unactualized *forces*<sup>160</sup> of light energy and the consumptive powers of the plant; these powers or material capacities of the plant express themselves, at least in part, through the radical conversion of the plant's source energy into vital nutrients the plant can actually use. So because light cannot govern or control the plant from without (i.e., transcendentally), that energy (or light force) immediately dissipates or turns to ash

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<sup>160</sup> For Deleuze, a *force* is a connective energy that affects and transforms bodies by linking them together. However, forces not only bind bodies, they perpetually disrupt the unity, stability, and/or homeostatic organization (i.e., steady-state) of bodies, as well. That is, bodies are always in transition, or always becoming-other, because of the various forces that act upon them. Those forces might be physical (e.g., gravitational, electro-magnetic), or they might be historical, psychological, social, economic, ecological, legalistic, circumstantial, and so forth. And like the bodies through which a given set of forces may be discerned or intuited, the forces themselves remain in a perpetual state of tension with one another, wherein they pass from being reactive (i.e., limited, subordinated) to being active (i.e., dominating and fully expressive of their potential).

(as far as the plant is concerned) just at the moment that the plant itself registers its own heightened state of electron excitation, and thereby enters into the twofold process of photosynthesis. In all, these multiple chemical reactions unfold at lightening speeds: “It takes eight minutes for a photon of light to travel the 93 million miles from the sun to the Earth’s surface. A green plant needs only a few seconds to capture the energy in that light, process it, and store it in the form of a chemical bond” (Svetlik).

Clearly, these processes, these plant-becomings, are decidedly *not* metaphorical, nor merely theoretical. Through the unleashing of its powers of extraction, consumption, and conversion, the plant enters into a kind of symbiotic relationship with its outside (with the non-plant), and thereby moves beyond the confines of its own steady-state (or homeostasis). The plant grows, blooms, greens, etc.; in fact, its entire survival depends on its uptake of the forces of light energy and, by extension, the various reactions and self-organizing processes duly unleashed by those forces. But all that light energy can really do, vis-à-vis the chain of causation, is stimulate the plant in such a way that it takes up the *advances* of its outside—however impersonal those advances may be. Obviously the sun has no designs on the plant, and vice-versa; the various resonances and couplings discussed here may be habitual, but never inevitable, never expected or assumed. They are always fortuitous. Still, by extracting an electrical charge from the light it encounters on its exposed surfaces—that is, through the manufacture of cellular receptors (or, energy carriers)—and by converting that charge into life-giving glucose through various chemical reactions, the plant, as Deleuze says, “sings of the glory of God.” So by being open to its outside, and by transforming that outside into vital nutrients, the plant

expresses itself in singular ways: it grows; it greens; it blooms; it bears fruit, and thereby “feels in this prehension the *self-enjoyment* of its own becoming.”

Again, there are no acts of recognition here; no prearranged agreements between sun and plant—just the force of an encounter, the opening of a relational field, and the self-organizing (or processual) effects the outside-plant unleashes in the plant, itself. So by registering the effects of solar energy on its leaves—or on any other part of its anatomy, depending on the type of plant involved—the plant, in a sense, *knows* its outside; or, more precisely, the plant *learns* of (read: takes up, invests itself in, orients itself to) the stream of solar energy that it fortuitously encounters. Because “to learn,” according to Deleuze, even among non-human forms (like plants),

is to conjugate the distinctive points of our bodies with the singular points of the objective Idea in order to form a problematic field. This conjugation determines for us a threshold of consciousness at which our real acts are adjusted to our perceptions of the real relations, thereby providing a solution to the problem. (*Difference* 165)

So when forced beyond a certain threshold or operative limit by its encounter with the outside, the plant opens up to what Deleuze calls an “objective Idea” of the sun (or of the solar radiation that strikes its surfaces)—an Idea expressed through the opening of a relational or problematic field, in which the plant *adjusts* itself to its encounter with the sun. The plant’s production of photosynthetic cells, then, speaks to the capacity of the plant-body to forge some sort of liaison between its own parts (e.g., the cells themselves; also, the electron excitation happening at the surface of the plant) and the singular flow of light energy striking the plant at any one time. In effect, the production of these cells is

the plant's "solution" to the "problem" of light energy, just as a human or animal eye is a solution to the same problem—i.e., the problem of registering, relating to, and making use of light. In fact, any one solution will never exhaust the potentially infinite number of ways a given problem, like light energy, can be solved by different organisms. Any solution just brings greater depth and contour to the problem, by demonstrating its ever-widening range of application, but again never *solves* the problem for all time. So, in this instance, the "real acts" of the plant (i.e., the various biochemical processes/reactions, discussed above) reflect the plant's own "perceptions of the real relations" unfolding between itself and its source energy. We recall from the Introduction to this dissertation that those relations cannot be reduced to their terms (i.e., their *relata*); but those *relata* derive an individual organization, and a related set of meanings, values, and purposes (e.g., the sun *becomes* a life-giving source of energy for the plant; the plant bears fruit, aspirates oxygen, etc.) from the independent unfolding of those relations. Hence the vibratory effects of solar energy on the plant enable the plant to express itself in ways it could or would not on its own.

Finally, this suggestion that "the plant sings of the glory of God" should in no way index the renewal of transcendence, nor should it connote the total isolation or self-same inwardness of the plant; as we know, all things (including plants) enter into absolutely essential relations or encounters with their outside. The thing to remember, though, is that that outside cannot be folded, as such, into the plant itself without being converted to the plant's own material and processual stuff. So the plant *owns* (or better, actualizes) its outside, as evidenced by its ceaseless power or capacity to differ along continuous lines of variation: the plant grows, it greens, it flowers—it becomes-other.

## *Literary Matters*

The writer's position is no different from that of the painter, musician, or architect. The writer's specific materials are words and syntax, the created syntax that ascends irresistibly into his work and passes into sensation.

—Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (*What is Philosophy?* 167 )

So what can we take away from the above example in our effort to forge a uniquely materialist orientation to the book? To begin, I would point out that materialism is in no way driven by the need to render opinion or to build moral and/or communal consensus about the book. A materialist criticism experiments with the book, machines the book (by forcing it to its limits), and thereby creates new possibilities for the book, new modes of expression, new *flowerings*, if you will. Foucault describes it best:

From the moment that [critical] discourse ceases to follow the slope of self-interiorizing thought and, *addressing the very being of language*, returns thought to the outside; from that moment, in a single stroke, it becomes a meticulous narration of experiences, encounters, and improbable signs. (“Thought” 429; my emphasis)

From a materialist perspective, the question now becomes how best to “[address] the very being of language”—i.e., language from the point-of-view of its uptake of forces, and its related capacity to vary (or become-different)? The critic's experience of the dynamic actualization of those non-actualized forces, then prompts “a meticulous narration” (or a mapping) of the book's transformative encounters with its outside, or, as Foucault says, its production of “improbable signs.”

I would suggest further that the book operates as what Deleuze-Guattari call a *body without organs*. That is, the book is a “recording surface” (*Anti-Oedipus* 10), or degree zero of intensity. It resists organization, stratification, and the judgment of God:

In order to resist organ-machines, the body without organs presents its smooth, slippery, opaque, taut surface as a barrier. In order to resist linked, connected, and interrupted flows, it sets up a counter-flow of amorphous, undifferentiated fluid. In order to resist using words composed of articulated phonetic units, it utters only gasps and cries that are sheer unarticulated blocks of sound. (9)

So the book—or what might more aptly be called the *book-body without organs* (hereafter, B-BwO)—resists the imposition of codes, or preset values and meanings. However, the forcible capture and confinement of the book’s intensive movements—i.e., its powers of emergence, its capacity to vary, to affect, to self-organize, to *go critical*—by way of “an over-all persecution apparatus” (i.e., institutional criticism) can obscure the B-BwO by imposing various striations (generic, narratorial, etc.) over its flexible surfaces. That is, the book may be subordinated to certain lines of articulation, certain *segments*,<sup>161</sup> which are not only forced on the book, but made into essential laws of the book, or into regulatory regimes that convert the book’s unlimited becomings into homeostatic mechanisms.

By way of example, think of the B-BwO as a blank stretch of electro-magnetic tape—a favored example of Deleuze-Guattari that obviously had more purchase in 1972

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<sup>161</sup> Deleuze-Guattari develop this notion of “segmentarity” in *A Thousand Plateaus*, in their plateau on micropolitics. They write that “Segmentarity is inherent to all the strata composing us...life is spatially and socially segmented” (208). So, for our purposes, to *segment* the book (read: to subject it to some form of generic, discursive, narratorial, and/or structural organization) is to *stratify* the book—i.e., divide it up, partition and classify it, and thereby rationalize it.

(when *Anti-Oedipus* was first published) than it does today—upon which certain words, images, and sounds are recorded. In itself, the tape is “non-productive,” and yet “perpetually reinserted into the process of production” (8). So while those collected words, images, and sounds, circulating on the B-BwO, converge and collide, quite fortuitously, the tape “presents its smooth, slippery, opaque, taut surface as a barrier,” or as limit to the productive flow of *desire*.<sup>162</sup> That is, the recording surface arrests or repulses the potentially repetitive or habit-forming flow of those desires. The B-BwO, then, as Deleuze-Guattari would say, “belong[s] to the realm of antiproduction,” which, put simply, means that it resists the imposition of generic, formal, or narrative organization (i.e., preset lines of articulation); it resists regulation and categorization, order and organization. It resists abstract standards of judgment, and instead registers the intensive and nomadic distribution of what Deleuze-Guattari would call “desiring-production” that freely traverses its surfaces. In turn, the B-BwO retains the capacity to decompose fixed meanings and values (e.g., common sense, good sense—essential inscriptions/marks on the B-BwO); it retains the capacity to express the unrecognizable, the *asignifying*, the non-human: “sheer unarticulated blocks of sound.” It retains the power of emergence and the inexhaustible capacity to *become*. it retains the capacity to affect, and to be affected. To transform. To differ, to vary. Hence the critical appeal to those material powers of the book—typically obscured by transcendent illusion—becomes the defining moment of the materialist intervention.

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<sup>162</sup> For Deleuze-Guattari, *desire* is understood not as a kind of longing, nor as evidence of a certain subjective lack (as in the Lacanian register), but as an entirely impersonal (read: non-Oedipal, non-coded) flow of socio-material energies/forces unfolding in and between bodies, and across social networks. Desire, then, is variable, free-flowing, and socially productive, and cannot be reduced to a representational logic.

We return, then, to this idea of the book as “recording surface.” The point being made here is that the book has no essential organization. It has no interiority that one can readily access; it has no fixed values or rhetorical/tropological patterns that the critic can simply identify and teach others to identify in the same way, through endless cycles of critical control. To even enter the book and follow the narrative from beginning to end becomes a problem for the materialist critic because it presupposes certain absolutes about the book (e.g., a fixed point of entry, an interiority, an essential organization).<sup>163</sup> By ridding themselves of *transcendence*, then, or by rooting it out wherever it presents itself, the materialist operates through the assumption that, as critics, we act not on the book itself, but on its *virtual multiplicities* (read: the pure excess of the book; or, more generally, the powers or potentials of systems, when forced out-of-phase)—those that subtend the various stratifications of the book. In so doing, the critic releases an intensive matter from the book—i.e., a matter imbued with “variable intensive affects” (Deleuze-Guattari, *Plateaus* 408), with energy levels both escalating and diminishing, with variable powers and capacities, etc.—that crosses established thresholds of book-behavior so as to enable new patterns, possibilities, and powers of the book to emerge. Moreover, because

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<sup>163</sup> From a materialist perspective, this is an important point to emphasize. That is, at the outset of *Kafka* Deleuze-Guattari rhetorically pose the following question: “How can we enter into Kafka’s work?” (3). To this, the authors offer up the following reply: “We will enter...by any point whatsoever; none matters more than another, and no entrance is more privileged, even if it seems an impasse, a tight passage, a siphon.” In both question and answer lie the seeds of *revolution*, or what Baugh calls a “revolutionary pragmatics of reading” (as discussed in the Introduction): a problem, newly revived, reconstituted (e.g., “how can we enter into *Kafka’s* work?”); a defiance (e.g., “we will enter, then, by any point whatsoever”); an agitation (e.g., “none matters more than another, and no entrance is more privileged”); a creative trajectory (e.g., “even if it seems an impasse, a tight passage, a siphon”). Deleuze-Guattari then add, “Only the principle of multiple entrances prevents the introduction of the enemy, the Signifier and those attempts to interpret a work that is actually only open to experimentation.” So the authors know their enemy, the Signifier (or signifying regime of signs); they regard the enemy as “tyrannical, terrorizing, castrating” (Deleuze, *Negotiations* 21), and do so in large part because it remains “stuck in the question ‘What does it mean?’” (22). They also know that their secret weapon in this fight (i.e., “the principle of multiple entrances”) will *destratify* (read: decode, decentralize, de-organize) any critical—or, more broadly, institutional or State-based—apparatus committed to pursuing interpretative domination over the book.



materialists actively call attention to the productive, self-ordering capacities of the book, they shift the focus away from the plane of transcendence (and the various discursive presuppositions that tend to dominate that plane) and re-assert the power of the plane of immanence—a plane that we never left. That is, any and all transcendent illusions of the book are merely fogs that have rolled in, disguising immanence. So the materialist critic is ultimately tasked with renewing or restoring the plane of immanence, or with making felt the unactualized potentials of the book.

From a materialist perspective, then, we ask: what are the positive powers of literature (or of the book)? There are many; arguably chief among them the power “to become” (i.e., become-other, become-different), that from which all other positive and productive powers of the book flow—e.g., the power to affect, to take flight, even *to be*; also the powers of decomposition, expression, and preservation. For the moment, though, let’s stay with this question of becoming and ask, what is this seminal power? And how does it operate in and through a literary (or, more broadly, artistic) register?

Generally speaking, all things (organic and inorganic) *become*: they alter; they vary; they differ—or at least they retain the capacity to do so. The materialist orientation to literature seeks to mobilize those powers of becoming, while transcendent modes of criticism seek to shut them down. That is, the latter block or suppress the becomings of the book—i.e., the book’s inexhaustible capacity to metamorphosize—by subordinating its various intensive capacities (e.g., alteration, variance, decomposition, flight) to a set of semiotic coordinates that locate the book *spatially*:<sup>164</sup> e.g., as textual whole or narrative unity; as generic or structural instantiation; as a period piece (early-modern, romantic); as

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<sup>164</sup> Or *chronologically*, for that matter, which is essentially a spatialized form of time—e.g., clock time, historical time: the time that flows between constants or fixed variables.

self-sustaining, self-sufficient value, etc. These are *effects* of the book. They are (1) lifted from those aforementioned temporalities (or becomings); (2) hypostatized, or given an objective reality; and (3) rendered abstract measures of the literary artifact. As discussed in Part 1, the transcendent orientation to literature reduces the book to a representational logic (e.g., narratorial, structural, figural, axiological, etc.)—an entire critical overlay that unfolds in what Deleuze-Guattari call a supplementary dimension or critical *netherworld*. On this point, the authors argue that “Unity always operates in an empty dimension supplementary to that of the system considered (overcoding)” (*Plateaus* 8), which means that any sort of textual, discursive, structural, or symbolic self-containedness or interiority will always be assigned to the book. Put simply, all self-sustaining unities cannot be derived from the book itself—just as a room cannot be a room by some inward feature of its composition; the supposed presence of those interiorities in the minds of, among others, the New Critics reflects the fact that certain overcoding operations are in play—i.e., “phenomena of centering, unification, totalization, integration, hierarchization, and finalization” (41). Deleuze-Guattari put a fine point on the matter as follows: “unity appears only when there is a power takeover in the multiplicity by the signifier or [by] a corresponding subjectification” (8). So by unifying the book around a fixed body of critical codes, or in and through some sort of aesthetic, linguistic, or narrative logic—in short, a *root* command structure (*think*: literary critical arborescence)<sup>165</sup>—the critic effectively takes control of the book and, with nearly unimpeachable authority, suppresses its vital powers.

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<sup>165</sup> Deleuze-Guattari contrast their concept of the rhizome with that of the tree. The latter indexes the presence of a central (or centralizing) authority. It also denotes fixed modes of organization and structure; fixed points and positions, with homogenous (or regulated) links between them.

While literature retains the power to assert (or make felt) a *virtual* (or unactualized) dimension—which Deleuze variously names difference, Idea, sense, event, multiplicity, the plane of immanence, etc.—through its capacity to become-other, become-different, those becomings are effectively denatured (i.e., robbed of their inherent dynamism) by various critical constants/values that locate the book on a plane of transcendence. But while those aforementioned overcoding operations, those “power takeover[s]” of the book’s multiplicities, may block becomings or short-circuit time (i.e., extract time from the equation), all resultant constancy, and all related forms of textual governance that depend upon, and/or derive from, the perception of that constancy, will remain illusory. In other words, the book never fully renounces its power to become-different; so, in some way or another, the B-BwO continues to vex whatever standards that may be applied to it. Only the immanentist orientation to literature, as discussed in the last chapter, contributes in co-creative ways to the powers of the book, while offering a viable alternative to criticisms of containment, which perpetuate illusory modes of order and organization. In fact, the immanentist orientation marks an important shift in the discourse of literary criticism from *control criticism* to *catalytic criticism*, from critical restraint to critical propulsion. It opens the book up to unseen forces and “unheard-of becomings”; it unleashes a revolutionary potential, so as “to free life from where it’s trapped” (Deleuze, *Negotiations* 141). But how exactly is this accomplished in a literary context?

According to Deleuze, “Literature...moves in the direction of the ill-formed or the incomplete” (*Essays* 1); it *moves*, in other words, toward the breakdown (or unearthing) of its formal unity; it frees itself from the strictures of supposed interiority and the

perception of wholeness—and does so, as suggested above, by overcoming its own spatial coordinates, its own acquired (or externally imposed) forms of equilibrium and constancy. Literary language, Foucault writes, is “language getting far away from itself as possible,” thus escaping representation: “in this setting, ‘outside of itself,’ it unveils its own being, the sudden clarity reveals not a folding-back but a gap, not a turning back of signs upon themselves but a dispersion” (“Thought” 424). Literature, then, in a seeming affront to its New Critical representation as “the well-wrought urn”—i.e., both self-contained and self-sustaining—and to critical models beholden to the values of enlightenment reason, remains in perpetual retreat from the Cartesian ideal of the ‘*clear and distinct*.’ That is, literature reveals itself to be *more*, not less, confused and obscure—though no less singular, no less decisive in its obscurity; it becomes, as Deleuze-Guattari would say, “vagabond, anexact”<sup>166</sup>—i.e., less formal, less available to fixed perception; or rather, more open and unrestrained than most criticisms know how to handle. So just as all things *become*, becoming itself remains essential to the constitution of all things—even if we do not know or see it. At the material level of the text (e.g., words and syntax), for example, subtle forms of agitation and unrest make essential contributions to literary becomings. Consider, then, the following formula: ‘Becoming’ = ‘being’ + ‘time’ (i.e., emergent being; being out-of-phase; being untimely).

As discussed in the last chapter, Deleuze-Guattari describe the work of art as a “being of sensation and nothing else: it exists in itself” (*What is?* 164); they then add that the various “sensations, percepts, and affects,” of which all works of art are composed, “are *beings* whose validity lies in themselves and exceeds any lived”—i.e., any extant or recognizable form. But are we not with this idea of self-validating “beings of sensation”

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<sup>166</sup> See Chapter 3, note 9, for Deleuze-Guattari’s comments on the *anexact*, which they attribute to Husserl.

re-introducing transcendence into the equation? Are we not returning to the idea that *being* can be represented or understood in a wholly abstract way (read: divorced from time; divorced from the flows of becoming)? Not exactly. These so-called *beings of sensation* do not escape their becomings. They are, in fact, emergent beings, untimely beings. Which is to say, any material form—e.g, words, syntax—when pushed out-of-phase through the activation of its affective capacities escapes its “basin of attraction,”<sup>167</sup> and thereby becomes-other. So, in this context, *being* is understood as both affirmation and testament to its own becomings. Deleuze-Guattari describe the matter as follows: being *becomes* sensation when “the plane of the material ascends irresistibly and invades the plane of composition” (166). This *irresistible ascension* toward “the plane of composition,” then, is matter-*in*-movement, or better, matter *as* movement—i.e., matter as a mobile force, in a state far-from-equilibrium. So what we have is self-differentiating matter, matter-becomings, *molecularized* matter: we have materiality.

Hence, the materials of the poem or novel, by being subject to (among other things) various non-actualized forces related to their use or application within the poem itself, collide with one another, stress one another—and do so to the point where the words themselves *crack open*, like atoms, unleashing a wave of expressive power or energy. This type of violence, this boiling over of the text, forces literature from its “basins of attraction” (e.g., meaning, significance, classical syntax, majoritarian grammar); it also dilutes any habitual associations that may be tied to the words (or language) in everyday social contexts, and, as suggested a moment ago, “exceeds any lived.” In short, literature converts its materials into malleable and supple sensory

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<sup>167</sup> This is a term from complexity science that simply speaks to the initial conditions and long-term behavior of a material system—the so-called “state space”—from which all variance effectively flows.

aggregates; it *extracts* from them a revolutionary potential in the form of compounds of sensation. Those materials, in turn, *emerge* not as a language with preset meanings or formal syntax, but as a-syntactical, a-grammatical, and a-signifying vibrations; or, in other words, as *beings of sensation*:

whether through words, colors, sounds, or stone, art is the language of sensations. Art does not have opinions. Art undoes the triple organization of perceptions [i.e., universals of contemplation], affections [i.e., universals of reflection], and opinions [i.e., universals of communication] in order to substitute a monument composed of percepts, affects, and blocs of sensations that take the place of language. The writer uses words, but by creating a syntax that makes them pass into sensation that makes the standard language stammer, tremble, cry, or even sing: this is the style, the “tone,” the language of sensations, or the foreign language within language that summons forth a people to come, “Oh, people of old Catawba” [referring to Thomas Wolfe], “Oh, people of Yoknapatawpha” [referring to Faulkner]. The writer twists language, makes it vibrate, seizes hold of it, and rends it in order to wrest the percept from perceptions, the affect from affections, the sensation from opinion—in view, one hopes, of that still-missing people. (Deleuze-Guattari, *What is?* 176)

We will consider the emergence of “a people to come” or this “still-missing people” in our next chapter. For the moment, suffice to say that only by way of their irresistible ascension into the plane of composition, do the brute materials of literary composition (words, syntax) *become* sensation; that is, they become “beings of sensation.”

So finally, we have alluded to a number of positive powers of the book herein, beyond this seminal powers of becoming: i.e., the power *to enfold* outside forces; “to stand up on its own,” as Deleuze-Guattari say, independent of any external or transcendent support, as “being of sensation”;<sup>168</sup> *to connect* or *machine* (i.e., literature retains the capacity to hook-up, to enter new arrangements, to release or stimulate difference); to “ascend irresistibly” into sensory aggregates; to go critical; to expresses difference; to extract a revolutionary potential; and to bring “new varieties” into the world: “A great novelist is above all an artist who invents unknown or unrecognized affects and brings them to light as the becoming of his characters” (*What is?* 174).

With this, then, we have built a preliminary map of some important Deleuzian concepts, which we will put to work in our readings of Crane’s *The Red Badge of Courage*, Melville’s *Moby-Dick*, William Gass’s *On Being Blue*, and Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass* in the next chapter.

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<sup>168</sup> It bears repeating, however, that literature—despite being its own power of thinking (different from philosophy, different from science), with its own unique forms of action in the world, and its own unique and singular ways of expressing itself—is activated in those capacities by what it is not—by the outside-book, or by outside forces. Literature does not exist in a vacuum, but rather, as Deleuze says in his letter to Cressole, “as a little machine in much more complex external machinery.”

## Chapter 4

### Unwording the Word—

#### On Literary Chromatic *Matters*

At first, it can only be a matter of somehow finding a method by which we can represent this mocking attitude towards the word, *through words*. In this dissonance between the means and their use it will perhaps become possible to feel a whisper of that final music or that silence that underlies All.

—Samuel Beckett (*Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writings*, 172)<sup>169</sup>

One must say of every writer: he is a seer, a hearer, “ill seen ill said” ...a colorist, a musician.

—Gilles Deleuze (*Essays Critical and Clinical*, LV)

The American language bases its despotic official pretensions, its majoritarian claim to hegemony, only on its extraordinary capacity for being twisted and shattered...[for being] a language shot with a spray-gun of colors.

—Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet (*Dialogues II*, 58)

What we look for in a book is the way it transmits something that resists coding: flows, revolutionary active lines of flight, lines of absolute decoding rather than any intellectual culture.

—Gilles Deleuze (*Negotiations*, 23)

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<sup>169</sup> This title for this chapter comes from a comment made by Samuel Beckett in a letter to Axel Kaun, dated 9 July 1937. Beckett suggests that “On the way to this *literature of the unword*, which is so desirable to me...Let us...act like that mad (?) mathematician who used a different principle of measurement at each stage of his calculation. An assault against words in the name of beauty. In the meantime I am doing nothing at all. Only from time to time I have the consolation, as now, of sinning willy-nilly against a foreign language [Note: Beckett writes this letter in German], as I should love to do with full knowledge and intent against my own language—and as I shall do—*Deo juvante* [i.e., “with God’s help” (Latin)]” (173; my emphasis).



As I prepare to write this chapter, I acknowledge the feeling of what W. J. T. Mitchell refers to as *ekphrastic hope*—i.e., “the desire to overcome the ‘impossibility’ of ekphrasis” (154). The *hope* to which Mitchell refers derives from the conviction that any presumed aporia between verbal and visual modes of expression (e.g., words and images, literature and painting) can be overcome through *ekphrasis* (i.e., written or verbal descriptions of so-called “mute” visual forms). For some—especially within the art community—converting the visual, spatial, or plastic arts (e.g., painting, architecture, sculpture, photography, animation, graphics, etc.) into, say, “verbal icon or imagetext,”<sup>170</sup> crosses an aesthetic, if not moral, line in that it subordinates the visual semiotic—including (1) the socio-cultural meanings and values effectuated by that semiotic; (2) the unique sensory and affective attributes of visual forms; and (3) the modes of reception and/or interpretation the visual calls upon in the perceiving subject—to the operative and expressive capacities of a foreign medium (i.e., language). So, in short, because the visual is differently constituted, differently meaningful, and differently perceived,

A verbal representation cannot represent—[i.e.] make present—its object in the same way a visual representation can. It may refer to an object, describe it, invoke it, but it can never bring its visual presence before us in the way pictures do. Words can ‘cite,’ but never ‘sight’ their objects. (152)

While clearly verbal forms cannot “sight” objects, as Mitchell suggests, or represent them “the way pictures do”—i.e., without doing violence to *both* visual and verbal modes of expression in the process—great writers, according to Deleuze, are still able to produce the sort of “Visions and Auditions that no longer belong to any language” (*Essays* 5). In

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<sup>170</sup> Mitchell writes that with ekphrasis, “The estrangement of the image/text division is overcome, and a sutured, synthetic form, a verbal icon or imagetext, arises in its place” (154).

other words, they are able to draw upon the expressive capacity of language for *sight* and *sound*. But how, precisely, does the writer draw this type of expression from words?<sup>171</sup>

In a late essay, Deleuze speaks to the power of literature to *act* upon language (i.e., to expand, intensify, or transform it). Literature, he claims, releases the word from its referential confines—i.e., “forces it out of its usual furrows” (*Essays* 5)—and thereby forces language as a whole beyond the threshold of its own habitual uses and fixed associations. “Visions and Auditions,” he goes on to suggest, “are not fantasies, but veritable Ideas that the writer sees and hears in the interstices of language, in the gaps of language”; when activated, or drawn to the surface, they become affective conduits for “the passage of life within language.” In other words, by opening the word to its *outside* (e.g., sound, color), literature—understood in this context as a form of action, a doing—propels language as a whole into affective registers. It draws new accents, new life from the word. In a sense, it *unwords* the word by opening up

a kind of foreign language within language, which is neither another language nor a rediscovered patois, but a becoming-other of language, a minorization of [a] major language, a delirium that carries it off, a witch’s flight that escapes the dominant system.

So to engender the sort of Visions and Auditions in and through language “that no longer belong to any language,” the writer must activate the capacity of language itself to vary, to intensify, to take flight, and to become-other. It is the task of the critic, then, to map those becomings, or rather, to track that “witch’s flight,” and—in a final act of co-creation—to unleash that “delirium” in and through the book.

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<sup>171</sup> Ronald Bogue likens this phenomenon to “Stoic *lekta*, [i.e.,] surface effects that haunt the bodies of words like fogs or auras emanating from their superficies” (*Deleuze* 163).

Before proceeding with this agenda, I would simply say that in this chapter I *hope* to challenge the more commonly-held assertion that “the ekphrastic encounter in language is purely figurative” (Mitchell 158)—i.e., metaphorical, referential, descriptive, thematic—and, by extension, “a special or exceptional moment in verbal or oral representation.” Instead, I support the (perhaps) more fringe assertion, espoused by the ekphrastic hopeful among us, that ekphrasis—or what Deleuze would call the affective capacity of language for Visions and Auditions—is ultimately “paradigmatic of a fundamental tendency in all linguistic expression” (153). That is, I define ekphrasis (in this context) as language-in-becoming, or as language forced into affective registers, and thereby unmoored from conventional association. As such, ekphrasis sheds the distinction of mere literary or rhetorical device, relegated to a remote sub-genre of poetry,<sup>172</sup> and instead becomes what Deleuze calls an “event of language” (*Logic* 185)<sup>173</sup>—a notion first intuited by literary critic Murray Krieger.<sup>174</sup>

Over the pages that follow, I set out to track the literary *ekphrasm* (i.e., the singular point at which language opens up to its outside), so as to evaluate, or account

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<sup>172</sup> Some paradigmatic examples of this poetic form include Homer’s depiction of the shield of Achilles (in the *Iliad*); Keats’ “Ode on a Grecian Urn”; Robert Browning’s “My Last Duchess”; and John Ashbery’s “Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror.”

<sup>173</sup> Deleuze discusses this matter in a number of his works—in particular, *The Logic of Sense*. Therein, he writes, “language being a unique event. . . merges now with that which renders it possible” (185). He elsewhere adds, “Events make language possible. . . . Nevertheless, the event does belong to language, and haunts it so much that it does not exist outside of the propositions which express it” (181). We will explore how the incorporeal event “haunts” literature in the upcoming stages of this chapter.

<sup>174</sup> In a nod to Krieger’s now seminal treatment of ekphrasis in his 1967 essay, “*Ekphrasis and the Still Movement of Poetry; or Laokoön Revisited*,” Mitchell ties ekphrasis again to the *hope* “of achieving vision, iconicity, or a ‘still moment’ of plastic presence through language” (156). That is, literature attains or affirms, as Mitchell describes it, “a ‘still moment’ of plastic presence” by being able to “convert the transparency of its verbal medium into the physical solidity of the medium of the spatial arts” (90), and thereby reconfigure, even overcome, the temporal aspects of writing (read: linear, progressive, narratorial). On a number of fronts, however, Krieger remains self-consciously formalist in orientation, relying heavily on what he calls the role of “pattern” (i.e., rhetorical pattern, tropological pattern, grammatical or syntactic pattern) in ekphrastic poetry, and on a related conception of the poem as both a “formal necessity” (90) and what he calls “a formal and linguistic self-sufficiency” (88). James Heffernan writes, “Krieger’s theory of ekphrasis would hermetically seal literature within the well-wrought urn of pure self-enclosed spatiality, where the ashes of New Criticism (still glowing, as ashes will) now repose” (2).

for, the power of language to unleash difference. That is, we will map the processes of language-in-becoming—using as our guide to this mode of literary action Stephen Crane’s *The Red Badge of Courage*, Herman Melville’s *Moby-Dick*, and William Gass’ philosophical inquiry, *On Being Blue*. In particular, we will look at how Crane, Melville, and Gass *re-singularize* (read: renew, re-activate, unleash new potentials from) specific color-words figured prominently within these texts (e.g., *red*, *white*, and *blue*). To anticipate my conclusions, I will argue that these words overthrow their conventional associations and assume a transformative power in these works, expressed in and through the becomings of the characters. In short, by extricating themselves from any perceiving subject or fixed meaning, these words become-different.

### ***Demonstration 1: On Being Red, On Being White, On Being Blue***

Literature is an ally to Deleuze’s thinking, and even a privileged one, since fiction is a zone favourable to the exposure of the illusion of transcendence.

—Mary Bryden (“Deleuze and Anglo-American Literature” 105)

In Stephen Crane’s *The Red Badge of Courage*, Henry Fleming—anonously referred to throughout the novel as “the young man” or “the young soldier”—would burn to enlist in the army: “he had read of marches, sieges, conflicts, and he had longed to see it all. His busy mind had drawn for him large pictures extravagant in color, lurid with breathless deeds” (8). While his mother had advised against leaving the farm, the young man was ultimately swayed in his decision by “accounts of...decisive victory” (9), printed daily in the newspapers; and by “[t]ales of great movements” (8)—told with near-“Homeric” grandeur—that “shook the land.” In addition, Henry saw great virtue in taking up arms for a noble cause: “He had, of course, dreamed of battles all his life...In visions

he had seen himself in many struggles. He had imagined peoples secure in the shadow of his eagle-eyed prowess” (7). In these visions, the youth cast himself as protector, and as part of a wider fraternity or *band of brothers*—those whom he viewed as “heroes” (24), and whom he admired both for their “unspeakable valor” (15) and for “bearing a load of courage unseen” (24). Going off to war, then, the young man (now the young soldier) “basked in the smiles of the girls and was patted and complimented by the old men” (13); and though he feared the likelihood of “a Greek-like struggle” (7), believing at one point “prominent trees spoke to him of tragedies—hidden, mysterious, solemn” (41), the youth felt he might ultimately have “the strength to do mighty deeds” (13).

So the young soldier was ruled by “the color of his ambitions”<sup>175</sup>—but his ambitions, in the end, would prove all too black-and-white. That is, he would fall prey to a certain representation of war, and to a somewhat predictable, albeit alluring, portrait of himself as war hero. His ambitions were, in effect, *colored* by various abstract universals (e.g., heroic ideals, archetypal characters, stock narratives)—what Crane would refer to as the “laws of tradition” (40)—which were then bolstered, both publicly and privately, by “the newspapers, the gossip of the village” (8–9), and by the youth’s “own picturings” (9). With the circulation of these ideas/images of war, and the values they embody, the young soldier would, in the end, convert those ideas into what Deleuze calls an *object of recognition* (*Difference* 139). An object recognized (i.e., “recalled, imagined or conceived”) blocks the immediacy of the encounter—that which unfolds, say, on the battlefield—and the affective power of that encounter (i.e., the capacity of battle itself to transform, to strengthen or diminish, the young soldier through new experiences, new

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<sup>175</sup> This phrase, from *The Red Badge of Courage*, refers to the young man’s resolution to enlist in the army, despite the resistance of his mother. The entire sentence reads as follows: “he had made firm rebellion against this yellow light thrown upon the color of his ambitions” (8).

ways of thinking, new becomings, and so forth). Levi Bryant summarizes Deleuze's position on what he (Bryant) calls the "moment of the encounter" as follows:

Like Lacan's concept of trauma, the encounter exceeds our powers of anticipation and thus explodes the symbolic or system of possibility that characterizes so much of our organism. However, it evokes the necessity of thinking by engendering thought within thought that refuses being ignored. Where thought tied to recognition is concerned, we remain trapped within the grip of an abstract system of possibilities which fails to establish the necessity of that which is thought. By contrast, thought tied to the encounter contains all the necessity of the concrete insofar as it *commands* us to think. The encounter is thus imperative in nature. It is that which we *must* think or that which we cannot avoid thinking or that which it falls to us to think. (94)

As I will show, the young soldier's experiences of war are transformed by his encounters in battle—i.e., by that which he *cannot* anticipate, by that which forces him to act, to do, to think differently, rather than according to certain rules or mandates. I would argue, in fact, that the young soldier's basic conflict in *The Red Badge of Courage*—that which he ultimately must overcome—derives from his expectations or fixed ideas (i.e., about war, being a soldier, the nobility of his cause, etc.), those that not only weigh heavily upon his mind in the run-up to the battle, thus distorting his actual experiences, but that *trap* him, as Bryant says, "within the grip of an abstract system of possibilities."

Crane, for his part, uses color-words (in particular, "red" and "blue") as markers of those abstractions, those fixed possibilities, at various stages in *The Red Badge of*

*Courage*. That is, he ties color not only to specific codes or symbolic values in the text, but to a number of preconceived ideas about war as well—an entire representational overlay. However, over the course of the novel, Crane’s color-words take on new tints, new shadings, and in ways that parallel their undoing—i.e., their break from symbolic investments, their unmooring from given subjects (of perception)—in Melville’s *Moby-Dick* and William Gass’s *On Being Blue*. That is, these words shed their confinements (rhetorical, semiotic, axiological, etc.), and do so in ways that have vital implications for the characters, and the transformations they undergo. So, simply put, I argue that in these works color-words operate as affective conduits, or channels of pure difference, through which the young soldier, Captain Ahab, and Gass’s narrator pass; in so doing, they each (in their own way) open up to new experiences, new ways of thinking, and new potentials in themselves. In short, they become-different.

Consider, for example, Crane’s *red*. Scattered liberally throughout *The Red Badge of Courage*, red first presents to the young soldier as “the red, eyelike gleam of hostile camp fires” (3), and later as “the red eyes across the river” (26). This red, in revealing the enemy’s location to the soldier, applies fixed coordinates (in space and time) to that enemy, and to the young soldier as well. So this red positions; it locates. More importantly, though, it forces the young soldier to turn inward. That is, while watching opposing forces across the river—a river said to be “amber-tinted,” by day; “a sorrowful blackness,” by night—the youth has the unnerving sense of *being* watched: “In the gloom before the break of the day their uniforms glowed a deep purple hue. From across the river the red eyes were still peering” (25). Those eyes, then—gazing, blood-shot, intently

focused—effectively mark the youth as a soldier, and as a potential target; they also intensify his feelings of vulnerability and fear in the lead-up to the battle:

As he looked all about him and pondered upon the mystic gloom, he began to believe that at any moment the ominous distance might be aflame, and the rolling crashes of an engagement come to his ears. Staring once at the red eyes across the river, he conceived them to be growing larger, as the orbs of a row of dragons advancing. (26)

So these dragon eyes bear down upon the soldier, and in such a way that clearly connotes danger for the young man from the farm, an ominous and gathering threat. But following the narrative grain of the text a step further, this red ultimately activates a series of structural binaries in *The Red Badge of Courage*—e.g., here/there, us/them, self/other, centre/margin, mind/body, courage/fear, inside/outside. In fact, the piercing red-eyed stare of the enemy not only effectuates (or better, pries open) the yawning chasm between North and South in this fight over the soul of America, but intensifies that divide. On the one hand, “the red, eyelike gleam of hostile camp fires,” cast across the “sorrowful blackness” of the river, signifies to the young soldier that the enemy is poised and ready for war—or ready for what Crane elsewhere calls “the red animal...the blood-swollen god” (128). On the other hand, these eyes erect borders between opposing forces in *The Red Badge of Courage*. They striate space, territorialize the landscape, forge affiliations, organize and distribute bodies. Ultimately they reflect and reinforce values.

Not unexpectedly, the external conflict (brought to light by the peering, blood-shot eyes across the river) doubles a series of internal conflicts in the young soldier—i.e., “little combats” (41) that not only “deeply [absorb]” him, but that ultimately isolate him



from the rest of his regiment. The youth believes, in fact, that he is not like the others, that “he was not formed for a soldier” (31)—because unlike his comrades, the young soldier is given to “ceaseless calculations” (22) and “his own eternal debate” (28). At one point, he “contemplated the lurking menaces of the future, and failed in an effort to see himself standing stoutly in the midst of them” (16). Later, he let himself be “bowed down by the weight of a great problem” (25), even while recognizing that “he could not long bear such a load.” He questioned his reliability, his commitment, his judgment (24); and at the point when “his old fears of stupidity and incompetence reassailed him...he doggedly let them babble” (49). He even “tried to mathematically prove to himself that he would not run from a battle” (16), but in the end only managed to deepen his feelings of confusion and anxiety. Ultimately, the young soldier’s self-recrimination and paralyzing fears would erode his confidence and dilute “the color of his ambitions”:

In the darkness he saw visions of a thousand-tongued fear that would babble at his back and cause him to flee, while others were going coolly about their country’s business. He admitted that he would not be able to cope with this monster. He felt that every nerve in his body would be an ear to hear the voices, while other men would remain stolid and deaf. (35)

Needless to say, with the battle approaching, the young soldier felt the “laws of tradition” (40) bearing down on him, judging him; and in that light he “convicted...himself of many shameful crimes against the gods of tradition” (25).

What I want to emphasize at this point is that the internal debate, and thus deepening interiority of the young soldier, would only augment his feelings of isolation, particularly among those against whom he “continually tried to measure himself” (23):

His emotions made him feel strange in the presence of men who talked excitedly of a prospective battle as of a drama they were about to witness, with nothing but eagerness and curiosity apparent in their faces. It was often that he suspected them to be liars. (24)

But regardless of whether or not his comrades were, in fact, deluding themselves, the young soldier could in no way share in their “eagerness and curiosity”; nor could he “speak of victory” (29), contribute to “the blithe and merry speeches that went from rank to rank,” or allow himself to “[dodge] implike around the fire” (32). The young soldier’s struggle to ultimately connect (or commit himself) to his regiment, and thus the Union cause in general, would clearly manifest itself in the contempt he felt for the “vast blue demonstration” (14) playing out on the battlefield before him (with *blue*, in this case, referring to the color of the Union army’s uniforms).<sup>176</sup> The youth felt both rationally and emotionally detached from what he took to be mere spectacle or propaganda—i.e., the “shock and awe”<sup>177</sup> of his day. This blue, in fact, becomes the military arm of what Crane would later refer to as “the red sickness of battle” (246). But rejecting or disassociating himself from this demonstration put the soldier at odds not only with his own regiment, but with what he *imagined* the heroic soldier to be. That is, because the young soldier felt little affinity for this “vast blue demonstration,” he rightly has greater reason to fear that he might desert his comrades, as but one of “many shameful crimes against the gods of tradition.” So how, then, might the youth overcome this conflict or confusion in himself? Naively, he “wished that he, too, had a wound, a red badge of courage” (100)—for that at

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<sup>176</sup> Crane makes repeated reference to this idea of a “blue demonstration” (see, for example, pp. 22, 38, 47).

<sup>177</sup> I am alluding to the American army’s strategy of so-called “rapid dominance,” particularly in the early stages of the most recent war in Iraq—the so-called “Battle of Baghdad”—in March 2003. The strategy called for a dominant and overwhelming exercise of military might, and spectacular displays of force.

least would clarify things. That is, an outward display of blood and guts might absolve the young soldier of any guilt for thinking about abandoning his regiment: “At times he regarded the wounded soldiers in an envious way. He conceived persons with torn bodies to be peculiarly happy.” In the eyes of his comrades, then, “a wound, a red badge of courage” might make the youth a *real* soldier, and thus legitimize him.

But to borrow a phrase from William Gass, “it is not blue I see but myself seeing blue” (83).<sup>178</sup> That is, the young soldier, despairing of the grotesque “blue demonstration” unfolding before him, would see *himself* seeing blue; or, put another way, for the first time he would come face-to-face with “the color of his ambitions”—i.e., the war he had dreamed about or imagined—and would find it inauthentic, lacking: “He wished to return to camp, knowing that this affair was a blue demonstration; or else to go into a battle and discover that he had been a fool in his doubts, and was, in truth, a man of traditional courage” (Crane 47). For the youth, in other words, this blue demonstration was “theory” (38), conceived in the minds of those higher-up the chain of command—i.e., those who the young soldier would ceaselessly vilify throughout the novel (e.g., 43, 46, 80–1, 167–68, 190); it was war reduced to a set of prearranged tactical manoeuvres and overt displays of military might. So because this demonstration felt (in some ways) staged to the young soldier, felt forced and artificial, he needed to extricate himself from this all-too-familiar *object of recognition*, which had trapped him “within the grip of an abstract system of possibilities.” In no way, would this demonstration resolve the young soldier’s lingering doubts about his capacity for courage. Only battle itself, as suggested above, could really answer the question of whether or not “he had been a fool in his doubts, and

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<sup>178</sup> We will return to Gass’s use of this phrase in a moment.

was, in truth, a man of traditional courage.” We will return to this question of *battle*, and its role in the young soldier’s liberation, below.

For the moment, though, let us consider William Gass’s use of the phrase, “it is not blue I see but myself seeing blue” (from *On Being Blue*). For Gass, this phrase speaks to the disappointment he feels at not being able to enter the consciousness of another, at just that point when she reveals herself in the *bluest* way possible (i.e., physically, sexually). That is, he imagines having “gained the famous talisman of Gyges, a ring (as Plato tells) which confers invisibility upon its wearer” (79). He then imagines using the ring to slip unnoticed into a neighbour’s house so as to take a good look at “that buxom wench with the inviting eyes.” But the moment proves unsatisfying. All Gass ends up seeing, despite this being a voyeuristic fantasy of his own making, is the woman “preparing salad at the sink” (82). At first he asks, “Why doesn’t she slip out of those blue jeans and roll upon the floor in an agony of desire,” but soon recognizes a fatal flaw in his plan. That is, his invisibility (or lack of color) white-washes the encounter:

Invisible I can’t see the faint fuzz of my cheeks or the framing fringe of my hair. Suppose...I were inaudible. I should find, very quickly, how much I need to hear the sound of my own breathing. To hear the scene, but not myself: how odd...how horrible...how whimsical...how unnerving. Now I understand what a difference any kind of distance makes. How could I taste her lips and not taste my own, or run my hand upon her arm without its fingers being felt? Do I wish us both odourless in bed? (82–3)

So what’s missing from Gass’s blue-movie? The body, itself; the affective (or affected) body, the intensive body: the body aroused by its encounters—precisely what Gass

imagines-away from this scenario. What's missing is the expressive *force* of the encounter, which, as Brian Massumi suggests, "strikes the body first, directly and unmediately. It passes transformatively through the flesh before being instantiated in subject-positions subsumed by a system of power. Its immediate effect is a differing" ("Introduction" xvii). What's missing, then, is not just the *pornographic* moment—"the bluest part of blue" (Bayley)—but the involuntary sensation (i.e., something more, something unexpected) unleashed by that experience (e.g., lust, curiosity, excitement, surprise). What's missing is the *differential* moment, as felt in and through the autonomic reactions (or singular becomings) of the body.

So Gass's invisibility opens the door to the mundane—i.e., the recognizable rituals of domestic existence (e.g., preparing salad, sitting on the couch, watching television)—but, of course, this proves unsatisfying to the would-be voyeur. The impotence of his blue imaginings are the reflection of an incongruity between the actual experience and the way Gass *represents* that experience (or that *blue*) to himself. But should Gass really have expected otherwise? Probably not. His ambitions were colored by little more than his own fetishistic desires, his own assumptions about the "buxom wench," his own "picturings" and perversions—in short, his own expectations. So despite whatever he may have invested in this scene, or whatever he may have wanted to happen, Gass cannot ultimately bridge the aporia between his own passions and those of the wench next door. Simply put, his expectations flatten the encounter; they block the excesses (becomings) of the body. They tie him to the semiotic coordinates of his own mind (i.e., *himself* seeing blue); they turn him inward, where he festers and rankles "within the grip of an abstract system of possibilities." They internalize him, contain and

control him. In the end, the experience leaves him wanting: no feeling, no sensation, no happy ending. This is blue imagined, though there's little or nothing *blue* about it.

The young soldier experiences a similar phenomenon. On the one hand, the “blue demonstration” before him underscores a series of traditional oppositions (e.g., us/them, here/there, self/other, victor/vanquished, win/lose, etc.)—the conventional coordinates of war. This blue, like the red before it, positions (e.g., the youth, his comrades, the enemy); it locates and affiliates. On the other hand, it disassociates the young soldier from his comrades. That is, it isolates him, alienates him, trapping him within the confines of his own mind. This blue, the young soldier discovers, only feeds or fuels “the red sickness of battle”—that which he ultimately needs to exorcise from his system.

Here, then, a parallel emerges between the soldier's need to rid himself of “the red sickness” and Captain Ahab's near-fanatical compulsion, in *Moby-Dick*, to destroy the white whale that “swam before him as the monomaniac incarnation of all those malicious agencies which some deep men feel eating in them, til they are left living with half a heart and half a lung” (Melville 226). Clearly Ahab was himself one of those “deep men,” in that *Moby Dick* left him “Gnawed within and scorched without, with the infixed, unrelenting fangs of some incurable idea” (228)—an idea, it should be stated, unrecognizable to the nineteenth-century whaler. That is, Ahab's “monomaniac revenge” (229)—which grew “a thousand-fold” (227) in the wake of his disfiguration, or “dismast[ing]” (202), by the leviathan—ultimately put his own motives on a collision course with those of the other whalers of his time, “bent on profitable cruises” (229). Melville writes,

with the mad secret of his unabated rage bolted up and keyed in him, Ahab had purposely sailed upon the present voyage with the one only and all-engrossing object of hunting the White Whale. Had any one of his old acquaintances on shore but half dreamed of what was lurking in him then, how soon would their aghast and righteous souls have wrenched the ship from such a fiendish man! They were bent on profitable cruises, the profit to be counted down in dollars from the mint. He was intent on an audacious, immitigable, and supernatural revenge. (228–29)

Starbuck, Ahab's first officer, felt compelled then to remind his captain of the financial objectives of the whalemens: after being queried by Ahab about the hunt—"wilt thou not chase the white whale? art not game for Moby Dick?" (202)—Starbuck replies,

I am game for his crooked jaw, and for the jaws of Death too, Captain Ahab, if it fairly comes in the way of the business we follow; but I came here to hunt whales, not my commander's vengeance. How many barrels will thy vengeance yield thee even if thou gettest it, Captain Ahab? it will not fetch thee much in our Nantucket market. (202–3)

Ahab dismisses Starbuck's concerns, as they relate to the "Nantucket market," and in the following passage re-imagines the whole purpose of the hunt:

All visible objects, man, are but as pasteboard masks. But in each event—in the living act, the undoubted deed—there, some unknown but still reasoning thing puts forth the moldings of its features from behind the unreasoning mask. If man will strike, strike through the mask! How can the prisoner reach outside except by thrusting through the wall? To me,

the white whale is that wall, shoved near to me. Sometimes I think there's naught beyond. But 'tis enough. He tasks me; he heaps me; I see in him outrageous strength, with an inscrutable malice sinewing it. That inscrutable thing is chiefly what I hate; and be the white whale agent, or be the white whale principal, I will wreak that hate upon him. (203)

In this important passage, Ahab speaks to the need to break through, or extend himself beyond, what he calls “that wall, shoved near to me”—i.e., the white whale. For Ahab, the whale is not, as Starbuck believes, just some “dumb thing” or “dumb brute...that simply smote thee from blindest instinct!” (203). Rather, for Ahab, the white whale’s “outrageous strength” and “inscrutable malice” makes it a true anomaly. Let us pause, at this point, to unpack this seminal confrontation between Starbuck and Ahab.

In a sense, Starbuck speaks for the whaler, or really for the whaling community; that is, he views the whale in a way that all whalers view their quarry, as a “dumb thing” or “dumb brute,” propelled by the “blindest instinct!” In this context, then, Ahab’s idea that a whale could somehow be *sinewed* with “outrageous strength” and “inscrutable malice” makes no sense (and certainly has no purchase on the open market). Moreover, it contradicts certain basic principles upon which the whaling industry grounds itself—e.g., that the whale is reducible to “profit” alone, or reducible to that which can “be counted down in dollars from the mint”; that the whale is little more than an oil repository—and as such a commodity; and that the hunt, Starbuck claims, is strictly business, even if “the jaws of Death...fairly comes in the way of the business we follow.” So as to protect the integrity of their business, then, the whalers, as a collective, conform to a certain standard



or rule of law that transcends the needs or perceptions of any one whaler. That law—referred to, simply, as “Fast-Fish/Loose-Fish”—is defined as follows:

I. A Fast-Fish belongs to the party fast to it.

II. A Loose-Fish is fair game for anybody who can soonest catch it.

(Melville 460)

Simple enough; though as Melville—or rather, Ishmael—claims, the implications of this law are both rich and varied.<sup>179</sup> Still, the point remains that whaling operations at the time were governed by laws that applied, uniformly, to all whalers. No exceptions.

In fact, the effort to—in some way—unify, regulate, or standardize conceptions of the whale, the whaling industry, and whaling practices, in general, becomes a recurring motif in *Moby-Dick*. That is, the book begins with dictionary definitions of the whale, and with an inventory of different words for *whale* from “the known nations of the world” (9). “The pale Usher,” Melville tells us, extracts an “Etymology” of the word from dusty “old lexicons and grammars,” with the obvious implication being that the lexicon itself has the power (culturally speaking) to stabilize and/or regulate conceptions of the whale; or rather, that the whale has no identity, no meaning or value, outside the lexicons of the world that name or represent it in some way. The whale, in effect, is flesh made word. At this point, then, Melville provides a comprehensive, cross-cultural survey of “random allusions” (11) to the whale, or to what he otherwise refers to as “higgledy-piggledy whale statements,” drawn from a wide-range of historical books and documents.

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<sup>179</sup> The law, for Ishmael, has everything to do with the rights and freedoms of the individual, and for Melville himself, “the role of the individual in a culture...increasingly democratic” (Hovde xxvii). Ishmael states, “What are the Rights of Man and the Liberties of the World but Loose-Fish? What all men’s minds and opinions but Loose-Fish? What is the principle of religious belief in them but Loose-Fish? What to the ostentatious smuggling verbalists are the thoughts of thinkers but Loose-Fish? What is the great globe itself but a Loose-Fish! And what are you, reader, but a Loose-Fish and a Fast-Fish, too?” (462–63).

Here again he furthers the idea that the whale has become a ubiquitous presence, not only in language, but in literature and the popular imagination, as well.

These preliminary surveys and classifications (of a linguistic and literary nature) would later expand into more scientific realms; at one point, for example, Melville would provide a general taxonomy of the whale, by situating various whale species (alongside other marine life, derived from the scientific order of the Cetacea) into one of three, size-related categories: i.e., Folio, Octavo, Duodecimo. Elsewhere, Melville would focus directly on the science of whales itself—or rather, the “science of Cetology” (171)—with its “generalizing purpose[s]” (170), and again its comprehensive efforts to systematize specific aspects of the whale related to evolution, behavior, communal organization, etc. In any case, Melville’s basic point here is that whales, whalers (as further organized by a chorus of whaling and nautical terms), whaling ships, and whaling operations, have rarely escaped some sort of “comprehensive classification” (171). That is, they all, historically speaking, have been relegated to formal modes of categorization, not just by whalers, or by the whaling industry, but by culture, science, language, literature, law, myth—and so, it would seem, little else remains to be told.

Enter: Moby Dick, the white whale.

While again, the novel as a whole is dominated by inventories and surveys, by systems of classification and generic description, Melville exposes the inadequacy of such classificatory schema at several points in the narrative. For example, Ishmael (Melville’s narrator) acknowledges, on the one hand, that “the various species of whales need some sort of popular comprehensive classification, if only an easy outline” (171), and takes it upon himself “to project the draught of a systematization of Cetology.” On

the other hand, he “promise[s] nothing complete”: (1) because Cetology is an “uncertain, unsettled” science; and (2) “because any human thing supposed to be complete, must for that reason infallibly be faulty.” Ishmael, in fact, goes so far as to claim that “a regular system of Cetology” (175) may ultimately be unattainable:

It is in vain to attempt a clear classification of the Leviathan, founded upon either his baleen, or hump, or fin, or teeth...But it may possibly be conceived that, in the internal parts of the whale, in his anatomy—there, at least, we shall be able to hit the right classification. Nay; what thing, for example, is there in the Greenland whale’s anatomy more striking than his baleen? Yet we have seen that by his baleen it is impossible correctly to classify the Greenland whale. (175–76)

So because there are at least *some* whales that escape ready classification—and Moby Dick, who overcomes (or betrays) his so-called “pasteboard masks” (i.e., conventional attributions), appears to be one of those whales—Ishmael admits that whatever taxonomy he puts forward may be incomplete: “I am the architect, not the builder” (171); that is, he will “draught” the system, but promises nothing in terms of the reliability of that system.

The anomalous aspect of Moby Dick—reflected not only in its “remarkable hue” (225), or better yet, its “peculiar snow-white wrinkled forehead, and...high, pyramidical white hump,” but in its “outrageous strength,” “inscrutable malice,” and supernatural agency—situates the leviathan in a category all his own, one that again defies the “easy outline” (171) of most systematized renderings of the whale. Not surprisingly, then, Ahab seems unwilling, even unable, to reduce the white whale to what Starbuck dismissively refers to as a “dumb thing” or “dumb brute,” operating by sheer instinct alone. For Ahab,

at least, the singularity of the leviathan either strains or forces to its limits any system that reduces *all* whales to, say, a set of anatomical coordinates or fixed behaviors; and, here again, Ishmael seems sympathetic to this position. That is, he likens the attempt to forge “some systematized exhibition of the whale in his genera” (169)—within the science of Cetology—to “[the] classification of the constituents of a chaos.” He wonders further if the capacity to produce this sort of classificatory schema even lies within the purview of the sciences in general. For despite having “swam through libraries and sailed through oceans” (171), Ishmael cannot help but think, “what am I that I should essay to hook the nose of this leviathan!”

Throughout *Moby-Dick*, Melville often complicates the various forms of order and organization, the various laws, rules, or modes of classification, so carefully mapped out in the text. Late in the novel, for instance, Ahab smashes the sailor’s *quadrant*—i.e., that which fixes the coordinates of the Pequod by striating the oceanic spaces through which the ship passes. But while the quadrant tells Ahab where he *was*, it remains mute on where he *will* be, and (more importantly) on where Moby Dick swims. The captain, then, Ahab assigns little or no value to the information the quadrant provides: “Thou sea-mark! Thou high and mighty Pilot!...canst thou cast the least hint where I *shall* be? Or canst thou tell where some other thing besides me is this moment living? Where is Moby Dick? This instant thou must be eyeing him” (574). Ahab, in this instance, imagines a form of perception unmoored from human coordinates (or from any perceiving eye/subject). For example, he wonders if the quadrant itself might possess a power of perception that exceeds his own, or that opens on to seascapes other than his own (“Where is Moby Dick? This instant thou must be eyeing him”). Ahab wants to extract a

Vision or power of perception—what Deleuze-Guattari, in *What is Philosophy?*, refer to as a *percept*—from the ocean itself, first, by eschewing the restrictive, organizing confinements of the quadrant and, second, by adopting a kind of immanentist orientation to the ocean before him. That is, Ahab will now pursue his quarry by “dead reckoning” (574)—that is, by a “living power” (589), freed from human perception and fixed, identifiable coordinates. He will proceed “by log and by line” (574), meaning that Ahab will record (in his log) speeds, movements, surges, flows, course corrections/alterations, intensive affects on the Pequod (e.g., through changes in the current, the wind, or other weather-related phenomena). In effect, Ahab will *force* the ocean into affective registers:

In Melville, there is a private ocean of which the sailors are unaware, even if they have a foreboding of it: it is there that Moby-Dick swims, and it is he who is cast into the ocean from the outside, but in order to transmute its perception and to ‘abstract’ a Vision from it. (Deleuze, *Essays* 117)

So rather than being perceived by the sailor, and subject to the transcendent mappings of the quadrant, the ocean becomes its own perceiving eye, its own eye on Moby Dick.<sup>180</sup>

Another example of Melville unwriting the strictures of order and organization in the novel involves the sailor’s law, “Fast Fish/Loose Fish.” Recall that

Alive or dead a fish is technically fast, when it is connected with an occupied ship or boat, by any medium at all controllable to the occupant or

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<sup>180</sup> On this point, François Zourabichvili’s remarkable essay, “Six Notes on the Percept,” is instructive. In a passage that seems to speak directly to Ahab’s oceanic becomings, Zourabichvili writes, “the relation to **the landscape** is no longer that of an autonomous and pre-existent inner life and an independent external reality supposed to reflect this life. The landscape is an inner experience...not the redundancy of lived experience, but the very element of a ‘passage of life.’ The landscape does not return me to myself: it involves me in a becoming where the subject is no longer coextensive with itself, where the subjective form is inadequate when faced with the unformedness of becoming. I no longer contain myself, nor can I recover myself in the coherence of a Self or Ego. Similarly, a character in a novel is no longer externally related to what he sees or feels. To live a landscape: one is no longer in front of it, but in it, one passes into the landscape” (196).

occupants,—a mast, an oar, a nine-inch cable, a telegraph wire, or a strand of cobweb, it is all the same. Likewise a fish is technically fast when it bears a waif, or any other recognized symbol of possession. (460)

Meanwhile, “A Loose-Fish is fair game for anybody who can soonest catch it.” Put simply, then, this is a law of *possession*. But what does this mean for Ahab? Though a waif has yet to be thrust into the “peculiar snow-white wrinkled forehead” of Moby Dick, for Ahab, the white whale *still* remains a Fast-Fish. That is, in his “delirium” (227), his “full lunacy,” Ahab believes that his ownership of the white whale is guaranteed by a physical, psychological, or even historical form of possession. It is legitimized by his *dismasted* leg and, by extension, his own tragic past encounters with the whale. In effect, these things become Ahab’s waif—e.g., the leg opens up to its own *becoming-waif*. For other whalers, though, the white whale (just like any other whale) remains a Loose-Fish, and thus “fair game for anybody who can soonest catch it.” So by making a *Fast-Fish* claim on a *Loose-Fish*, Ahab at the very least complicates the whaler’s law.

But what does this all this mean for the role of color in *Moby-Dick*? In the much celebrated chapter, “The Whiteness of the Whale,” Melville reflects on “the mutating significance of whiteness” (Babb 100). He begins by inventorying a number of prevailing ideas/attitudes about white (or whiteness); and by mapping its privileged deployments in any number of formal, socio-political, aesthetic, and ritualistic settings. Melville then speaks of the “royal pre-eminence of this hue” (230), and adds that “whiteness refiningly enhances beauty.” He links the color to certain ideals and values, and also to faith and celebration. He speaks of its virtue and nobility; its “divine spotlessness” (231); its “imperial” aspect; its symbolism—e.g., a “white flag” (237); its role or pre-eminence in

nature. With regard to this latter, Ishmael invokes images of “a midnight sea of milky whiteness” (236), and of “the bleak rustlings of the festooned frosts of mountains” (237); he adds that “the great principle of light... forever remains white or colorless” (238). He further points to its more troubling racial dimension (231), also its supernatural or spectral powers (234), and its capacity to draw something “strangely hideous” from the face of the Albino. Finally, Ishmael links the color itself to “invisible spheres” (238), and to various “transcendent horrors” (231). His list, then, comes full circle—from the divine to the terrible or horrific.

But what Melville’s narrator realizes is that “all these accumulated associations” (231) scarcely get at the real power of white to *affect* things, to alter or transform them. That is, he notes that white (or whiteness) operates as an “intensifying agent” (238), a “potent... auxiliary” (234), and a “prime agent in exaggerating the terror of objects otherwise terrible” (236). White intensifies, exaggerates. Casting a white (or colorless) light across the surface of a given material body (e.g., a table, a plant, a body of water, etc.) extracts or unleashes *something from* that body (e.g., an expression, an idea, a Vision, a power or capacity); or alternatively, it sets in motion a process in and through that body (e.g., photosynthesis, boiling)—something, as Melville goes on to say, “not *actually* inherent in substance” (238; my emphasis). White diminishes, enhances, refines; it augments terror (e.g., the white shark) and amplifies beauty (e.g., purity, innocence). It contributes, confers, imparts; and because the *whiteness* of the whale operates, as Melville suggests, “without medium upon matter,” it retains an expressive power of its own, which cannot be standardized, regulated, or fully comprehended. White is anexact, ineffable, evocative. When “stripped of all direct associations” (235), it forces *things*—

e.g., bodies, objects, surfaces (so colored)—into affective registers. It forces them to *go critical*, and thereby become-different.

So the *whiteness* of the whale operates as an affective power, and hence outside of consciousness, outside of common sense, outside of affection and perception, outside of standards and conventions. “[It] calls up a peculiar apparition of the soul” (234); it provokes “peculiar moods” (235), those that open Ahab to his own becomings: “Ahab rushed from his room, was for the time but a vacated thing, a formless somnambulistic being, a ray of living light to be sure, but without an object to color, and therefore a blankness in itself” (246). In this instance, we get a glimpse of something intensive, something transformative, channelling through the sea captain—a pure excess that exceeds the physical body of the man, and that forces him beyond the confines of his own identity as a sea captain or whaler, subject to the whaler’s law. Ahab becomes-color, becomes-light (“a ray of living light to be sure, but without an object to color”); as such, he pierces the “white wall” (i.e., Moby Dick) residing at the limits of his consciousness (“sometimes I think there’s naught beyond”). But here we must tread carefully. That is, it would be inaccurate to say that Ahab, at this point, escapes the confines of his own mind. Or that he escapes his obsession, his madness and hate: Ahab “piled upon the whale’s white hump the sum of all the general rage and hate felt by his whole race from Adam down” (226). It would even be inaccurate to say that he escapes the past (e.g., history, tradition, memory). However, one might more rightly claim that *something* escapes through him, something inhuman: a rush of pure color, “a ray of living light.” That is, he is overcome, *tragically* overcome, by vital, inhuman powers, which, on the one hand, open up the possibility of genuine transformation or becoming, but on the other, spell the



destructive end (the doom) of both he and the white whale. So those powers are *liberated*—powers that transcend Ahab and Moby Dick, even while they unite the two in a unique, yet fatal, bond. Meanwhile, Ahab himself—whose demonic and inhuman passions derive from the impersonal forces that pass between he and the leviathan—never escapes the passion or hate which *must*, of necessity, destroy him.<sup>181</sup>

In fact, those passions form the basis of Ahab's relationship with the white whale, and propel him in his quest. Ahab's relation to the white whale can neither be generalized nor explained away by the sciences (i.e., Cetology), nor by the established orders of the whaler, nor by cultural traditions (e.g., language, literature, myth). There is nothing, for Ahab, that renders the whale intelligible; nothing that ties the leviathan to symbolic values: "how is mortal man to account for it? To analyze it, would seem impossible" (Melville 235). But as "a ray of living light," Ahab finds an affective opening, a point of connection, with Moby Dick. Moreover, he confronts the problem, posed by Deleuze-Parnet, of "how to unmake the face, by liberating in ourselves the questing heads which trace the lines of becoming" (*Dialogues* 45–6). Throughout the novel, in fact, Ahab progressively unleashes his own "questing heads"—i.e., through a "turning away" (40) from God, from self, from man, from order and organization. For example, smashing the quadrant forces Ahab to invent his own line of flight across the milky-white surfaces of his own "private ocean," wherein he might encounter Moby Dick. He maps an as yet uncharted course; he proceeds "by log and by line," by "dead reckoning"; he becomes-vector, becomes-trajectory. So just as the leviathan is seen "gliding at high noon through a dark blue sea, leaving a milky-way wake of creamy foam, all spangled with golden gleamings" (Melville 225), Ahab traverses those same oceanic flows, as well, leaving his

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<sup>181</sup> My thanks to Bruce Baugh for this point of clarification concerning Ahab's non-human becomings.

own whitened trail, his own “milky-way wake.” While “gazing out” (207) through the “stern windows” of his cabin, he makes note of the Pequod’s movement through the waves: “I leave a white and turbid wake; pale waters, paler cheeks, where’er I sail. The envious billows sidelong swell to whelm my track; let them; but first I pass.” In this white wake, Ahab sees a line of flight unfolding. He sees himself *making* tracks (like the whale), but not *leaving* tracks (i.e., “The envious billows sidelong swell to whelm my track”). He sees a line of mutation or transformation; his own disruption of *molar* (read: institutional, organizational) lines; his own becoming-white; his own becoming-whale. So just as a line opens up between Ahab and Moby Dick, the two converge in a “milk-white fog” (235).

Similarly, Crane’s young soldier, in *The Red Badge of Courage*, overcomes his own sense of disconnect from both his enemy and his comrades through what he deems a “mysterious fraternity born of the smoke and danger of death” (63). That is, the young soldier “felt the subtle battle brotherhood more potent even than the cause for which they were fighting”; so, in effect, an impersonal war emerges in and through this “mass of vapor” (74): “There was a singular absence of heroic poses. The men bending and surging in their haste and rage were in every impossible attitude” (65). The battle now becomes unfocused, directionless: “He lost the direction of safety. Destruction threatened him from all points” (76); and his coordinates, fixed in space and time by the gazing eyes from across the river, now scatter (or take flight) along uncontrolled trajectories: “over there, and over there, and over there” (70).

The young soldier would also discover a renewed commitment to the Union blue in the form of an inexplicable “red rage” (Crane 63). At first, he would crave a power

“that would enable him to make a world-sweeping gesture and brush all back.” Then, in a somewhat remarkable turn of events, that “world-sweeping gesture” would involve the dissolution of his own identity, and a blurring of the line between self and other:

He suddenly lost concern for himself, and forgot to look at a menacing fate. He became not a man but a member. He felt that something of which he was a part—a regiment, an army, a cause, or a country—was in a crisis. He was welded into a common personality which was dominated by a single desire. (62)

Spurred by crisis, then, and by the loss of his own “concern for himself,” the anonymous young soldier now becomes-other and converts “his rage into that of a driven beast” (64). He becomes-animal. At one point, Crane describes the soldier as a wild cat, a “war devil” (180), propelled by “his desire to smash into pulp the glittering smile of victory which he could feel upon the face of his enemies” (177). He goes red, goes critical—a conversion hastened by a discovery that would defy his preset ideas of war: “The youth... was smitten with a large astonishment. He discovered that the distances, as compared with the brilliant measuring of his mind, were trivial and ridiculous” (213). He had “exaggerated and enlarged everything.” What he labelled a “vast blue demonstration” would dissolve into pure “frenzy” (194), right in front of him, in a “furious rush” of soldiers:

The men, pitching forward insanely, had burst into cheerings, but tuned in strange keys that can arouse the dullard and the stoic. It made a mad enthusiasm that, it seemed, would be incapable of checking itself before granite and brass. There was the delirium that encounters despair and

death, and is heedless and blind to the odds. It is a temporary but sublime absence of selfishness.

More importantly, though—at least for our purposes—the various colors brought to light in and through the narrative (e.g., the colors of the union and confederate flags, the soldiers' uniforms, blood, emotion, the changing landscape, etc.) would, at points, merge and then dissolve into strange and unpredictable hues: “Wild yells came from behind the walls of smoke. A sketch in grey and red dissolved into a moblike body of men who galloped like wild horses” (55). Late in the novel, then, the young soldier “could not tell from the battle flags flying like crimson foam in many directions which color of cloth was winning” (225). Here, the line between the two sides begins to blur, along with whatever ultimately divides winner from loser, victor from vanquished.

In addition, the fixed colors associated with the union blue, in particular, and with war, in general—i.e., “the red animal...the blood-swollen god” (Crane 128)—would begin to fragment in the young soldier's mind, as he takes flight on “the red wings of war” (119) from the “little combats” that weigh so heavily upon his mind. In other words, the significance of war, “the red animal,” now begins to mutate, as the young soldier sees the possibility of a line of flight opening up for him along an affective channel: “The music of the trampling feet, the sharp voices, the clanking arms of the column near him *made him soar on the red wings of war*. For a few moments he was sublime” (my emphasis). So he becomes-animal, becomes-red, and in so doing exceeds both the confines of his own mind and body, and the fixed position he occupies on the battlefield (as a soldier). He “soar[s] on the red wings of war,” and thereby overcomes his limitations through non-human becomings. In fact, even the wound, itself, or “red badge

of courage,” which the young soldier had intuited would release him (e.g., from his fears, his obsessive thoughts, his guilt), would prove to be an affective conduit along which the youth would travel and become-other. That is, the wound has an expressive power all its own, regardless of the fact that the young soldier received his injury at the butt-end of a comrade’s rifle (in an act of friendly-fire). Nevertheless, with his comrades fussing over his battle scar, the youth would need only embody the wound, be its equal; the wound *qua* wound—at least in the eyes of his comrades—was in no way defined by, nor limited to, its back-story.

The wound, then, would have a transformative power; it would release the youth from any responsibility for having deserted his comrades, and absolve him of his “many shameful crimes against the gods of tradition.” When he realized that his act of desertion would not be discovered, he gained confidence, “self-pride” (Crane 160): “he did not shrink from an encounter with the eyes of judges, and allowed no thoughts of his own to keep him from an attitude of manfulness. He had performed his mistakes in the dark, so he was still a man.” The young soldier, in turn, felt “he had license to be pompous and veteran-like.” More importantly, though, he had finally “vanquished” (71) the “red, formidable difficulties of war” (71), which had earlier consumed the young soldier. Late in the novel, in fact, Crane writes that the youth “had dwelt in a land of strange, squalling upheavals and had come forth. He had been where there was red of blood and black of passion, and he was escaped” (241–2). So the young soldier would overcome his various confinements by varying the meaning and value of the color-codes before him. He would force difference from red and blue, and take flight along a line of continuous variation.

Similarly, the whiteness of the whale, which operates on the threshold between the actual and the virtual, expresses that which cannot be contained in the actual, and so it becomes an affective channel through which Ahab *must* pass, or break through, in order to “reach outside.” By lashing out against the leviathan, Ahab not only defuses the subjugating power of the whale, but affirms life, affirms action (“the living act”); he affirms the event, the deed, the doing—affirms all, beyond the limiting or restrictive roles (or forms of identity) that render him prisoner. Propelled, then, by his own delirium, he goes off-grid. He escapes to a non-human life; he is liberated. Ahab becomes-different, becomes-animal, becomes-imperceptible. So the killing of the white whale in no way reflects Ahab’s need to carry out a specific action in order to reap a specific reward in the Nantucket market, as it does for Starbuck. Killing the whale reflects his need to overcome what constrains him. The doing, in other words, carries Ahab beyond himself, outside himself, to perhaps unknown or even non-human extremes. The doing renders him other, and thus breaks him of the sinews of hate that inextricably link him to the white whale, until he is “left living on with half a heart and half a lung.” So, in short, striking out at the white whale, or at that which renders him subject to a debilitating and enduring hate that metastasizes within him, aligns Ahab with a pure expression of becoming. For Deleuze-Guattari, becomings are not concerned with either beginnings (i.e., points of entry) or goals/objectives; rather, they have their own, irreducible integrity. So the actor (Ahab) becomes conflated with the act, and is rendered imperceptible by the merging. So too the young soldier. For Deleuze-Guattari, all becomings tend toward imperceptibility.

I would further suggest that *Moby-Dick* (much like *The Red Badge of Courage* and *On Being Blue*) becomes an assault on the one (color) as pure or superior; the one is

revealed, not as transcendent, but as multiple. One = multiple. For example, Melville's inventories of white, in "The Whiteness of the Whale," are multi-cultural, pluralistic—i.e., none holds sway—which breaks down the superiority of the one white, or the one, pure race. The whale itself is the anomalous: a pure variable along a line of continuous variation; and by singling out the anomalous—or, what Deleuze-Guattari, in *A Thousand Plateaus*, variously call the "borderline," the "peripheral," the "threshold"—Ahab is able "to reach the pack as a whole and pass beyond it" (245); that is, he is able to push through (or overcome) the white wall. So by becoming-different (or becoming-animal, becoming-whale, becoming-other), all molar constructions of identity are revealed as identities-in-passing. In fact, the stability of given identities are, at best, epiphenomenal; in other words, they are passing, yet singular, effects of underlying causal processes. So all becomings have a decisive and irreducible integrity of their own—that which cannot be reduced to any end, beginning, or subject position along the way—which is manifest in and through their capacity to uproot or destabilize essential structures of identity ascribed to bodies (e.g., soldiers, voyeurs, whales or whalers).

The mutating significance of white in *Moby-Dick*, and red (and blue) in *The Red Badge of Courage*, finds its correlate in Gass's handling of blue in *On Being Blue*. That is, Gass unleashes blue from its narrow confines, its reduction to ready identification, representation, and recognition: "Again and again we strike the bigotry about blue, the same confusion of categories, the same errors of mind...and the same disastrous lapses of taste" (75). Blue, he insists, retains an affective power, that which cannot be categorized-away; blue is its own doing, its own action: "If color is one of the contents of the world as I have been encouraging someone—anyone—to claim, then nothing stands in the way of

blue's being smelled or felt, eaten as well as heard" (76). Or rather, nothing stands in the way of blue functioning as what Deleuze calls a "being of sensation" (i.e., a living power; a vibrating, expressive body): "Yellow cannot readily ingest grey. It clamors for white. But blue will swallow black like a bell swallows silence...blue contracts, retreats" (76).

Gass then goes on to suggest that blue is the color of language, or, better yet, of language-in-becoming. That is, blue "penetrates the pages" (84), imbuing words with "physical qualities" (88) that reveal everything, immediately. Blue opens the word to its own becomings, its own unwording. It is the flow of excess in and through language—especially literary language—denied to Gass in his imagined invisibility: "For the voyeur, fiction is what's called *going all the way*" (85). "Words," he adds, "are one-way mirrors" (84)—the voyeur's tool—and so "every loving act of definition," or every attempt to look through those "mirrors" to isolate a meaning, a value, a referent, "reverses the retreat of attention to the word and returns it to the world" (87). Gass claims, though, that "when there's nothing left but language" (90), only then does it "[fill] the mouth as it was meant to. We feel the need to speak it. Accepting the words as our own, speaking the words as our own, we believe at last in their denotations" (88). Or rather, we believe "at last" in the expressive power of language. So predictably, Gass resists diminishing blue by tying it to any sort of fixed idea, association, or application; he argues, instead, "every color is a completed presence in the world, a recognizable being apart from any object" (74).

So Ahab, the young soldier, and Gass himself ride the flow of color to a point of radical depersonalization. The red, white, and blue in these texts are sites of affective modulation, where the anomalous insists and channels its way through the characters (in their becomings). Their identities dissolve and become imperceptible (i.e., non-



subjectified, non-human). But this is not always the case. For colors can readily be tied to human coordinates, fixed landmarks, symbols and flags. For example, color stabilizes a people around their flag, their colors (e.g., the red-white-blue). Also around their political affiliations (e.g., red states, blue states), thus distorting the flow of causality. That is, any nation takes shape in and through a collective investment in certain intensities and affects—i.e., certain phrases, images, sounds; certain assemblages of bodies, etc.—which, in turn, build territories, and effectuate the narratives of that nation. But more often than not the identity of a people is not so much retroactively assumed (i.e., as an outgrowth of those circulating, yet impersonal, signs), but deemed rather the grounding spirit of the nation itself. The *colors* of that nation, in turn, are thought to embody the pre-existing spirit of a people. Political colors, in fact, become a label, a short-hand, for specific identities, values, codes; they designate an insider status, again built upon the regularity of certain sounds, gestures, rhythms. They tie a people to various ideological and/or epistemological confinements. They further prevent people from acting outside the confines of majoritarian models. So a collective and enduring investment of bodies in repeated affects invariably raises those affects to the level of symbolic abstraction, which, in turn, closes-off or closes-in on a people. America, in particular, by tying itself—i.e., its past and future—to the symbolic values and fixed identity associated with its flag, suppresses its own singularity, its own flirtation with the anomalous. America loses its capacity for emergence, for interaction with the outside; it loses (or at least diminishes) its revolutionary fervor by reducing that fervor, that excess, to generalities, inevitabilities (e.g., *Manifest Destiny*), laws, rules, objectivities, standards, traditions, familiarities.

But literature, as we know, typically frustrates (or works against) these impulses. That is, Gass, Melville, and Crane unleash non-symbolic modes of color in and through their works. They break color of its extant associations and affections, and its predictable links to established points-of-view. By foregrounding the affective power of these words, the authors extract something unthought from them, something unseen, undesignated, unactualized, unrepresented. They extract difference. So color itself becomes a conduit to other worlds, other people—a people not yet formed. Gass, Melville, and Crane work to “dehumanize” color constants, to liberate them from everyday recognition, from fixed meanings and values. They force colors beyond their established norms (or normative associations), by re-investing them with the power to go to the limits of what they can do (ethics). So the work of color in these narratives, or with color-affect, involves the renewal and progressive differentiation of color itself. I would add, though, that the breaking of habitual associations, of (consensual) opinion, of common sense (or good sense), of unambiguous, undistorted communication, of universal agreements, of fixed symbolic concepts, etc., through the productive use of the color machine has important political consequences as well. That is, by placing color in variation, Melville, Crane, and Gass extract a revolutionary force from these words, which again they express in and through the becomings of their characters. They create the potential for new thoughts, new feelings, by doing violence to the everyday language of opinion or symbol that, of necessity, puts limits on what individuals can see or do, while subordinating color itself to higher values (e.g., nation, courage, innocence). But color, as we have seen, becomes a schizoid body in these narratives: a regulation to be overcome, a threshold to be crossed, a naked intensity to be felt.

On the whole, then, these works make investments in the *thisness* of America (i.e., the revolutionary excesses of such), by treating color not as an actual thing, but as a potential for (or power of) perception, action, creation. These works invest American democracy, itself; they renew its flight. They invent a people. They speak to an impure race of voyeurs, outcasts, and what Melville (referring to Ahab's crew) refers to as an disorderly band of "mongrel renegades, and castaways, and cannibals"—i.e., a bastard race. Collectively, these works become a call for the renewal of the anomalous—a quintessentially American ideal. For America itself was the untimely, the unseeing, the unpredictable, the something-new. America haunts history, escapes from history. At one point, America was an interference in history, a new sensitivity, a new expression of life, a new opening that extracted a surplus-value (an excess of being, an excess of affect), resulting in an emergence of order (or a self-ordering). This is an America not reducible to its individual terms, but defined—as we will see more clearly later in the chapter with our reading of Walt Whitman—by its felt relations, its forms of consistency, its emergent nature, and ultimately its *inalienable* capacity to become-different.

### ***The Trouble with Color, the Trouble with Color-Words***

For some critics, color functions as a "structural device" (Riley 258) in literature, as "conceptual substructure" (223), or as narrative cipher. Color is decoded, traced and tabulated, and becomes an allegory of values in the hands of the literary critic. For example, Allan Pasco, in an exhaustive survey of every reference to color in Proust's *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu*, demonstrates that the systematic and patterned usage of color-words in Proust's masterpiece provides the *key* (or set of keys) to the book's thematic sub-structure and overall unity. Through color, he traces meaning in Proust; he

deciphers the code. Charles Riley suggests that Pasco's work, while ambitious, is ultimately forced to simplify its representation of color in order to maintain the code, or keep the code—and, by extension, its preset values—intact (224). In the end, such efforts get us nowhere.

Yet commenting on the role of color in Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*, Riley makes a representative claim of his own: "As in the work of Joyce, color functions [in *Gravity's Rainbow*] both within the matrix of a code and descriptively. The main advantage of determining the color code in the novel is that it helps to establish the identities and relative importance of characters" (258). But this makes no allowance for the capacity of these words to vary, re-singularize, or take flight. Color-codes impose strict semiotic coordinates on the text, which, in turn, control interpretations of the story and its characters. Nonetheless, this approach to literary color endures. Riley points out,

Tracking the color codes of literature seems a simple enough exercise even for introductory courses in literature. Following the progress of F. Scott Fitzgerald's yellow in *The Great Gatsby* or Thomas Hardy's red in *Return of the Native*, as well as Walt Whitman's green or Hart Crane's white, is largely a matter of knowing the symbolic code and spotting the deployment of the color. (220)

In fact, simply "knowing the symbolic code and spotting the deployment of the color"—or, what amounts to the same thing, pursuing predictable appeals to, and interpretations of, those symbolic "deployment[s]"—has little to offer any useful understanding of how color actually works in literature, or how it actualizes itself through language. As we will see later in the chapter, color has an important role to play in Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*,

but that role is neither guaranteed nor executed through the coded “deployment” of certain color-words in the text (e.g., Whitman’s *green*), nor does it depend on any uniform (or cultural) understanding of the conventional meanings and symbolic associations linked to specific color-words. For the likes of Allan Pasco, the color-word may, in fact, bear the load of various symbolic or political values, various stock associations; and, in so doing, it might play a conventional role in the text as part of a larger color code that the critic can readily trace and interpret. As materialists, we need avoid the mistake of presupposing color, or of presupposing something we all identify as, say, “red” or “blue”—i.e., something we all share. This way of thinking, I will argue, not only constitutes an assault on color, but on the dual powers of language and literature.

In *Dialogues II*, Deleuze-Parnet would affirm the idea (first proposed by D. H. Lawrence) that “the highest aim of literature” is “to leave, to escape...to trace a line” (27); and by taking that flight, literature not only breaks with figurative constraint, but becomes an expression of pure difference. In fact, over the course of his career, Deleuze would discuss a number of writers he thought capable of producing such difference (e.g., Melville, Lewis Carroll, Proust, Kafka, Virginia Woolf—to name a few). In particular, he would single out the work of German novelist Heinrich Von Kleist for its capacity to produce a language “deep within German by means of grimaces, slips of the tongue, screechings, inarticulate sounds...” (*Essays* 110); similarly, Antonin Artaud would send language along a *witch’s flight* through a “deviant syntax” (112) and his use of so-called “breath-words,” whereby Artaud would “fuse consonants and vowels in inseparable sonic amalgams” (Bogue, *Deleuze* 27). T. E. Lawrence, who Deleuze would characterize as “one of the greatest portrayers of landscapes in literature” (*Essays* 116), would produce a

“private desert” in words, just as Melville would produce “a private ocean.” However, of all the writers with whom Deleuze would take an active interest, Samuel Beckett would arguably be the greatest purveyor of difference in language. In a celebrated letter to a correspondent (see note 1, above), Beckett makes the following claims (which I quote at length) that speak directly to his desire to force language to its limits:

It is indeed becoming more and more difficult, even senseless, for me to write an official English. And more and more my own language appears to me like a veil that must be torn apart in order to get at the things (or the Nothingness) behind it. Grammar and Style. To me they seem to have become as irrelevant as a Victorian bathing suit or the imperturbability of a true gentleman. A mask. Let us hope the time will come, thank God that in certain circles it has already come, when language is most efficiently used where it is being most efficiently misused. As we cannot eliminate language all at once, we should at least leave nothing undone that might contribute to its falling into disrepute. *To bore one hole after another in it, until what lurks behind it—be it something or nothing—begins to seep through; I cannot imagine a higher goal for a writer today.* Or is literature alone to remain behind in the old lazy ways that have been so long ago abandoned by music and painting? Is there something paralyzingly holy in the vicious nature of the word that is not found in the elements of the other arts? Is there any reason why that terrible materiality of the word surface should not be capable of being dissolved, like for example the sound surface, torn by enormous pauses, of Beethoven’s Seventh Symphony, so

that through whole pages we can perceive nothing but a path of sounds  
suspended in giddy heights, linking unfathomable abysses of silence?  
(171–72; my emphasis).

Deleuze, in seeming lockstep with Beckett, would go so far as to suggest that music and painting, as “events at the edge of language” (*Essays LV*), “seep through” the words of great writers, but in ways that “language alone makes possible.” That is, great writers, by being able to actualize the outside of language, bring language itself to a breaking-point. Language, then, gives evidence of that outside through *effects* of

- 1) *silence*—i.e., “the Thing in its muteness—vision” (98);
- 2) *sonority*—i.e., a sonic body, expressed through hums, stutters, murmurs, cries, screams (110; see also, 172);
- 3) or *both*.

As suggested, we will look at how Whitman’s magisterial *Leaves of Grass* draws color-visions (or effects of color) from words. First, though, we must further our considerations of the fraught relationship between language and color.

Put simply, color creates a special problem for language. Why? Because color resists *coding*; more precisely, it resists linguistic encoding (lexicalization), and does so

- (1) despite the formation of an *International Commission on Illumination*, in 1931, and an *International Color Consortium*, in 1993, designed in both instances to establish an authoritative, universal (or trans-cultural) color-space, whereby standardized names or numbers were assigned to corresponding color swatches;<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> In his essay, “Too-Blue—Color-Patch for an Expanded Empiricism,” Massumi argues that psychologist David Katz, in a landmark series of color-matching experiments (from the early twentieth century), made

- (2) despite efforts within the cognitive sciences “to yoke the structures of color-language to the mechanisms of color-vision” (Gage 189);
- (3) despite the attempt to tie socio-cultural constructions of color to “the lexical and grammatical structures of particular languages” (Lyons 197–98), especially among socio-linguists;
- (4) despite attempts to adopt a universal color vocabulary rooted, for example, in “archetypal human experiences of *black* night, *white* bone, *red* blood, and so on” (Gage 179; my emphasis);<sup>183</sup> and finally,
- (5) despite the near ubiquitous deployment of color-words in everyday speech (e.g., “feeling *blue*?”; “I’m *green* with envy”; “you’re *yellow*”).

Despite all, and despite the enduring *hopes*—ekphrastic hopes?—of researchers and academics alike, such efforts do little to forge a clear path between words and colors:

Languages have never been used for labelling more than a tiny fraction of the millions of color-sensations which most of us are perfectly well equipped to enjoy...[and while] most of us are perfectly capable of discriminating among an extensive continuum of color-nuances very few of these nuances have been named, and modern color-systems...have usually resorted to numbers in order to distinguish perceptible differences

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the crucial methodological error of assuming that color-words (e.g., “blue,” “red”) operate neutrally, or as “transparent designator[s]” (*Parables* 208), in the laboratory setting. In other words, Katz believed (perhaps following the dictates of the *International Commission on Illumination*) that both the researcher and test subject would (or should) have “equal access” to the meaning or value of given color-words, thus erasing the need to control for any possible “asymmetry in their relation to the word.”

<sup>183</sup> In their renowned study of the cross-cultural production of color-based lexicons, *Basic Color Terms*, Brent Berlin and Paul Kay map what they take to be a universal evolution in the naming of colors, which begins with the linguistic encoding of a few basic colors by more ancient or *primitive* peoples and culminates with the more refined (though still limited) color vocabularies of modern industrial societies.



of hue or value (lightness or darkness) in what has turned out to be a far from symmetrical color-space. (180–81)

But what Gage elsewhere calls “the relative poverty of color-vocabularies” (183) is not the only disconnect between language and color. The problem is further compounded, as linguist John Lyons claims, by “grammatical ambivalence” (206) in the English language toward the creation of specific structural categories for color-based communication. He argues, for example, that content words or “lexical items” (e.g., “green,” “blue”) conventionally linked to perceived color-sensations have no functional or operative role within language.<sup>184</sup> That is, they are *not* connectives or demonstratives; they do not establish nominal relationships between objects, entities, participants/agents in a given discourse in the way that, say, pronouns or prepositions do.

So again we ask *why* color resists efforts to be coded, classified, or otherwise systematized by language? According to Massumi, the inability to name (as Gage says) anymore than “a tiny fraction of the millions of color-sensations” may be attributable to the fact that things we *see* (like color) “retain a synaesthetic tinge of singularity” (*Parables* 169), and thus tend to “settle...slowly into general classes divided according to sense mode.” He adds, further, that color “is the last objective ‘element’ to hypostasize by meeting the measure of words”; and though, over time, it may be “inculcated through conventional language, [i.e.] language used as an abstract standard of comparison,” its relationship to language will never be entirely square or symmetrical. Which is to say, the fluidity of color, or, more precisely, the fact that color itself is always changing, always being inflected from without, always being touched and re-touched—e.g., by other

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<sup>184</sup> This is clearly a debatable claim, for even lexical items retain *functional* powers of cohesion—think of a list, for example. As we will see, Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass* provides one of the best literary examples of how grammatical cohesion unfolds between lexical items.

colors, other wavelengths of light (through what Massumi calls the “brightness confound”), other sensory inputs (taste, texture, sound), other forces, other bodies—makes it (color) ultimately hard to pin down through words, i.e., hard to stabilize, hard to isolate. Color, like language, is always in a state of becoming-different, and in that purely transformative state tends to disclose or make felt something *more*, something that (as I will show) need not be colorful, visual, or even actual. So my point is that while a given color-word may be adequate for the limited purpose of referring to a preset value—or then again it may not—there is simply no way of translating the affective or expressive power(s) of color *into* words, without restricting or grossly over-simplifying the coloring-sensation itself. There is something about color that cannot be generalized away.

In one sense, then, the problem is that *color-words* (read: lexically-encoded color-sensations) condition the mind—let alone the shared sensibilities of entire communities, cultures, or nation-states—to internalize certain “ideas about colors” (Gage 184)—i.e., what they designate, symbolize, represent. Color-words, in fact, contribute to what Massumi calls the “unacknowledged ideality” (*Parables* 170) of color. Which is to say that color vocabularies (or lexicons of color) (1) cloud perceptions of color; (2) fuel conditioned responses; (3) normalize attitudes; and (4) propel the black-and-white symbolism often tied to certain colors (e.g., politically, communally). Meanwhile, the purely affective power of those colors—i.e., their capacity to express themselves in variable ways, to enter new arrangements, to become-different, etc.—all such power collapses (or is occluded) under the weight of color-based lexicons (designed by the likes of the *International Commission on Illumination*); these lexicons standardize color by again generalizing away its singular aspect, by blocking its powers of becoming, and by

neutralizing its expressive capacities. So color-words, then—at least when thought to operate as what Massumi calls neutral or “transparent designator[s]” (208) in the lab or on the political stage—are little more than purveyors of abstraction or generality.

But there is another problem, as well, which we briefly touched on above—a problem perhaps well-rehearsed within the “specialized sub-vocabularies” (Lyons 201) of artists, designers, interior decorators, paint manufacturers, art-historians, or even children playing with crayons. That is, color, both in terms of its physical production and optical reception along visible wavelengths of light, in no way operates independently of other colors; nor does it operate independently of ambient light, which may augment or diminish the color in question (e.g., through shadow or glare). Something like texture may also play a pivotal role in the visual production of color: “surface colors possess several characteristics apart from the hue, value and saturation (chroma), which have usually been held to define the parameters of color as perceived. One of these characteristics is texture” (Gage 184). Also, as suggested above, color may be altered by the various objects, bodies, or surfaces, as well as other sensory inputs or stimuli (e.g., taste, sound), which either disperse or absorb, intensify or dampen, the color in question. In short, color is defined by its encounters, by the unactualized forces that act upon it, by the relations into which it enters, and by the ensuing amplifications or modulations (i.e., affective variances, lines of flight) that derive from those relations. Color has no innate centre, no pure presence to which the researcher (or anyone else) can point, and thereby name. Colors are purely relational phenomena, meaning “convivial by nature. Deprive them of company and they ‘blank out’” (Massumi, *Parables* 163). Restore that company, or that force of the outside, and they ceaselessly push toward states other than

themselves: they brighten, darken, weaken, fade, blur, distress, etc. Put another way, color is in a constant state of becoming: becoming-augmented, becoming-diminished, becoming-bright, becoming-blurry, etc. It is constantly being composed and decomposed, constantly coming and going. It clashes. It complements. It enters into arrangements with things other than itself (again: other bodies, other surfaces, other colors), and adjusts to those arrangements in singular ways: it agrees or disagrees; it harmonizes or disperses.

So color, in a word, is a *rhizome*—i.e., defined by its relations (or relational fields), its movements and propulsions, its contractions and expansions. Color always exceeds and/or retreats from any essential presence. It exists only in passing, much like that of a diminished or augmented chord in music, whose root depends entirely on the company it keeps (or on the sonic assemblages into which it enters). Color lives on the outside; it lives in and through its relations—i.e., through, on the one hand, the complex absorption and dispersion of electromagnetic radiation, and, on the other, the processing capacities of both the eye and brain. In so doing, color (as visually produced) ceaselessly breaks with resemblances; it eschews identity, frees itself from restraints, surpasses its own limits. Hence, there are no pure colors, only inflections of the light along lines of continuous variation. From this, we conclude that color-words, by bringing an artificial symmetry to an asymmetrical color-space, profoundly denature color. That is, they not only fail to account for the operative capacities and affective powers of color—i.e., the capacity of such to alter or vary in terms of intensity, saturation, value, hue, brightness—but they actively flatten or restrain those powers in their monochromatic representation of visible color. Put simply, color cannot be coded either lexically or grammatically, through its “synthetic articulation into classes and categories” (Massumi, *Parables* 169),

without (1) devaluing its singular aspect; (2) without flattening or restraining it; and (3) without robbing color itself of everything we know to be the case (aesthetically, scientifically, visually/perceptually) about its production and reception. Color-words are, in short, a wash-out. They generalize away the open borders and ill-defined edges of the color continuum, while ignoring the capacity of visible color to be accented or inflected by its relations, encounters, or arrangements with other colors, other bodies.

Even still, I cling to my “ekphrastic hope.” That is, I argue (following Deleuze) that in literature, the saying exceeds the said, the emergent exceeds the emerged. Put another way, language—like color—retains its own “synaesthetic tinge of singularity,” which indexes something unseen, something incorporeal—i.e., a force that acts upon language, or a non-linguistic outside that cannot be coded as language. The critic, then, in an act of co-creation with the text, grasps the word in its becomings (or even hastens those becomings), and thereby pulls new sayings, new dynamisms, new affects to the variable surfaces of language. We will see below how color enters into, and actualizes itself through, literary language; for the moment I would simply suggest that language in its color-becomings effectively expands the *saying* by opening up the word to its own expressive potential; in so doing, “language in its entirety” is pushed “to its very limit in order to discover its Outside” (Deleuze, *Essays* 72). That is, *language in its entirety* is severed “from all reference” (74) and sent “racing along a line of flight” (58), toward something no longer linguistic; it is made to “stutter” (107), made “convulsive” (58). Deleuze-Guattari write, “It’s easy to stammer, but making language itself stammer is a different affair; it involves placing all linguistic, and even non-linguistic, elements in

variation” (*Plateaus* 109). It involves writing “like a foreigner in one’s own language” (Deleuze-Parnet, *Dialogues* 3); it involves opening up language to its own becomings:

A style is managing to stammer in one’s own language. It is difficult, because there has to be a need for such stammering. Not being a stammerer in one’s speech, but being a stammerer of language itself.

Being like a foreigner in one’s own language. Constructing a line of flight.

So, in short, whenever words are opened to their unactualized potential, language as a whole is sent reeling. By activating that potential, language goes critical, and in so doing disassociates itself from whatever transcendent makers may be ascribed to it (e.g., culturally, socially, institutionally, etc.). In this way, color-words overcome the Platonic rule of identity, where specific words are thought to instantiate universal values.

In any case, it is certainly well-known to both painters and scientists that colors are never solid, never fixed. They are passing effects of the light, as are the deep greens of a mid-summer flora. Moreover, colors never exist in isolation. In fact, all colors are composites. They are mixed, created. They are inflected or altered by the relations into which they enter (e.g., with other colors, other bodies). Colors contrast and complement one another, and thereby differentiate themselves in unique and ephemeral ways. From a scientific perspective, for example, color is a complex and entirely variable effect, generated by the dispersion and absorption of electromagnetic radiation, and by the processing capacities of both the eye and brain. Put simply, color is generated through a set of relational processes, or through what I call the forces of *reciprocal inflection*—e.g., absorption, saturation, refraction, reflection, contraction, expansion, contrast and complementarity. Yet these forces are in no way exhausted by their actualization. As

discussed in chapter 3, all forces are virtual; so that which is perceived in this context (e.g., the color *red*) is, in a sense, the bloom, actualized along visible wavelengths of light by the forces of reciprocal inflection. Color is an emergent property, a singular effect—an effect that, in turn, makes felt the virtual processes through which it unfolds. Put simply, visible color actualizes (or illuminates) the uncolored forces of reciprocal inflection.

Now, of course, visually perceived color retains an affective power all its own, expressed along visible wavelengths of light. But the point here is that the forces or virtual processes that enable that color to visibly actualize, or to be perceived, operate independent of the color itself, on the radical outside of such; hence, any other medium—e.g., words, music, clay—in ways entirely unique to that medium, retain the capacity for variable expressions of reciprocal inflection. For example, literature can actualize, again, in uniquely linguistic ways, the processes of (say) contrast and complementarity—processes essential to the production and reception of color. Thus when color enters into language, it does not enter symbolically, nor obviously does it enter as a visible expression of light energy; rather, it enters affectively, as yet another actualization of a set of relational processes that, yes, reveal themselves along visible wavelengths of light, but again are not exhausted thereby. Even visible color itself will not exhaust these processes. That is, color *becomes*-color (or remains in a state of becoming-color) through its ceaseless renewal of the processes of reciprocal inflection. Similarly, words become-color, and thereby produce effects of color or color-sensations, by unfolding the same set of virtual processes that go into the production of color. These processes are “events of language” (Deleuze-Parnet, *Dialogues* 69), just as surely as they are events of sight or

sound. We will explore just *how* language produces color-sensation in our reading of Whitman, below.

All art, Deleuze suggests, shares “a common problem” (*Francis* 56) that of “capturing” or harnessing what are ostensibly insensible forces (read: non-sonorous, non-visual, non-colored, non-linguistic),<sup>185</sup> and expressing those forces through a given set of materials. So the virtual processes that actualize (say) a specific shade or hue on the canvas only do so by entering into transformative relations with the artist’s materials. In the case of writing, those same relational processes (e.g., juxtaposition, transition, reflection, contraction, expansion, contrast and complementarity, etc.), channelled or unfolded through pigments on the canvas, are channelled—again, incorporeally—through words on the page, and in a way that transforms those words into what Deleuze-Guattari call “blocs of percepts and affects” (*What is?* 164); they add that “the only law of creation is that the compound must stand up on its own,” i.e., independent of any perceiving subject, authorial intention, or situated emotion. Thus affective language is language unleashed from either subjective or objective attribution, from grounds, from containments. Affects/percepts are markers of an infinite potential, and it is through these channels that coloring forces travel; that is, they make felt unactualized forces.

So as color moves into literature—again, as a set of relational processes, along affective channels—it enters into transformative relations with words; and provided the writer finds the literary or linguistic means of doing so, she—no less than the painter or

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<sup>185</sup> Deleuze gives the example of “time” as force, asking, “how can time be painted, how can time be heard?” (*Francis* 57). While being able to render forces of time is a problematic for all artists, so too are “elementary forces like pressure, inertia, weight, attraction, gravitation, germination—how can they be rendered?” Deleuze adds the proviso that sometimes the artist is tasked with unleashing forces invisible to one form of art but given to another; he writes, “how to paint sound, or even the scream? (And conversely, how to make colors audible?)”—these questions clearly resonate with the issues here discussed.



colorist—effectively invents color; that is, the writer opens up language to its own color-becomings, and in so doing forges a kind of literary chromaticism. By extracting color-sensation or sound-sensation from words, by actualizing those effects, literature becomes

a painting or a piece of music, but a music of words, a painting with words, a silence in words, as if the words could now discharge their content: a grandiose vision or a sublime sound. What is specific to the drawings and paintings of great writers (Hugo, Michaux...) is not that these works are literary, for they are not literary at all; they attain pure visions, but visions that are still related to language in that they constitute an ultimate aim, an outside, an inverse, an underside, an inkstain or unreadable handwriting. Words paint and sing, but only at the limit of the path they trace through their divisions and combinations. Words create silence. (Deleuze, *Essays* 112–13)

So the unique color- or sound-effects produced in and through literature not only disrupt conventional associations tied to words, but open up new possibilities of language, new ways of thinking, new colorings of life. We turn, then, to the question of how color expresses itself through language, and to that end ask the following: How does literature make or produce color? Of what effects (or coloring-sensations) is literature capable? How do the processes of reciprocal inflection raise language itself to an affective power or *being of sensation*? Can literature become a color-machine? Few works, I would hold, provide a better orientation to these matters than Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*.

## ***Demonstration 2: Whitman's Color-Machine***

"I will make the poems of materials, for I think they are to be the most spiritual poems..."

—Walt Whitman (*Leaves of Grass*, "Starting from Paumanok" 6.3)

In the Preface to *Essays Critical and Clinical*, Deleuze suggests that there may be "a painting and a music characteristic of writing, like the effects of colors and sonorities that rise up above words" (LV). He later presses the issue in an essay on Walt Whitman, arguing that "Whitman no doubt fabricated one of the most coloristic of literatures that could ever have existed" (59). So building on our earlier discussion, we again pose the question: How does color enter into language? Or, more precisely, what does it mean for a literature to be "coloristic"? To answer these questions (and perhaps test Deleuze's somewhat novel conception of Whitman's poetry as "one of the most coloristic of literatures"), we turn to *Leaves of Grass*, and, in particular, "Salut Au Monde"—a cycle of poems within *Leaves* that provide a solid orientation to a uniquely *literary* chromatics.

At the outset of stanza 3, the poet (or poet-narrator) asks, "What do you hear Walt Whitman?" and later, in stanza 4, "What do you see Walt Whitman?" Following each question, the poet begins ensuing lines with the repeated phrase, "I hear... I hear ... I hear..."; then, "I see... I see... I see..." John Hollander describes this not atypical verse-form in Whitman as "anaphoric catalogue" (183)—with *anaphora* here referring to the rhetorical device of repeating the opening word(s) to sequential lines so as to privilege or stress those openings. I would argue, however, that Whitman's hypnotic chants—turning the same phrase over and over again—drain the anaphora of its rhetorical power. In "Salut Au Monde," Whitman begins lines with "I hear..." 18 times; "I see..." a minimum of 83 times; also, "You..." 45 times, etc. The repetition in these instances becomes so

extreme, if not exhaustive, that Whitman anaesthetizes the reader to the grammatical privilege typically accorded agents and agency within the clause. That is, his repetitions not only neutralize the functional power invested in the subject or noun-head (“I,” “You,” “It”), as doer of the deed, but de-activate the process (verb), as well, by sapping it of its energy, its action, its force. Hearing and seeing are ritualized, nominalised, made *thing*.

Whitman shifts the emphasis away from what the functional grammarian calls the *theme* of the sentence (i.e., subject, topic) and re-locates that emphasis in the sights and sounds, or various objects of perception, enumerated within the poems.<sup>186</sup> In so doing, he blurs the grammatical/functional constraints (i.e., meaning, value, role, purpose, etc.) normally assigned to those elements within the clause by the sentential theme. Or, put another way: *that* these things are seen or heard becomes progressively less important in this cycle of poems, as does the fact that “I” see or hear them. So I would argue that by neutralizing, even emasculating, the subject,<sup>187</sup> Whitman draws an affective power from what Michael Halliday labels the “structural residue” (78) of the clause—a power that exceeds any lived perception or felt emotion. That is, the residue—in taking the form of what Whitman calls, “The divine list for myself or you or for any one making, / The face, the limbs, the index from head to foot, and what it arouses, / The mystic deliria, the madness amorous, the utter abandonment” (“From pent-up aching rivers” 24–6)—floats

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<sup>186</sup> In a part of the clause that functional grammar refers to as the *rheme*, or sentential *complement*.

<sup>187</sup> Though I will speak of Whitman’s assault on the grammatical subject over the pages that follow, I fully acknowledge his enduring and powerful commitment to the “I”—or to the ego that experiences, that consumes, that sings and chants—throughout his *Leaves*. But on this point, Whitman himself, in a late statement, entitled, “A Backward Glance O’er Travel’d Roads,” suggests that while “I avowedly chant ‘the great pride of man in himself,’ and permit it to be more or less a *motif* of nearly all my verse... I think it not inconsistent with obedience, humility, deference, and self-questioning” (698). That is, a man’s pride is “not inconsistent” with a man’s willingness to re-examine his own actions (or motives); to learn, grow, and change; to demonstrate humility; or to cede some degree of power to his fellow man. So, in some ways, Whitman extends the purview of the “I” beyond the fixed sensibilities of the ego. And, as we will see, his anaphora affirms the subject-in-becoming—i.e., the subject conflated with its actions, its doings, its other.

free, unrestrained and unrestricted by the perceiving I/eye. So Whitman suppresses the more conventional, more predictable or mechanical controls of the clause, and thereby subverts the *superordinate* (or hierarchical) relations of the subject-predicate bond; and though the residuals (e.g., complement, adjunct) are normally subjugated by the sentential theme—with the meaning and value of the residual inextricably bound to the dominant interests of the theme—Whitman unleashes *desire* in and through the structural residue of the clause, desire that cannot be turned back on the poet (or subject of perception) as some form of Oedipalized neurosis or unfulfilled wish: “none of the hierarchical orders are supported any more, they dissolve, they liquefy, while complex enumerations in quasi-biblical rhythms are allowed to verge on chaos” (Fletcher 107).

Whitman, in effect, *thematizes* the *rhematic* content of the line by assigning topical or newsworthy value to that portion of the sentence which again—grammatically speaking—tends to complete the meaning of the clause rather than initiate or organize its own functional values, as is the case in *Leaves*.<sup>188</sup> So by subverting the extant theme, Whitman opens up new *vistas* (i.e., new possibilities, new becomings, new lines of flight) for the residual. He demonstrates, for example, that the veritable riches of things seen or heard in “Salut Au Monde” (e.g., railroads, rivers, workmen, distant lands, myths, songs, world religions, etc.) have an integrity, a value or import, that needs to be experienced, experimented with, and ultimately evaluated *independently* of their being seen or heard. So Whitman, I would argue, draws a power of reciprocal inflection from the structural residues of the clause—a power most amenable to the residue itself. Why? Because to

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<sup>188</sup> Halliday contrasts “marked” sentential themes with the “unmarked” themes of “I” or “You” (44). That is, he reserves the term *unmarked* for clauses that begin with phrases like “I see...” or “I hear...,” just because such phrases are so ubiquitous and hence standard-bearers of the English language. So the repetition of unmarked themes in “Salut Au Monde” reinforces Whitman’s plan to drain the fixed subject of its power.

suppress the theme is to force the sentential complement out of its basin of attraction (i.e., the clause); the complement, then, when unhinged from the gravitational pull of the theme, derives its fortunes elsewhere (i.e., its meaning, value, purpose, etc.). That is, the complement expresses itself through the outside—i.e., through *that* which complements *it*, or through that with which it contrasts—more on this in a moment.

So the power of individual units of enumeration in Whitman's *leaves* derive not from any transcendent value (assigned to those units)—for, democratically speaking, “all the things of the universe are perfect miracles, each as profound as any” (“Starting from Paumanok” 12.16)—but from enumerative propulsions, mutual reinforcements, and what Whitman himself calls the “ensemble.” He writes, “I will not make poems with reference to parts, / But I will make poems, songs, thoughts, with reference to ensemble” (12.17–18). In other words, his poems retain a collective value, a power of connection and reciprocal inflection, whereby they not only shed their isolated identities, but assume their meaning or value through the company they keep: “The armies of those I love engirth me and I engirth them, / They will not let me off till I go with them, respond to them, / And discorupt them, and charge them full with the charge of the soul” (“I Sing the Body Electric” 1.2–4). In fact, Angus Fletcher speaks to the “power” of Whitman's poems “to radiate an absorption” (94), which I take to mean the power of these poems (or poetic lines) to reflect or express what they *deterritorialize* from other sources, other vernaculars, other bodies, other people and places, other poems (or poetic cycles) in *Leaves* and elsewhere; moreover, they retain the capacity to renew or reinvent—or, in the language of this chapter, to inflect, to color—what they *lift* from those realms. Put another way, Whitman's poems both absorb and convert their outside, and in so doing

forge connections (both ephemeral and durable) *with* that outside; that is, the poems spread like grass, sprouting extensions, and extensions on extensions. This is a poetry of ceaseless distributions, of progressive developments and modulations, of new vistas, new peoples, new languages, new worlds. This is a poetry of pure passage, pure relation:

Shot gold, maroon and violet, dazzling silver, emerald, fawn,

The earth's whole amplitude and Nature's multiform power consign'd for  
once to colors;

The light, the general air possess'd by them—colors till now unknown,

No limit, confine—not the Western sky alone—the high meridian—North,  
South, all,

Pure luminous color fighting the silent shadows to the last. (“A Prairie  
Sunset”)

The Whitman line, then, either fragment or phrase, becomes an opening—i.e., receptive to, and expressive of, “earth's whole amplitude and Nature's multiform power”—because it overcomes the confinements of the self-contained, self-sustaining clausal unit(y). His catalogues replace the horizontal and linear progression of the clause with the “ramified growth of subordinate clauses” (Hollander 182); and in the variable juxtapositions and transitions that ensue—i.e., in the leaps and gaps between lines—Whitman discovers the drama of reciprocal inflection, whereby coloring-sensation courses through his verses.

Deleuze claims that for Whitman,

Selecting singular cases and minor scenes is more important than any consideration of the whole. It is in the fragments that the hidden background appears, be it celestial or demonic...[be it] a bloody or

peaceful reality. But the fragments—the remarkable parts, cases, or views—must still be extracted by means of a special act, an act that consists, precisely, in writing. For Whitman, fragmentary writing is not defined by the aphorism or through separation, but by a particular type of sentence that *modulates the interval*. It is as if the syntax that composes the sentence, which makes it a totality capable of referring back to itself, tends to disappear by setting free an infinite asyntactic sentence, which prolongs itself or sprouts dashes in order to create spatiotemporal intervals. Sometimes it appears as an occasional enumerative sentence, an enumeration of cases as in a catalogue (the wounded in the hospital, the trees in a certain locale), sometimes it is a processional sentence, like a protocol of phases or moments (a battle, convoys of cattle, successive swarms of bumblebees). It is an almost mad sentence, with its changes in direction, its bifurcations, its ruptures and leaps, its prolongations, its sproutings, its parentheses. (*Essays* 57–8)

Deleuze's point here is that Whitman's verses unfold rhizomatically. In other words, they are engendered—if not propelled—by connective energies, by retreat from essential presences, by unrestrained passage, by transversal connections: “Nature without check with original energy” (Whitman, “Song of Myself” 1.13). Whitman puts the point in another way: “Take my leaves America, take them South and take them North, / Make welcome for them everywhere, for they are your own offspring...connect lovingly with them, for they connect lovingly with you” (“Starting from Paumanok” 4.1–2, 4). So, in short, his poems spread wildly, through cyclic expansion; they take their leave from

poetic tradition, from European ideals. He writes, “Expanding and swift, henceforth, / Elements, breeds, adjustments, turbulent, quick and audacious, / A world primal again, vistas of glory and incessant branching” (17.1–3). Whitman’s poetry, like the America he imagines, is non-totalizable; it is a map of shifting relations; it is free verse (or better, *freedom* verse): “Exulting words, words to Democracy’s lands” (14.5). And in the intervals both between words and between lines, Whitman pries open spaces; he experiments with new possibilities for a people—a people as yet unformed or wholly unified—struggling with the collision between past and future, between entrenched ideals and new exigencies. Through his verse—i.e., through, as Deleuze says in the passage above, “its changes in direction, its bifurcations, its ruptures and leaps, its prolongations, its sproutings, its parentheses”—Whitman modulates the intervals between complements (or linguistic residues) forcing unknown effects, unheard-of becomings, and ultimately a new camaraderie through his verses, that which extends itself into what Whitman, in *Specimen Days*, calls, “the foundation and tie of all... Unionism” (68). In *Leaves*, he writes, “I will sing the song of companionship” (“Starting from Paumanok” 6.18); and later, “who but I should be the poet of comrades?” (6.26). Finally, in “Songs of Parting,” he adds, “Of seeds dropping into the ground, of births, / Of the steady concentration of America, inland, upward, to impregnable and swarming places” (2.1–2). For Whitman, America itself—in its “steady concentration,” its “divine list[s] for myself or you or for any one making,” its “mystic deliria,” its “swarming” extension of itself—*becomes* a literature, a literature haunted by secession (from the clause), by an uneasy union and all-too ephemeral encounter with the outside, in *the open air*: “I think heroic deeds were all conceiv’d in the open air, and all free poems also” (“Songs of the Open Road” 4.11).



Whitman's colorism derives from the poem's variable openness to the outside, to light, to "The play of shine and shade on the trees" ("Song of Myself" 2.14). Contrastive, complementary, "convulsive" (Deleuze, *Essays* 58), brightened by a new democratic ideal, and yet dampened by the death of a president, Whitman's *Leaves* is a work of pure modulation, "free and lawless" ("From pent-up aching rivers" 29). In Whitman, relations are invented, collapsed, and renewed. Put another way, he colors his leaves through the forces of reciprocal inflection; he captures and, at every turn, expresses unrestrained sympathies, resonances, and couplings: "For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you"; meanwhile, "My tongue, every atom of my blood, form'd from this soil, this air" ("Song of Myself" 1.3, 6). Whitman is compelled to magnify or amplify relations, to open up spaces—or what he repeatedly calls new "vistas" (read: new ways of seeing), from which any whole (any united whole, or political union, or "Unionism") derives. In fact, Whitman's poems are themselves a clearing of space, of poetic space, geographical space, historical space—all of which open the door for America to rush through: "Leaving such to the States they melt, they depart, charging the water and the land with names" ("Starting from Paumanok" 16.9). His work becomes an agitation, a movement headlong into the "unknown" and the "unseen." He writes, "What is known I strip away, / I launch all men and women forward with me into the Unknown" ("Song of Myself" 44.2–3); and "You road I enter upon and look around, I believe you are not all that is here, / I believe that much unseen is also here" ("Songs of the Open Road" 2.1–2). In fact, Whitman's rambling processual clauses vex the interpretative or analytical overtures of the critic, and any related appeals made to conventional opinion or common sense. Why? Because the Whitman line, in its resistance to clausal confinement and insular

value, projects something impersonal or unrecognizable, that which continually jams the circuits of recognition and representation: “Mélange mine own, the unseen and the seen” (“Starting from Paumanok” 10.6); and because the specific identity of elements inventoried in Whitman’s verses becomes progressively less clear—again, given the diminishing power accorded subject and verb in the clause—they need not *necessarily* be so inventoried; in short, nominalised sequences can always be reshuffled.

Whitman’s story of America is the story of shifting relations and continuous reshufflings. His poetry is permeated by restlessness, by a perpetual unease about the state of the Union (and the shifting tectonic plates beneath it), and by linguistic or grammatical forms ceaselessly colliding and re-modulating. In all these ways, coloring force pours into (in and through) Whitman’s verses, and in that way advances the cause of an America that need resist the confinements of its own color codes (red-white-blue):

How many hold despairingly yet to the models departed, caste, myths,  
obedience, compulsion, and to infidelity,

How few see the arrived models, the athletes, the Western States, or see  
freedom or see spirituality, or hold any faith in results...

How society waits unform’d, and is for a while between things ended and  
things begun... (“Songs of Parting” 1.5-6, 10)

Whitman here imagines America as a nation “unform’d,” or yet to come; a nation still in the throes of its processes of individuation, its ceaseless renewals and reinventions of itself, its becoming-different. Elsewhere, he writes, “the ambitious thought of my song is to help the forming of a great aggregate Nation” (698). To that *ambitious* end, the Whitman line is marked by relational forces (e.g., juxtaposition, contrast and

complementarity, expansion and contraction, communication and convergence), by ceaseless renewals, and by the linguistic tonalities that emerge from these variable collisions. Here, then, Whitman's color-machine unfolds. That is, the color of the Whitman line—e.g., phrase, fragment, or even “spear of summer grass” (“Song of Myself” 1.5)—is similarly unleashed through its proliferating bonds, its expressions of complementarity and contrast, its reciprocal nature and break with grammatical isolation, etc. In short, Whitman's coloring (or coloring-sensation) emerges through felt relations—relations amplified, inflected, and ceaselessly renewed.

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So, finally, as we have seen, literary color must be liberated; that is, literature must enter into its own color-becomings, so as to “acquire a real presence...an intense clarity” (Deleuze, *Francis* 120). In fact, anything (in life and art), any material, is capable of expressing color and becoming a color-machine—though not in any predictable fashion. For example, color-words often block color, by reducing it to conventional associations; literary language, though, creates new color mixes, new linguistic accents. Literature opens up language as a whole to its own becomings, its own revolutionary potential, its own coloring-sensation, and does so by shaking language loose from its symbolic associations and conventional attributions. Literature cracks open color-words, re-coloring them in the process. So, in this context, we speak not of color-words in literature but the color-becomings of literature, shaped through processes of extraction, conversion, production, and “affective modulation” (Massumi, *Parables* 222).

Literature delivers or offers up color not in a visual way, not as appearance, but in and through the invisible, non-colored, non-localized processes (e.g., contrast and

complementarity, modulation, juxtaposition, transition, etc.) of which color itself (visually understood) is but one manifestation, one projection of a non-colored field of forcible relations. The painter or visual artist employs materials to which they do not own the exclusive rights—the saying (i.e., the coloring) exceeds the said (i.e., the color). The artist employs a certain visual range of colorings, and those colorings have certain affects. But as I have tried to argue, coloring-forces can be directed away from the canvas and toward other materials (e.g., words, sounds), producing additional color-effects; and though those effects may not be visual, they are certainly no less coloristic. Again, the outward manifestation of color does not have exclusive rights to the non-colored processes/forces that visual color makes felt/known in certain ways. So the writer, the musician, the political orator (or whomever else) has full access to the non-localizable machinery of the forces that color takes up, in order to create sonic hues, grammatical shadings, vocal complementarities, and so forth—all in the service of producing a certain coloring or coloristic effect. And these effects are not metaphorical, nor any less material or concrete, than the colorings produced by artists or painters.

## Epilogue—

### Critic as Artisan

*Sal Paradise*: “I didn’t want to interfere, I just wanted to follow.”

—Jack Kerouac (*On the Road*, 132)

The artisan is the itinerant, the ambulant.

—Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 409)

The artisan must...follow the accidents and local vagaries of a piece of material. He must let the material have its say in the final form produced. This involves a sensual interaction with [that material], applying a tool in a way that does not fight the material but conforms to it.

—Manual DeLanda (*War in the Age of Intelligent Machines*, 30)

All that’s left for the reader is to become the artisan of his own reading, step by step...by multiplying marginalia; that will then be the guiding principle of this commentary effect.

—Éric Alliez (*The Signature of the World*, 1)

The pure critic does not exist; the pure critic transists.

—Iain Mackenzie (*The Idea of Pure Critique*, 73)

Let me suggest, in conclusion, that the materialist critic—given what I have called her co-creative encounters with the book—shares much in common with the artisan. That is, rather than simply representing the book by tracing its conventional figures, unpacking its structural logic, or exposing its relation to dominant ideologies, the materialist *machines* the book (read: connects it to its outside, puts it to work), so as to liberate the powers and potentials of a set of linguistic materials. To understand how this approach advances a uniquely artisanal agenda, consider the following scenarios:

- A *folk artist*, always on the lookout for new and interesting objects, happens upon a lamp made of sea shells piled high among some trash at the side of the road. She thinks to herself, “...maybe I can use this.”
- A *gardener*, frustrated by the annual yields of both his pear and apple trees, decides to graft disease-resistant rootstock onto their damaged trunks in hopes of maximizing their capacity to fight off root-rot over the winter months. He knows the transplantation will require a keen eye and steady hand—as the incision may be too deep, or not deep enough, for the tissues of the scion to merge with those of the stock—and so he consults a member of his regional gardening club, schooled in the vagaries of local flora.
- A *flower arranger*, walking on the beach, spies a piece of oddly-shaped driftwood; believing it to have broken free from the moulded hull of a sunken fishing vessel, the man is struck by the thought that what has become little more than marine debris now testifies to how the various forces of nature (e.g., high winds, tall waves, powerful

currents, the corrosive effects of sea water) ceaselessly collide with the pride and sense of familial duty that compels fishermen to risk life and limb on the high seas in hopes of bringing home *the catch*. Turning to a friend, he says, "...I have an idea for a new arrangement."

- An apprentice *weaver* lays eyes on a rare, nineteenth-century *Jacquard loom* at auction. Notable for its pioneering use of punch cards, the Jacquard is thought to be a prototype for the programming technologies of today. Wanting to know everything she can about this remarkable specimen, the weaver excitedly asks the seller, "how do I work this?" "what are its moving parts?" "what can it do?"
- A *woodworker* intently studies the grain of a piece of mahogany—and with that, Deleuze-Guattari (in a passage from *A Thousand Plateaus*) pick up the commentary. The authors suggest that for the woodworker "it is a question of surrendering to the wood, then following where it leads" (408)—i.e., along "the variable undulations and torsions of the [wood] fibres." Which is to say, the woodworker tracks a set of expressive traits in the wood—"an entire energetic materiality"—in an effort to tap its unexploited potentials and self-ordering capacities; and so through its "submission to the sensible and sensitive evaluations"<sup>189</sup> of the woodworker, the mahogany opens to its own becomings—i.e., its power to vary, to differ, to self-organize.

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<sup>189</sup> I take this phrase from *The Signature of the World*, a book by Deleuze's student Éric Alliez, to emphasize the fact that—in this instance—the artisan is tasked with *evaluating* the empirical conditions and expressive capacities of the wood (i.e., its *sensible* nature) (48).

These scenarios are meant to highlight just some of the ways that artisans (such as, the folk artist, gardener, flower-arranger, woodworker—not to mention the soap-maker, stone-mason, jewellery-maker, blacksmith, etc.) put to work, and/or orient themselves to, the materials they encounter (e.g., in nature, at auction, at the side of the road).

But what can we take away from these scenes? Here are a few particulars:

First of all, the artisan pursues the interesting and the remarkable (i.e., the ‘what *can* be...?’), rather than the clear and distinct (i.e., the ‘what *is*...?’). Her approach—or really, her whole way of thinking—is propelled by curiosity, by intuition, by “a sort of groping experimentation” (Deleuze-Guattari, *What is?* 41), and by the thrill of encounters with the unknown and the unrecognizable.

The artisan places the emphasis on concrete practices, and on engaging life where it stands—in the here and now.

The artisan does not treat her materials like inert receptacles. Instead, she negotiates or traverses their idiosyncratic features—i.e., “an energetic materiality [that] overfills the prepared matter, and a qualitative deformation or transformation [that] overfills the form” (Deleuze-Guattari, *Plateaus* 410)—rather than generalizes those things away.

The materials the artisan encounters (or comes across) become a kind of provocation: amenable to local interventions, while resistant to general structures of knowledge, institutionally produced and dogmatically applied by experts in the field.

Artisans belong to loosely organized and heterogeneous groupings or collectives of variable sizes and forms of organization: “the metallurgist is the first specialized artisan, and in this respect forms a collective *body* (secret societies, guilds, journeymen’s



associations)” (Deleuze-Guattari, *Plateaus* 412). But these bodies, these organizations, need not be stifling, nor exclusive. Recall: “we do not even know what a body can do”—and this includes collective bodies. Their anarchic distributions are based on temporary and highly variable partnerships, alliances, exchanges, and interactions.

For the artisan, *space* (e.g., material, social, mercantile) unfolds in and through variable forms of organization and assembly. That is, the artisan imagines space, creates it, pries it open. There are no prescribed relations, no prefigured orders: relations are made, territories created. For example, flower arrangements are a free distribution of dried grasses, mosses, pods and petals, marked by a spontaneous order and open-ended structure (*nomos*), where arrangement *precedes* essence.

But what truly links artisans to one another is their collective relation to the *problem* (or the problematic). For example, the artisan will perpetually be tasked with needing to locate and/or procure certain materials—and possibly in large quantities—and needing to work (with) those materials in novel and interesting ways. Moreover, the artisan must choose what to make, before then confronting the inevitable question of what *else* to make. For, in fact, artisans will always need to invent new forms, and thereby re-invent themselves, and their practices, in the process, so as to remain competitive in a fickle and ever-changing marketplace. Finally, the threefold problem of how to sell things, of when and where to sell them, and of how to meet the demands of the consumer are the enduring concerns of any artisan.

These problems, however, rarely lend themselves to fixed solutions. For example, markets dry up. Venues change. Prices fluctuate, as do consumer needs or demands. Moreover, suppliers go out of business. The quality of available materials varies widely,

perhaps even with the changing of seasons, as does the expense accorded such materials. As well, the artisan may be required to call upon different skill sets, different creative and/or practical capacities, as again competitive forces create unpredictability in the marketplace. In short, the artisan's solutions will always be temporary, always approximate; at the same time, they may only serve to deepen, nuance, and/or alter the problem, rather than resolve it for any protracted period of time.

So what does all this mean for the critic? As suggested above, I would add the critic—or at least the Deleuzean-inflected materialist critic—to this *guild*. My intuition is that the materialist may have more to learn from the artisanal agenda than from any institutional body when it comes to, for example, engaging—i.e., making use of, orienting themselves to—a set of literary or linguistic materials. Let us consider a few points of convergence:

*The critic-artisan pursues the interesting and the unusual.* In a short, but compelling, passage in *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze-Guattari tie the artisanal economies to the broader field of what they call *minor science*.<sup>190</sup> In brief, the authors claim that “artisans are those who follow the matter-flow as pure productivity” (411); that is, they track, exploit, unleash what Deleuze-Guattari variously refer to as “machinic phylum,” “traits of expression,” or “singularities”—and do so in threefold fashion. First, they actively *follow* (read: track, pursue) a given material by travelling to where those materials may lie (e.g., the seed-catalogue, the beach, the trash), or by tracking them down through merchants—i.e., individuals mired in mercantile flows of their own, as

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<sup>190</sup> Deleuze-Guattari contrast minor or nomad science with major or Royal science. In brief, the non-sovereign minoritarian tradition works on/with materials to liberate their affective and metamorphic powers; the latter divests materials of those powers by imposing a formal metrics on a subservient matter. (See *Plateaus* 361-374 *passim* for an extended treatment of this relationship; see also note 4, below.)

distributors of material goods. Next—and most importantly for our purposes—artisans *follow* the aforementioned “matter-flow” in and through their chosen materials, and do so, as Deleuze-Guattari point out, by “connecting” their own particular “operations”—i.e., their own way(s) of working with, or operating on,<sup>191</sup> the materials they find/encounter—to “an entire energetic materiality” (408).<sup>192</sup> Finally, artisans *follow* a largely travelling marketplace that moves from school yards to side streets; from fairgrounds to convention-halls; from hotel lobbies to private homes; from malls to flea-markets; from the Internet to the trunk of a car; from town to town, season to season—both indoors and outdoors. For this reason, Deleuze-Guattari describe the artisan as “the itinerant, the ambulant” (409), always *following*, always in flight. Artisans are, in fact, prospectors, migrants, nomads; most of all, they are apprentices, following the signs.<sup>193</sup> So Deleuze-Guattari conclude that “to follow the flow of matter is to iterate, to ambulate. It is intuition in action.”

Setting aside for the moment this question of the artisan following-after materials, or following-after a marketplace, let me suggest that the critic-artisan—in tracking the book’s singularities or traits of expression—follows a matter-flow, and, in so doing, maps the unusual, the interesting, or the remarkable in and through the book. On the one hand, the trait is formless—i.e., “opposed to the image or to the expressed form” (78); so traits of expression escape resemblance, form, and reference; they, in fact, *contaminate* such

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<sup>191</sup> Cf. Massumi’s notion of “operative reason”; see pp. 29–30, above.

<sup>192</sup> Tracking the *machinic phylum* or *traits of expression* in and through a set of materials is *not* the same as identifying formal (or otherwise essential) aspects of that material—which is the work of State science. The minoritarian agenda involves tracking something intensive, energetic, and singular, something “active and affective” (Deleuze-Guattari, *Plateaus* 408) through a kind of material sub-strata, whereby “singularities, or self-ordering processes...provide opportunities for intervention by artisans” (Bonta and Protevi 162).

<sup>193</sup> In *Proust and Signs*, Deleuze writes “We are wrong to believe in facts; there are only signs” (92); he goes on to say that any true “apprenticeship to signs” means, above all else, knowing that “Everything exists in those obscure zones that we penetrate as into crypts, in order to decipher hieroglyphs and secret languages. The Egyptologist, in all things, is the man who undergoes an initiation—the apprentice.”

things (i.e., resemblances, forms): “A trait of expression contaminates everything, escaping linguistic form” (Deleuze, *Essays* 77). On the other hand, the trait gives voice to something uncertain or unknown, an entire “zone of indetermination” (76); in doing so, the trait indexes the potential of material forms to go beyond, to become-different. That potential, that power or capacity to become, is precisely what the critic-artisan pursues.

Elsewhere, Deleuze makes the point that “Something in the world forces us to think. This something is an object not of recognition but of a fundamental *encounter*” (*Difference* 139); he then adds,

It is not the gods [or, in this context, the structures, the narrative forms, the themes, the values, etc.] which we encounter: even hidden, the gods are only the forms of recognition. What we encounter are the demons, the sign-bearers: powers of the leap, the interval, the intensive and the instant; powers which only cover difference with more difference. (145)

These encounters, moreover, are “involuntary adventures”—or what Massumi calls *a shock to thought*<sup>194</sup>—in that they provoke something unexpected in the mind and body of the artisan: “that which can only be sensed...moves the soul, ‘perplexes’ it” (Deleuze, *Difference* 140)—e.g., certain *sensations* or feelings (e.g., excitement, surprise, anticipation, curiosity, suspicion—something more?); a new awareness or understanding; new ways of thinking, new modes of action.<sup>195</sup> Brian Massumi describes the matter in the following way: “the force of expression...strikes the body first, directly and unmediately.

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<sup>194</sup> This is the title of a collection of essays by Massumi.

<sup>195</sup> Deleuze makes a pivotal distinction in his work between recognition, or better yet, the *recognizable*—i.e., “that which bears directly on the senses in an object which can be recalled, imagined or conceived” (*Difference* 139)—and that which is empirically unrecognizable (or imperceptible) to the senses, though no less real. The encounter proves critical to Deleuze’s notion of a ‘superior empiricism’ because the encounter itself, and *not* the object empirically recognized, gives rise to an involuntary level of sensation or sensibility beyond that which can be routinely recognized by way of the senses. So, in short, the encounter forces thought, and forces an awareness of that which can only be thought or sensed.

It passes transformatively through the flesh before being instantiated in subject-positions subsumed by a system of power. Its immediate effect is a differing” (“Introduction” xvii). In this moment, then, we are imbued with “the thought of immanence.”<sup>196</sup>

*The critic-artisan opens up a critical space in the book.* This we spoke about at length in Part 2 of the dissertation, particularly with regard to Blanchot, and what he termed “the space of resonance,” opened up by the movement of the critical. In Chapter 4, for example, I sought to not only enumerate Whitman’s various spatial constructions, but to open up his *Leaves*, as a whole, to their own color-becomings, or, to borrow a phrase from Deleuze, “the spatializing energy of color” (*Francis* 134).

In *Kafka*, Deleuze-Guattari treat Kafka’s body of work spatially, like “a rhizome, a burrow” (3)—i.e., something to be tracked, mapped, followed—and thus make the following pronouncement: “We will enter, then, by any point whatsoever.” That is, they will pass through “multiple entrances” if need be, making connections, following a line of flight. This kind of “internal itinerancy” (*Plateaus* 414), or this *moving-with* the book’s matter-flow, becomes the hallmark of what I have called the *immanentist orientation*.

*The critic-artisan negotiates the problem (i.e., the problematic sub-structures of the book) rather than imposes critical constants on the book (i.e., literary or linguistic axioms).* Critical axioms, of the sort discussed in Chapter 2, totalize the literary artefact through a cluster of critical idealisms. Comparatively, a materialist criticism is propelled by the *problem* of use, of function (more on this below), and by an epistemology designed to negotiate the local vagaries of a set of literary or linguistic materials. Critics look at the book not by the set of static properties that align it with all other books—that

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<sup>196</sup> I derive this phrase from Leonard Lawlor’s book, *The Implications of Immanence*. He writes, “Let us say that immanence is opposed to the transcendent, meaning that the thought of immanence is the thought of life” (70). We discussed this question of “life” at length in Chapter 3 of the dissertation.

is, they eschew such classification, such predictability—but in terms of its expressive capacities and thus how the book itself may be affected by events, by outside forces, and thereby metamorphosed. In short, the emphasis shifts to the dynamic relations between matter and energy (or matter-force relations) and away from matter-form relations—i.e., from the axiomatic of “what is?” to the problematic of “what can be?”:

Reproducing implies the permanence of a fixed point of view that is external to what is reproduced: watching the flow from the bank. But following is something different from the ideal of reproduction. One is obliged to follow when one is in search of the “singularities” of a matter, or rather of a material, and not out to discover a form... when one engages in the continuous variation of variables, instead of extracting constants.”

(Deleuze-Guattari, *Plateaus* 372)

So drawing these variables to the surface—i.e., these impurities, idiosyncrasies, heterogeneities—makes manifest, or makes felt, the book’s vague essences and capacity for spontaneous transformation (into, say, a color-machine or sound-machine). Moreover, because there is nothing inevitable or predictable about a given actualization of the book-body, we now ask what makes the emergence/experience of the book-body possible?

How do the materials of the book play a participatory role in the book’s actualization?

*The critic-artisan pays heed to a people yet to come.* Here, I imagine the possibility of criticism becoming a minor science, that which not only breaks its institutional bonds, but at last overcomes the enduring blight of “the poisoned gift of Platonism.” As far back as Plato’s *Ion*, the critic (or proto-critic) has been denied her co-creative role. That is, the critic was forced from the stage and into the gallery—i.e., a

place where judgment unfolds, where laws are made and sanctions are imposed. But what might it mean for the critic to regain her ionic charge (lost to the ages) and thereby re-assume her creative, if not political, role in relation to the book? I imagine, at the very least, a criticism that occupies the affective registers of the text, such as a rhapsodic (i.e., spoken word or performance-based) criticism—a form of criticism that indeed has a contemporary following. I imagine a much expanded notion of what Sussman calls “the task of the critic,” one defined not institutionally, not in the classroom, but socially, politically. I imagine new, and as yet unformed, coterie of critics determined to take up the artisanal agenda as it relates to the magnification of the book’s powers and potentials of expression. A critic’s guild?

The mistake of mid-twentieth century criticisms (e.g., Formalism, New Criticism, Structuralism) was to pursue a State or majoritarian science, which involved the ceaseless enumeration and application of a set of critical axioms; however, in a strange and unlikely return to the dream of the New Critics (et al.) to forge a critical science, I suggest that a viable future for the critical enterprise may involve the turn, not to State science, but to minor science (and to its related artisanal agenda). In this latter context, we might imagine that the *rude* critic (e.g., Ion)—who like the smiths and journeymen of old—is looked upon as ignoble, even immoral, for his work with base materials and his supposed lack of cultural refinement; we might imagine such a critic playing more of an operative role, getting their hands dirty in the text and thereby forcing new becomings, rather than making it conform to a deadening representational logic.

*The critic-artisan renews the functional orientation to the book.* Finally, I would suggest that by asking the empirico-pragmatic questions of the artisan (e.g., “how do I

use this?” “what does it do?” “how do I make this work?”), the critic-artisan goes along way to reviving the problem first formally posed in the nineteenth century, by Matthew Arnold, concerning “the function of criticism at the present time.” Recall that in Chapter 2, I critiqued the fact that Arnold’s functional inquiry, in and through the twentieth century, would be fuelled by the presumed need to establish norms of critical action and by questions/concerns related to the socio-political value of literary criticism (or literary theory). Moreover, I pointed out that the evolving functional concerns of the critic tended to derive from a perceived crisis either in prevailing approaches to literary criticism or in the role of art, generally, in a morally bankrupt society. The perception of that crisis would, in turn, stimulate efforts to legitimize or purify the critical apparatus through the erection of certain pan-critical agreements about the function of criticism, both institutionally and on the public stage.

However, I have a different reason for appealing to functional matters in this context. The materialist critic—again, much like the artisan—is solely motivated by the desire to *force* crisis, not resolve it. In an interview (with Deleuze) on the publication of *Anti-Oedipus*, Guattari clarifies the functionalist agenda as follows:

We’re strict functionalists: what we’re interested in is how something works, functions—[thus] finding the machine...Functionalism has only failed when people have tried to introduce it where it doesn’t belong, into great structured wholes [e.g., the State, social movements, language, even institutional criticism] that can’t themselves come about, [or] be produced, in the same way they function. Functionalism does rule, however, in the world of micro-multiplicities, micro-machines, desiring-machines,



molecular formations....The only question is how anything works, with its intensities, flows, processes, partial objects. (Deleuze, *Negotiations* 21–2)

In fact, because “desiring-machines” remain open to their own becomings, i.e., their own powers of transformation, precisely *how* those machines work and *what* they can do (e.g., expressively, affectively) remain open questions—i.e., irreducible to any conventional measure. In *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze-Guattari draw a clear distinction between molar formations (e.g., institutions, statistical norms, society or the State)—or what Guattari (in the statement above) refers to as “great structured wholes,” and what Deleuze-Guattari call “large heavy aggregates” (*Anti-Oedipus* 288)<sup>197</sup>—and “molecular formations” (read: the deviant, unregulated, asignifying actions and behaviours of systems pushed far-from-equilibrium). In short, they draw a distinction between the molar and the molecular, between fixity and movement, between product and the process of production, and between institutional unities and variable arrangements:

It is only at the sub-microscopic level of desiring-machines that there exists a functionalism—machinic arrangements, an engineering of desire; for it is only there that functioning and formation, use and assembly, product and production merge. All molar functionalism is false, since the organic or social machines are not formed in the same way they function, and the technical machines are not assembled in the same way they are used, but imply precisely the specific conditions that separate their own production from their distinct product. (288)

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<sup>197</sup> Deleuze-Guattari still perceive these lumbering “aggregates” and “great structured wholes” as desiring-machines, but machines limited by “determinate conditions”— i.e., by the fixed, “statistical forms into which [those] machines enter as so many stable forms” (*Anti-Oedipus* 287–88).

So with this perspective in mind, I distinguish between, on the one hand, the book—where functional capacity collides with the processes of formation (effectuating what Deleuze-Guattari call “desiring-production”)—and, on the other hand, the literary artefact—where form and function are divorced from one another; that is, I distinguish between a criticism that mobilizes the book’s capacity to “go critical” and a criticism that blocks the book’s becomings, often by forcing its compliance with pre-existing critical norms. Put simply, I draw a distinction between molecular functionalism (which again involves forcing the book to its limits) and the sort of “molar functionalism”—to which Deleuze-Guattari refer in the passage above—that has long plagued the Arnoldian inquiry into “the function of criticism at the present time.” The salient difference between the two can be formulated as follows: the latter falsely concerns itself with pre-established unities or “large heavy aggregates”—e.g., the literary artefact, the author, the ideal reader, even institutional models themselves—while the former concerns itself with the subterranean currents of desire (or schizoid flow) unfolding across the affective registers of the book.

Finally, for Deleuze, as for Whitman, literature has both a creative *and* political role: “The ultimate aim of literature is to set free, in the delirium, this creation of a health or this invention of a people, that is, a possibility of life” (Deleuze, *Essays* 4). Similarly, Whitman writes, “I see tremendous entrances and exits, new combinations, the solidarity of races, I see that force advancing with irresistible power on the world’s stage... [while] issuing forth against the idea of caste” (“Years of the Modern” 4–5, 8). So, in the end, “the ultimate aim of literature”—a uniquely artisanal aim—is “to liberate a living and expressive material that speaks for itself” (Deleuze-Guattari, *Kafka* 21). What this means, as we know, is that literature pries open and modulates words, exposes them to their own

becomings, and in so doing overrides their conventional associations. My argument all along has been that the critic need participate in this dual agenda (i.e., both creatively and politically), not by dictating outcomes or by forcing socio-political codes from the book, but by unleashing forces and creating new possibilities of life.

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