

The Uses of Literature: Gilles Deleuze's American Rhizome

by

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

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Abstract

“The Uses of Literature: Gilles Deleuze’s American Rhizome” puts *four writers* – Walt Whitman, Herman Melville, George Jackson and William S. Burroughs – in conjunction with *four concepts* – becoming-democratic, belief in the world, the line of flight, and finally, control societies. The aim of this study is to elaborate and expand on Gilles Deleuze’s extensive use of American literature and to examine possible conjunctions of his philosophy with contemporary American literary criticism and American Studies. I argue that Deleuze’s interest in American writing not only productively complicates recent historical accounts of “French Theory’s” incursion into American academia, but also provides a compelling way think about the relationship between literature and history, language and experience, and the categories of minor and major that organize national literary traditions. Beginning with the concept of the “American rhizome” this dissertation approaches the question of rhizomatic thought as a constructivist methodology for engaging the relationship between literary texts and broader social movements. Following an introduction laying out the basic coordinates of such an approach, and their historical relevance with respect to the reception of “French Theory” in the United States, the subsequent chapters each take an experimental approach with respect to a single American writer invoked in Deleuze’s work and a concept that resonates with the literary text under consideration. In foregrounding the question of the *use* of literature this dissertation explores the ways literature has been appropriated, set to work, or dismissed in various historical and institutional arrangements, but also seeks to suggest the possibility of creating conditions in which literature can be said to take on a life of its own.

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1. Introduction: American Rhizome

In November 1975 Gilles Deleuze traveled to New York to participate in the Schizo-Culture conference organized by Semiotext(e) Press at Columbia University. Accompanied by Félix Guattari (co-writer of *L'Anti-Œdipe* (1972; 1977) and *Kafka: Pour une Littérature Mineure*, which was published that same year), and the philosophers Michel Foucault and Jean-François Lyotard, Deleuze's acceptance of the invitation to contribute to the conference occasioned his first and only visit the United States. In a certain respect Schizo-Culture might first be understood as part of a response to the brutal imposition of "law and order" that characterized 1970s America and the presidency of Richard Nixon in the wake of the new social movements of the previous decade. The themes of the conference – prisons and madness – focused on the increasing incarceration of political activists and people of color, and sought to question, from a political standpoint, the category of "mental illness." These were issues all four French thinkers were deeply engaged with at the time in their own country – both through their writing and their political affiliations. Foucault, along with his partner Daniel Defert, had for instance recently created the *Groupe d'information sur les prisons* to investigate conditions in French prisons and the title of the conference itself alludes to the rethinking of schizophrenia and desire that inspired *Anti-Oedipus* (though the English translation of that book would not appear for two more years).

Schizo-Culture was primarily an experiment to bring these French theorists, all loosely connected to the events of May '68, together with artists, activists, and writers associated with the American counter-culture, the New York avant-garde, and with those who to varying degrees were affiliated with radical movements of the sixties. Among those attending Schizo-Culture were writer William S. Burroughs, composer

John Cage, British anti-psychiatry movement advocate and co-founder R.D. Laing, radical feminist Ti-Grace Atkinson, and anti-war and prison activist Judy Clark.

Several recent studies recount this event and the encounters Deleuze and Guattari had during the three weeks they spent traveling in the U.S. According to François Cusset's *French Theory*, in addition to the range of people they met at the conference, Deleuze and Guattari were also introduced to Allen Ginsberg, Bob Dylan, Joan Baez, Patti Smith, and Lawrence Ferlinghetti. Cusset also notes that while in Los Angeles, Deleuze and Guattari "visited the Watts neighborhood and spoke to some members of the Black Panthers."¹ All of which suggest multiple lines of connection between radical thought in the United States and Deleuze's philosophy.

Already in *Anti-Oedipus* one is often stunned by the importance given to certain radical American figures (from John Brown to John Cage) and particularly by the way fragments of American writing function in that book. All of a sudden Deleuze and Guattari inject a line from George Jackson's *Soledad Brother*, an excerpt from Ginsberg's *Kaddish*, or a passage from Henry Miller's *Sexus*. With respect to Anglo-American literature more generally, they assert that these are writers "who know how to leave, to scramble the codes, to cause flows to circulate, to traverse the desert of the body without organs. They overcome a limit, they shatter a wall, the capitalist barrier."² My dissertation seeks to explore the function of American writing within Deleuze's philosophy – both the books he wrote in collaboration with Félix Guattari and Claire

¹ François Cusset, *French Theory: How Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze, & Co. Transformed the Intellectual Life of the United States*, trans. Jeff Fort (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 67-68. See also Sylvère Lotringer (one of the key organizers of the conference) "Doing Theory" in *French Theory in America*, eds. Sylvère Lotringer and Sande Cohen (Routledge Press: New York, 2001) 125-163. Many of the texts presented at the conference also were collected and published three years later in *Semiotext(e): Schizo-Culture* 3, no. 2 (1978).

² Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 132-133.

Parnet and his later collection *Essays Critical and Clinical* (1993) – as a way to address several related questions that pertain to both the use of literature and the use of theory. This dissertation emerged from a desire to affirm literature and a practice of literary criticism in a moment when both appear to be in crisis. What I find most compelling about Deleuze’s use of literature is that it suggests a path for approaching literature, not as an *object* of critique, but as a *means* of open experimentation. It struck me that Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of an “American rhizome” (which I will turn to shortly) enabled a thinking about the connections between American writing and various social movements at a distance from the terms of a national literary tradition. Moreover, it seemed to me that Deleuze’s suggestion that one think of writing in terms of “becoming” or “experimentation” – rather than, for instance, in terms of representation or even of history – provided an antidote to the exhausted rehearsals of ideology critique and the theoretical assumptions of new historicism that have oriented the study American literature for some time.

Provocative statements about American literature can be found throughout both volumes of Deleuze and Guattari’s *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, and are further emphasized in a remarkable essay Deleuze wrote with Claire Parnet in 1977, “On the Superiority of Anglo-American Literature.” But Deleuze’s interest in these writers also predates his co-written books and continues into his last published book, a collection of texts devoted specifically to literary questions. Prior to the collaborations with Guattari and Parnet, for instance, Deleuze dedicates a section of *Logic of Sense* (1969; 1990) to a stunning discussion of F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Crack-Up*, and in that book he also positively references William S. Burroughs and Allen Ginsberg. And in *Essays Critical and Clinical* (1993; 1997) Deleuze includes two texts on nineteenth-century American

writers Walt Whitman and Herman Melville, providing some of the most perceptive and challenging thoughts with respect to these writers to date.

It is clear that a certain enthusiasm for American literature in Deleuze's philosophy predates the Schizo-Culture conference and continues long after it, but this event is important insofar as it can be seen to signal a crucial shift in the approach to the idea of "America" that appears in books written after the conference. Beginning with "On the Superiority of Anglo-American Literature," written two years after the conference, Deleuze begins to connect his thinking about America with the concept of the rhizome. Three years later, *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980; 1987), Deleuze and Guattari make this vital connection explicit:

America is a special case. Of course it is not immune from domination by trees or the search for roots. This is evident even in the literature, in the quest for a national identity and even for a European ancestry or genealogy (Kerouac going off in search of his ancestors). Nevertheless, everything important that has happened or is happening takes the route of the American rhizome: the beatniks, the underground, bands and gangs, successive lateral offshoots in immediate connection with an outside.³

This striking affirmation of literary and social movements at a distance from search for national identity or the terms of official culture clearly shows that in Deleuze's philosophy "American literature" names a category that is irreducible to a national literary tradition. It also expresses a relay triggered, at least in part, by the experiences Deleuze and Guattari had during their visit to the U.S. mentioned above. An important shift in emphasis can be noted in this passage – from literature to the collective social arrangements to which literature is connected. Connection to an "outside" appears in nearly all of Deleuze's statements about literature, but this notion should not be

³ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, 1987), 19.

confused with an idea of a transcendent outside. Instead, the “outside,” here as elsewhere, names a process of establishing relations: it is the relations themselves that are outside, or “external to their terms.”⁴ This crucial shift to a thinking of connections between literary and social assemblages is also indicated in a surprising footnote on American literary critic Leslie Fiedler’s *The Return of the Vanishing American* (1969). Fiedler’s quite singular cultural geography, which analyzes the role of landscape and social region on American mythology and literature, is here radicalized by Deleuze and Guattari in terms of a notion of writing as *mapping* new relations. They write, “Every great American author creates a cartography, even in his or her style; in contrast to what is done in Europe, each makes a map that is *directly connected to the real social movements crossing America.*”⁵ What statements such as these suggest, at least on one level, is that a lived encounter with the American counterculture, and even the geography of the United States, made a powerful and lasting impression on the writers of *A Thousand Plateaus*. If a transformation in Deleuze’s thinking about literature, and American literature specifically, occurs after 1975 it is highly likely that it is partly a result of the Schizo-Culture event. But here we should ask another question: how exactly do we understand the relationship between an event like the Schizo-Culture conference and the thought of a philosopher?

Recently cultural historians have begun to complicate received narratives of French Theory’s incursion into the United States (and especially the American academy) by reconnecting it with insurgent radical movements and ideas that originated in the United States. The Schizo-Culture conference is a frequent, almost obligatory reference

⁴ Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, “On the Superiority of Anglo-American Literature,” *Dialogues II*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (London: Continuum, 2006), 40-41.

⁵ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 520 n 18 (my emphasis).

point for this type of work. The research of scholars like François Cusset, Joanna Pawlik, Julian Bourg, and Brady Thomas Heiner (to name only a few) provides a crucial historical framework for appreciating the complex exchange that took place between France and the U.S. during much of the twentieth century, and particularly during the 1970s. It is also indispensable for a study of Deleuze's relationship to America.⁶

On one level, this dissertation's analysis of Deleuze's writings on American thought and literature seeks to contribute to such historical research; and sets out to revisit, in the context of the reception of French theory within American universities, the broader social and institutional context surrounding that exchange. To understand the complex social history of Deleuze's American rhizome requires studying a lost history of encounters. Yet, on another level of analysis, simply recounting this history does not go far enough, nor does it provide the conceptual framework for understanding how literature – and aesthetic processes more generally – complicate our relationship to historical events.

One of the problems with historical accounts (and a historicist approach more generally) is that it runs the risk of reducing events to the level of the actual. Our relationship to that past becomes one of accumulating facts, tracing references, and supplementing a narrative, but does not reach the threshold where our beliefs and institutional practices would be transformed or a new path for the future might be sketched out precisely in *our own encounter with events*. Knowledge of the past is crucial, but it tells us very little about what the conditions for thinking an American rhizome in

⁶ I have already mentioned Cusset's important study *French Theory* (2003), but it is worth also mentioning here Jean Phillippe Mathey's earlier account of these exchanges in *Extrême Occident: French Intellectuals and America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993); Joanna Pawlik's, "Various Kinds of Madness: The French Nietzscheans inside America" in *Atlantic Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 2, October 2006; On the French political situation see Julian Bourg *From Revolution to Ethics: May 1968 and Contemporary French Thought* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007); and on the specific influence of black radical thought on French Theory see Brady Thomas Heiner, "Foucault and the Black Panthers" *City*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (December 2007).

an “immediate connection with an outside,” are, or better yet, how they can be produced. In order to think these kinds of relations, and the specific interest of literary and artistic experimentation, it is necessary to also think events at the level of the virtual.

The Schizo-Culture conference itself can serve as a strong example of the problem of historicizing on the basis of actual encounters insofar as that event can easily be thought to mark, from a historical perspective, the precise moment when the political affinities between those associated with what has come to be called “French theory” (a thoroughly American invention) and their counterparts in the U.S. began to dissolve. To some extent 1975 indexes a crucial historical shift from the social movements of the sixties (and perhaps the entire first half of the twentieth century) to the postmodern “cultural logic of late capitalism” (Jameson) that would so effectively capture much of the style and the energies of previous periods but evacuate them of their political force. What’s more, as Cusset perceptively points out, the disconnect between radical thought and practice must also be referred to another historical process through which oppositional discourses came to be institutionalized and, as a result, “entered the realm of established practices.”⁷ In Cusset’s account of “The Seventies,” the Schizo-Culture event in fact serves to delimit a border between what he calls “a time of possible direct encounter ” and the normalizing function of the university as the dominant mediator of this relation.⁸ The story of French Theory thus becomes part of a larger narrative of the crisis of the humanities, the emergence of a post-cultural and post-historical “university of excellence” (Bill Readings) with its overwhelming capacity to “absorb what in the past would have threatened its ‘values’ [...] integrating into its programs the critique of

⁷ Cusset, *French Theory*, 65.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 66.

ideology and the new discourses of opposition.”⁹ For Cusset, the Schizo-Culture conference serves as a limit-case marking out the historical coordinates of a “missed encounter.” It’s as though someone had looked at their watch at the end of a long conference panel and, realizing time was running short (everyone having other things to do), declared the moment of encounter over. It is precisely here, however, that Deleuze’s relationship to American writing begins to take on real force, because the encounters between philosophy and literature cannot be reduced to a set of historical reference points.

Tracing the historical convergences of Deleuze and Guattari’s *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* with experimental writers, avant-garde artists, and militant activists working in the U.S. during the 1960s and 70s certainly provides one with a compelling entry point into the American rhizome. In addition to the Schizo-Culture conference, one of the most important convergences between the U.S. and France occurred, for instance, in the early 1970s around the issue of prisons. This historical encounter between the prison movement in France and radical black thought in the United States is discussed at length in chapter four of this dissertation. Many such connections between “French theory” and insurgent thought native to the United States have been forgotten and the effort to restore these links makes a considerable contribution to understanding the historical specificity of certain points of reference in Deleuze’s thought. Yet, as the ambiguous example of Schizo-Culture suggests, simply rehearsing this history often leads to a narrative of missed encounters, co-optation, and the failure to draw political inspiration from those meetings that did take place. From the vantage of our historical present it often seems we have no other option than to lament the overwhelming failure

⁹ *Ibid*, 45.

of many of the radical movements of the sixties and seventies to transform capitalist society. But as Deleuze and Guattari repeat many times: rhizomes have “multiple entrances” and the historical path may not always be the best one to choose.

In order to avoid collapsing the notion of an American rhizome with a narrative of failure, or the trajectory of an outdated theoretical or political project, it is necessary to pursue questions that emerge on a different level than an historical approach can address. If, as noted above, Deleuze and Guattari’s thinking in the books written after 1975 shifts to an emphasis on the relation between writing and social arrangements, this conceptual transformation cannot simply be reduced to a set of historical encounters. The affirmation that American writing produces “a map that is *directly connected* to the real social movements crossing America” is not itself founded on an historical claim, but requires instead a *philosophical* approach that enables an “experimentation of something that escapes history.”¹⁰ Following the “route of the American rhizome” forces one into a consideration of the production of concepts, beginning with the concept of a rhizome itself.

The concept of the rhizome, as this dissertation aims to show, enables an experimental approach to literary criticism as a practice of mapping. Such an experimentation begins with Deleuze’s (and his collaborators’) use of American literature, but it also seeks to map further connections that are not always found in Deleuze’s work. I will return to a much fuller elaboration of this approach as it pertains to the four writers I have selected for this study, but it is first necessary to give an account of the methodological implications of the concept of the rhizome.

¹⁰ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 111.

Here it is necessary to make a detour to another conference that took place in the United States, to which Deleuze was invited, but did not attend. In 1966 the “Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man” conference was held at Johns Hopkins University in an effort to introduce structuralism, which was at the time a novel approach to the human sciences in France, to an American academic audience. In most comparisons, Schizo-Culture appears as the bastard, anarchic challenger to this more officially recognized origin of French Theory in America, but in order to appreciate the implications of that characterization it is necessary to do more than repeat anecdotes. There are certainly important differences worth noting between the two conferences, not only in attitude but also with respect to institutional affiliation, funding, and the fact that the 1975 conference, unlike the first, brought together many non-academics, artists and activists. Yet, if one moves too quickly it is easy to misconstrue the conceptual and methodological questions that pertain, not so much to the style of a conference, but to a style of thought.

The Johns Hopkins conference introduced several prominent figures of French intellectual life in the mid-1960s to the United States, and it is probably most famous for first bringing the work of Jacques Lacan, Roland Barthes, and Jacques Derrida to an American academic audience. Once again, we should avoid conflating the positions of the figures in this list to the agenda of an academic conference, but there are a few important general insights to be gleaned from the broader intervention this conference sought to make. The “Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man” conference is best remembered, as indicated by the book that was published in its wake, as the origin

of the *Structuralist Controversy*.¹¹ That is, rather than presenting a coherent body of thought, this conference, like Schizo-Culture, serves as a limit-case: it simultaneously introduced structuralism to American academia and announced its *end*, or the advent of what came to be called “post-structuralism.” The latter term (which circulates primarily in humanities discourse in the United States) has served for some time as shorthand for designating quite disparate, but almost always French, theoretical positions (from Michel Foucault to Jacques Derrida, from Julia Kristeva to François Lyotard). The term, as many have pointed out, is notoriously undefined but, with respect to Deleuze’s philosophy specifically, it is well worth attempting to give a more precise account of the difference this prefix “post-“ makes. In order to reconstruct the force of Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the rhizome it is necessary to give a brief account of the history of structuralism.

Structuralism – prior to its errant itinerary in the U.S. – designates a theoretical endeavor that originated in post-war France to provide the foundation for research across multiple disciplines. Derived in large part from the so-called “linguistic turn” it drew its coordinates from the Saussurean account of language as a synchronic system that produces meaning entirely as an effect of the differential relations between terms and, most famously, from Saussure’s formal analysis of the arbitrary nature of the linguistic sign. As a scientific account of language, structuralism promised to lay the foundation for a new science of the human that would be distanced from philosophical perspectives grounded in the subject (phenomenology) and, accordingly, challenge the legacies of humanistic research (philology). Beyond linguistics (which in many ways remains the paradigmatic structuralist science), structuralism provided the theoretical

¹¹ See Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato, *The Structuralist Controversy: The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007).

basis for research across the “human sciences” influencing anthropology (Levi-Strauss), history (Braudel and the early Foucault), psychoanalysis (Lacan, a somewhat more complicated case), Marxism (Althusser, an even more complicated case), and finally (and most importantly for this dissertation) the study of literature (the early Barthes of *S/Z* would serve as a classic example of this approach; the work of Pierre Macherey would be an example of its Marxist variant).

Structuralism sought nothing less than to found “a new transdisciplinarity covering the entire field of knowledge” and it was in response to these historical and theoretical developments in France that Deleuze and Guattari first deployed the “anti-structuralist war machine” of the rhizome.¹² The problem with structuralism, in the broadest sense, is that in attempting to lay down a new scientific foundation for research across multiple disciplines, it must refer phenomena of various types to a “third order” that governs that research and, more importantly, remains unchanging.¹³ This theoretical operation requires the positing of a symbolic dimension which is itself based on a particular understanding of language as a system or rationally organized grammar. Several consequences follow from this operation: what is not based in the structure is relegated to the realm of the “imaginary,” theory becomes primarily an exercise in the *interpretation* of the structure, and the question of the relation between different structures (language and social formations, for instance) is either referred to a separate (theoretical) dimension determining them both, or excluded from thought as the impossible real. The three main purveyors of this type of thought, according to Deleuze, were linguistics, psychoanalysis, and a particular version of Marxism, which he in fact

¹² Eric Alliez has underscored these points in a recent talk “Rhizome.” Available at: <http://backdoorbroadcasting.net/2010/04/from-structure-to-rhizome/> (accessed July 14, 2010).

¹³ For Deleuze’s early account of structuralism see “How Do We Recognize Structuralism?” in *Desert Islands and Other Texts (1953-1974)*.

describes at one point as “new apparatuses of power in thought itself... Marx, Freud and Saussure make up a strange, three-headed Repressor, a dominant major language.”¹⁴

From the perspective of rhizomatic thought, the problem with structuralist accounts of language, desire, social formations, and – crucial for this dissertation – literature, was that this new transdisciplinary theoretical project could not sufficiently think the *relation between* structures without positing a third order as the condition of intelligibility (the symbolic), and consequently, could not think the *construction* of that which eludes structures. As the philosopher Eric Alliez has recently put it, “becoming is the absolute aporia of structuralism.”¹⁵ The thought of “becoming,” synonymous with “experimentation,” always refers one to a question of creation – specifically the conditions of creation – and a dimension that is autonomous from historical, linguistic, and social *structures*. Literature, as an aesthetic practice of experimentation, is of interest neither as a phenomenon of language or communication, nor merely the actualization of structural conditions, but as an act that, unleashing the “indisciplines” of language (making language “stutter”), produces affects and passages of life. Deleuze and Parnet underscore this vital point in “On the Superiority of Anglo-American literature” by emphasizing that literature is a mechanism of “escape” (the escape from language, history, dominant organization). Literature does not represent an imaginary world, nor can it be reduced to the nature of previously existing symbolic structures; instead, literature *produces the real*. As Deleuze and Parnet put it, “to write is to become.”¹⁶

Admittedly, the above summary gives an all too quick account of the structuralist position, no doubt passing over much of the complexity and nuance one

¹⁴ Deleuze and Parnet, *Dialogues II*, 11.

¹⁵ Eric Alliez, “From Structure to Rhizome.”

¹⁶ Deleuze and Parnet, *Dialogues II*, 32.

would find in structuralist texts. As noted above with respect to the Johns Hopkins conference, it was almost always the case that structuralism *in practice* led to a thinking of the limits of structure. My interest is simply to emphasize that the history of the concept of the rhizome – its specific virtue of being able to think becoming – cannot be sufficiently understood without relating it to this broader intellectual history. Moreover, because this history was to have several important consequences for the study of literature in the U.S., it is crucial to recall the specific problems such approaches entailed. When Deleuze and Guattari write, for instance, in *Kafka*, “we are least of all looking for a structure with formal oppositions and a fully constructed Signifier,” or in that same book rail against interpretation, these statements must be read as part of a philosophical battle whose history pertains not only to a dominant mode of thought in France, but also to the reception of that thought in the U.S. What is most interesting about this second (American) trajectory of structuralism is that at the very moment universities in the U.S. were absorbing interpretive methods derived from this approach (in the form of psychoanalysis, the new historicism, and to some extent the critique of ideology) in order to revitalize research in the humanities, Deleuze was actively distancing his philosophy from these positions and the theoretical foundations on which they rested. Here a very different sort of “missed encounter” comes into view, one that must be referred to the level of concepts and which I will return to at length throughout this dissertation; but what is most crucial to note here is that the American context is not unrelated to the history of the concept of the rhizome itself.

“Every concept has a history,” Deleuze and Guattari write in *What is Philosophy?*¹⁷ Despite a consistent rejection of history conceived of as a grand narrative

¹⁷ Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 18.

(including the history of philosophy) or as the final determination and ground of social, philosophical, or artistic experience, Deleuze and Guattari do not suggest that one can simply do away with history. Deleuze provides a useful definition of history as “the set of preconditions, however recent, that one leaves behind in order to become, that is, to create something new.”¹⁸ The history of a concept is part a break that every new concept introduces – a break in thought that disrupts the continuum of previously existing relations by initiating a new way of posing problems. But history is only one dimension. Like all events, a concept not only has a history, it “also has a becoming.”¹⁹ There are a few more detail to add to the history of the concept of the rhizome, before entering into its becoming.

Events have dates, but a date does not necessarily exhaust the potentials of a singular act of creation that is marked by it. The concept of the rhizome, for instance, can be dated 1975. Interestingly, “Rhizome,” was also the title of the paper Deleuze presented at the Schizo-Culture conference. Deleuze did not deliver his presentation in English, nor did he have it translated for the audience. In order to compensate for the language barrier, it is reported, Deleuze simply drew lines on a chalkboard.²⁰ One might speculate whether such inappropriate conference behavior (no doubt rendering the entire intervention incomprehensible to most of the audience) was a deliberate effort to make visible the limits of language. It is impossible to know for sure what compelled such a performance. What does, however, seem certain is that Deleuze took the Schizo-Culture as an occasion to unleash a concept whose history was entangled with theoretical battles in France, but whose becoming also pertains to America.

¹⁸ Gilles Deleuze, “Control and Becoming,” *Negotiations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997) 171.

¹⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 18.

²⁰ Pawlik, 231.

What makes the concept of the rhizome so important is not only that it has both a history and a becoming, but that it helps us think the difference between these two levels in the first place. The concept of the rhizome intervenes precisely to open up the dimension of becoming, which structuralism could not think, and it does so by introducing categories of connection, construction, and experimentation. It is no doubt for this reason that the concept first appears in print in Deleuze and Guattari's book *Kafka*, as specifically related to a problem concerning literature: "How can we enter into Kafka's work? This work is a rhizome."²¹ And later, in the opening chapter of *A Thousand Plateaus*, they write: "American literature, and already English literature, manifest this rhizomatic direction...they know how to move between things, establish the logic of the AND, over throw ontology, do away with foundations, nullify endings and beginnings. They know how to practice pragmatics."²² In both of these instances the concept of the rhizome is not invoked to establish the essential nature of a particular literary texts. Thinking of Kafka's work as a rhizome, or something as general as American literature as rhizomatic, does not respond to the question such as "What is literature?" (Sartre) nor does it provide a theoretical foundation for interpretation. The concept of the rhizome does not refer to any underlying structures or significance, but instead to a procedure or process of assembling. It is machinic and not structural. The rhizome introduces a *method* that responds to an entirely different set of questions (having to do with experimentation, not interpretation; becoming, not history): How do we enter? With what does it function? What are its uses? Where can we go? How does it work?

²¹ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Theory of Minor Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 3.

²² Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 25.

“Our method works only where a rupturing and heterogeneous line appears,” Deleuze and Guattari write in *Kafka*.²³ This assertion cuts directly to the principle assumption of method as such, namely that a method must be grounded in a *foundation*. To announce a method that begins, not with a point – as, for instance, those philosophies issuing from Descartes – but instead *on a line* involves a transformation of the very notion of method. Moreover, to affirm this notion requires a thinking of method in conjunction with a practice of construction (“To attain the multiple, one must have a method that effectively *constructs* it”).²⁴ One does not intervene in order to produce an interpretation of a contradiction signaled by rupture, but rather in order to carry further an experimentation that opens on a line of flight. Such a method works by *mapping* new directions rather than by following a ready-made path or referring the meaning of a text to a pre-existing structural order or instance of the “signifier.” A rhizome names a methodological orientation geared toward “an experimentation in contact with the real.”²⁵ Deleuze and Guattari provide a useful description of this procedure for constructing relations in the following way:

We will never ask what a book means, as signified or signifier; we will not look for anything to understand in it. We will ask what it functions with, in connection with what other things it does or does not transmit intensities.²⁶

The first chapter of *A Thousand Plateaus*, “Introduction: Rhizome,” gives us the “principles” of this new method and functions like a How-To book for experimentation. These six methodological principles are deceptively simple. “Any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be” (principle of connection), the analysis of

²³ Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka*, 7

²⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 22.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 22.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

language can only proceed by “decentering it onto other dimensions and other registers (principle of heterogeneity), “there are no points or positions in a rhizome, such as those found in a structure, tree, or root. There are only lines” (principle of multiplicity), “a rhizome may be broken, shattered at a given spot, but it will start up again on one of its old lines, or on new lines” (principle of asignifying rupture), “a rhizome is not amenable to any structural or generative model...it is a *map and not a tracing*” (principle of cartography), and finally “the tracing should always be put back on the map” (principle of decalcomania).²⁷

One of the difficulties with this method is that, from a certain perspective, it appears as an anti-method. These principles are not rules that would define a discipline, but statements that pertain entirely to an experimentation *with* texts and, as a consequence, a practice that must begin by determining its own protocols of reading *and* writing. This dissertation seeks to explore what a literary criticism informed by this *rhizomatic method* can do.²⁸ This methodological digression brings us back to the question of the specificity of an “American rhizome.”

I understand “American rhizome” as first designating an assemblage of names, events, quotations and collectivities constructed in Deleuze’s books. In order to avoid misconstruing an “American rhizome” as concept one can simply apply to texts, I have limited my study to the actual literary works referenced in Deleuze’s philosophy and set certain constraints for my own analysis. Beginning with the actual, I attempt to map out virtual potentials of various literary and historical encounters. In other words, (following the principle of decalcomania), I try to put tracings onto a map. In doing so,

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 7-13.

²⁸ “What we call by different names – schizoanalysis, micropolitics, pragmatics, diagrammatism, rhizomatics, cartography – has no other object than the study of these lines in groups or as individuals” Deleuze and Parnet, *Dialogues II*, 94.

this dissertation seeks to distinguish itself from existing studies of Deleuze and literature in two ways. First, I do not believe that Deleuze's philosophy provides a new hermeneutic approach to literature; it is not a theory of literature that can simply be transposed onto any text whatsoever, but a specific procedure or *use* of literature that works by connections. It is these connections that are of interest for this study. In what follows, I do not perform a series of "Deleuzian interpretations" of texts, but instead analyze the conjunctions between philosophy and literature that are constructed by Deleuze's use of specific examples of American literary experimentation. On this level I am interested in how Deleuze and his collaborators use of literature – how they enter, how they exit, what connections are made. Secondly, while I am convinced that the work of explicating Deleuze's approach to literature is necessary for my own study, I have tried to avoid producing yet another explanation of Deleuze's concepts. I have been interested in the *explication* of concepts (such as "minor literature" or the notion of a "clinical approach") only to the extent that they enable one to productively unfold new *implications*. One of the most difficult consequences of this second aim is that it forces one to shift the focus from reading to writing. Implications must be constructed by new acts of connection and construction between texts. Literary criticism must address its own capacities to write, that is, to become.

Concentrating primarily on the two volumes *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (co-written with Felix Guattari), the statements produced about American literature and American English in the provocative essay, "On the Superiority of Anglo-American Literature" (co-written with Claire Parnet), and Deleuze's late meditations on Walt Whitman and Herman Melville in *Essays Critical and Clinical*, this study has sought to determine the "irregular contours" of an American rhizome as it functions in those books and in relation to broader philosophical problems posed by Deleuze's philosophy

and the social and historical milieus out of which those problems emerged. I then proceed to map new relations by putting existing literary criticism, my own experience of texts, and books not discussed by Deleuze or his collaborators in conjunction with this assemblage in an effort to unfold new implications, or lines of an American rhizome.

“The Uses of Literature: Gilles Deleuze’s American Rhizome” experiments with this approach with respect to *four writers* – Walt Whitman, Herman Melville, George Jackson and William S. Burroughs – in conjunction with *four concepts* – becoming-democratic, belief in the world, the line of flight, and finally, societies of control. In foregrounding the question of *use* this dissertation seeks to explore the various ways literature is appropriated, set to work, or dismissed in various historical and institutional arrangements and to suggest the conditions in which literature can be said to take on a life of its own. One could easily make other selections or map other routes of the American rhizome, including subterranean hemispheric, even global, channels that cannot be reduced to any national or linguistic border (the concept of rhizome naming precisely constructions that resist dominant forms of organization, first and foremost those of the state).

What I have done is simply taken literally the idea of following lines (“taking the route”) of an American rhizome, because Deleuze’s use of literature struck me as one way to affirm a process of literary and social composition that was at odds with what often seems a prevailing tendency in American literary criticism, namely, to reduce singular instances of writing to a set of external theoretical coordinates. In the case of American literature in particular this has often meant subjecting writing to the development of a national consciousness or conflating aesthetic procedures with historical processes (effectively blocking the thought of becoming). What seemed most promising about Deleuze and Guattari’s statements about America was that in

perceiving the radical ambivalence of American life – “In America everything comes together, tree and channel, root and rhizome” – they also provided a way to think that tension without positing either a contradiction or an “American synthesis.”²⁹ Rather than falling into the endless rehearsal of the disappointment of the American dream, Deleuze and Guattari’s American rhizome enables one to start studying its lines of flight.

To this end, each of my chapters isolates a particularly intense rupture or line, a syntactic innovation, or conceptual resonance within a literary work invoked by Deleuze and his co-writers. I demonstrate how these concrete instances of becoming “escape” within a particular historical arrangement, and the degree to which they can be hooked into other lines or machines. Throughout I am interested in Deleuze’s use of literature in relation to concepts, and how this use is at odds with other more conventional approaches to literary study.³⁰

The concern of the first part of this dissertation is to explore the question “Another Deleuzian Century?” To this end, the first two chapters immediately following this introduction focus primarily on Deleuze’s short essays on Walt Whitman and Herman Melville included in *Essays Critical and Clinical* (1993; 1997). Deleuze’s writings on nineteenth-century American literature provide a particularly compelling entry point into the notion of an American rhizome insofar as both essays address the question of the relationship between processes of literary production and political experimentation.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 20.

³⁰ The question: “What are the uses of literature?” comes from Deleuze’s 1967 study of the novels of Leopold von Sacher Masoch *Coldness and Cruelty* and can be said to orient the entire “clinical approach” to literature. Deleuze extracts a subversive function at work in Masoch’s writing that is completely obliterated by the psychoanalytic appropriation of Masoch’s name in the construction of the pathological entity called “sado-masochism.” Deleuze’s question concerning the uses of literature shifts our perspective from a general theory of literature, to something more like a pragmatics of literature in which a range of functions can be drawn out and evaluated and in which, as Deleuze repeatedly emphasizes, the writer is understood not as a patient, but as a physician of the world.

In a rather surprising turn at the end of “Whitman,” for example, Deleuze affirms certain literary procedures as *directly* contributing to a revolutionary “society of comrades.”³¹ This striking claim repeats one of the primary and most provocative theses of all of Deleuze’s reflections on literature, namely, that writing should be referred neither to the level of the imaginary nor to that of the symbolic – it is not finally representational – but rather it should be thought of as *a process that directly engages in the production of the real*. There are several important consequences that follow from such an affirmation, not the least of which is an entirely novel theory of language (in large part drawn from the work of Guattari). But with regard to the practice of literary criticism one of the most challenging implications of Deleuze’s affirmation of literature’s direct relation to the real, is that it undermines the theoretical basis for understanding literature in terms of ideology.

In *A Thousand Plateaus* Deleuze and Guattari assert that “literature has nothing to do with ideology.”³² Such a statement is difficult to reconcile with much of the critical work being done by American Studies scholars today. Given the complex institutional history of much nineteenth-century American literature, its relationship to a nation-building cultural project, and the way Whitman and Melville in particular became integral parts of the canon-building project of mid-twentieth-century literary scholarship, a statement that literature has *nothing to do* with ideology provokes many questions. In the first part of this dissertation I address these institutional and theoretical issues at length and argue that Deleuze’s approach to these writers maps out a new orientation that not only challenges the of view literature as merely a cultural object

³¹ Gilles Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 60

³² Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 4.

expressive of an historical epoch (cultural historicism), but also, and I think more radically, the view that literature registers historical contradictions (Marxist historicism). Consequently, it also refuses to conflate these texts with the institutional function they have historically be made to serve. Deleuze's notion of writing as "becoming" moves away from interpretive models of criticism (such as new historicism and ideology critique) and forces one to think of literary criticism itself as an active engagement in an open process of experimentation. Literature conceived of as experimentation implies a transcendental empiricism, or a thinking of the production of the real conditions of *real* experience. Which is to say, literature produces events. Criticism must be attuned not only to the historicity of events (their actualization), but also to their becoming (what Deleuze will sometimes refer to as the "untimely," following Nietzsche, or the "virtual") In doing so, criticism finds the condition for mapping real connections between political, philosophical and artistic events.

The concern of Chapter Two, "Becoming-Democratic: Walt Whitman's *Specimen Days*," is to link Whitman's literary experimentation to the concept of becoming-democratic that appears in *What is Philosophy?* I begin by showing how Deleuze's essay "Whitman" (which focuses almost entirely on *Specimen Days*) marks out an original path for thinking the connections between Whitman's sentence, which Deleuze defines as an "infinite asyntactic sentence," and the real social movements crossing America in the mid-nineteenth century. Of particular interest are Whitman's convulsive figurations of his encounters with wounded soldiers during the Civil War and a striking passage where Whitman's open line relays the songs of black emancipation. I read both as concrete instances of Whitman's desire to contribute to the democratic experiment by putting the reader "in rapport" with the life of the mid-nineteenth century America. I then move to a discussion of Deleuze's counter-intuitive affirmation of American

literature as “the minor literature par excellence” in order to explore the relationship between an aesthetic procedure (minor use of a major language) and a political concept of becoming-democratic. I argue that “Whitman” not only makes possible a compelling new reading of Whitman, but that it also complicates our understanding of Deleuze’s political philosophy and his thinking about democracy in particular.

Chapter Three, “Belief in the World: Herman Melville’s *The Confidence Man*,” shifts the focus to the problem of the loss of confidence in American democracy and the necessity for what Deleuze calls belief in *this* world. Melville’s novel provides a scathing account of the degradation of all social relations and bonds of trust as a result of emerging industrial capitalism. In the course of the novel the reader is introduced to a series of forgers and it becomes increasingly difficult, if not impossible, to establish with certainty the identity of any character presented in the course of Melville’s unfolding fiction. The novel has often been read as an allegory in which Melville stages a pessimistic account of American optimism and the impossibility of escaping false beliefs. Deleuze, however, repeatedly invokes the novel in connection with Nietzsche’s affirmation of the “powers of the false” and suggests that Melville’s approach to the question of belief is better understood in terms of a clinical procedure – a Melvillian psychiatry, in fact – that diagnoses, not so much the problem of false belief, but the problem of grounding belief in a predetermined transcendent truth or identity. In addition to offering an analysis of *The Confidence Man* informed by Deleuze’s singular reading of that novel, this chapter also aims to draw out some of the convergences between nineteenth-century American thought and Deleuze’s philosophy. In “Bartleby; or, The Formula,” for instance, Deleuze suggests that Melville can best be understood as a kind of proto-pragmatist insofar as *belief* (rather than knowledge) becomes a condition for transformation and action in the world. My own reading seeks to explore the way

Melville's fiction stages belief as a question that can no more be reduced to the terms of false optimism than it can to a pessimistic desire to undermine belief, but instead forces one into the consideration of how fiction contributes to the production of new values.

The second half of this study moves away from Deleuze's writings on nineteenth-century American literature and explores the use of two twentieth-century American writers that appear repeatedly in the books Deleuze wrote in the 1970s. To the extent that the first part of the dissertation can be characterized as an exploration of the potentials and limitations of the revolutionary American dream of a society of comrades, this second part takes the realities of an American nightmare as its starting point. Specifically, these chapters seek to address the convergences of Deleuze and his collaborators' thinking about race, capitalism, war and new mechanisms of social control with two of their American contemporaries: George Jackson and William S. Burroughs. In addition to showing the resonances between, for instance, Deleuze and Guattari's thinking of contemporary capitalism as a form of "capture" and Jackson's very similar notion of "captive society" (Chapter Four) and elaborating Deleuze's direct appropriation of Burroughs's description of present-day dominant social arrangements as "control societies" (Chapter Five), what I am most interested in these chapters is how these different writers conceive of resistance in terms of creation and escape.

Chapter four "Lines of Escape: George Jackson's *Soledad Brother*" focuses on the second life George Jackson's prison letters achieved in France, first in relation to the *Groupe d'information sur les prisons*, where the assassination of Jackson became the topic of the third issue of the GIP's pamphlet *Intolérable*, and later in the use of Jackson's line "I may run, but all the time that I am I'll be looking for a stick" in both volumes of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* as well as in the essay, "On the Superiority of Anglo-American Literature" (written with Claire Parnet). This chapter traces the itinerary of

Jackson's letters in the context of the prison movement in France and shows how Jackson's analysis of "captive society," racism, and the social relations produced by capitalism converge with Deleuze and Guattari's thought and, more importantly, how Jackson's writing – understood as a weapon and a line of escape – contributes to a rethinking of certain terms of the Marxian analysis of capitalist society. Above all this chapter seeks to demonstrate how the encounter between black radical thought and Deleuze's philosophy maps multiple lines with respect to the notion of an American rhizome.

Finally, chapter five, "From Controlled Substances to Societies of Control: William S. Burroughs's *Naked Lunch*," turns to Burroughs's diagnosis of multiple forms of addiction in contemporary "control societies." Beginning with a discussion of Burroughs provocative suggestion that "money is like junk," this chapter explores the connections between Burroughs's analysis of addiction and Deleuze and Guattari's analysis of various regimes of subjectification in *A Thousand Plateaus*. I argue that both enable a thinking about addiction that is not reducible to notions of addictive substances nor addictive subjects, but instead forces us to consider the collective arrangements in which various forms of addiction are produced. Moreover, such an approach also opens up a thinking about drugs that can both affirm their potentialities and provide a strong account of their limitations. Informed by Deleuze and Guattari's concept of a "drugged body" I offer a reading of what I call the thermodynamic assemblage of Burroughs's *Naked Lunch*. The final section of this chapter, which also functions as the conclusion to the dissertation, turns to Deleuze's discussion of "control societies" (a designation he attributes to Burroughs) and the affirmation of creation as resistance to control.

While the effect of Deleuze's philosophy has been felt for some time in the U.S., to date Deleuze's reflections on American literature and his unique perspective on the

idea of “America” have gone unnoticed. Despite a consistent philosophical engagement with literature (from his early books on Proust and Leopold von Sacher Masoch to his last collection of essays published just before his death), Deleuze’s clinical approach never caught on in the way deconstruction did in comparative literature departments. More surprisingly, Deleuze’s relationship to Anglo-American philosophical tradition of empiricism (from David Hume to William James), his endorsement of pragmatism – that “most indigenous of all American schools of thought” (Mathey) – and his extensive reflections on America and American writers have only rarely been noted by critics working on American literature (Cesare Casarino and Timothy Murphy certainly stand out here) and have almost never been taken seriously by American Studies scholars.³³

Since I have limited my focus to only four writers it’s worth giving at least partial list (if only to give a sense of the range) of some of the names of American artists, musicians, and writers that appear in Deleuze’s work. In addition to those already mentioned at the outset of this introduction, one could add: Thomas Wolfe, Jackson Pollock, Andy Warhol, Philip Glass, Steve Reich, C.S. Pierce, Emily Dickinson, Henry Miller, William James, Henry James, John Dewey, H.P. Lovecraft, Leroi Jones (Amiri Baraka), and Ray Bradbury. Were we to add the names of American directors in Deleuze’s *Cinema* books the list of names connected to an American rhizome could easily be doubled. The point of this list of names (some of which appear only once) is not meant to suggest that Americans have a *privileged* place in Deleuze’s thought (one could just as easily make a list of non-Americans) or that the appearance of these names requires us to draw out any particular meaning or interpretation. Quite the contrary, the

³³ Both Casarino and Murphy point to Deleuze’s extensive interest in American literature and Anglo-American philosophical traditions. See Cesare Casarino, *Modernity at Sea: Melville, Marx, Conrad in Crisis* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 260, n. 145; and Timothy Murphy, *Wising Up the Marks: The Amodern William Burroughs* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 233, n. 8.

list simply highlights the creative potentials of an experimental approach that proceeds by connection and makes use of whatever comes “into range,” as Deleuze and Guattari put it in *A Thousand Plateaus*. What matters, and what I have discovered in the course of this study, is that the concept of the rhizome engages one in a process of thinking for which no predetermined rules exist. In taking up this undisciplined experiment this dissertation aims to contribute a new line to a minor American literary experiment.

2. Becoming-Democratic: Whitman's *Specimen Days*

2.1 Another Deleuzian Century?

In his 1970 review essay of Deleuze's two major philosophical statements of the late 1960s – *Différence et Répétition* (1968) and *Logique du Sens* (1969) – Michel Foucault famously concluded, “*Mais un jour, peut-être, le siècle sera deleuzien.*”¹ The ambiguity of the French is apparently lost on English readers. We read, “perhaps one day, the century will be known as Deleuzian” and assume that the “century” Foucault is referring to is twentieth and specifically the historical period in which Deleuze wrote. In his translator's introduction to the *Essential Works of Michel Foucault*, however, James Fabion argues that the original statement carries a far more ironic undertone and could have just as easily been rendered, “some day, the in-crowd will be Deleuzian.” For this reason, Fabion cautions readers against taking Foucault's remark as an unambiguous wish or “profession of full discipleship.”²

Foucault's allegiances aside, Fabion's allusion to the “in-crowd” seizes on an important tension in the reception of Deleuze's thought in the American (academic) context, the difference between what Slavoj Žižek describes as a “possible Deleuzian politics” and “those aspects of Deleuzianism that, while masquerading as radical chic, effectively transform Deleuze into an ideologist of today's ‘digital capitalism.’”³ In each case the question pertains to the inflection the name “Deleuze” effects for a determined time and place, suggesting that all too timely receptions of Deleuze's work often appear

¹ Michel Foucault, “Theatricum-Philosophicum,” *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology (Essential Works of Michel Foucault, 1954-1984, Vol. 2)* ed. James Fabion (New York: The New Press, 1998), 343. Deleuze comments on the remark in an interview given after Foucault's death, noting that “Foucault was a terrible joker. He may have meant that I was the most naïve philosopher of our generation...the one who felt the least guilt about doing philosophy,” see “Breaking Things Open, Breaking Words Open,” in *Negotiations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 88.

² See James Fabion's discussion of these issues of translation in his Introduction to *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology (Essential Works of Michel Foucault, 1954-1984, Vol. 2)*, xxi.

³ See Slavoj Žižek, *Organs Without Bodies: Deleuze and Consequences* (New York: Routledge Press, 2003), xii.

as little more than passing fads or, in the worse cases, an apology for our present. But perhaps a more eccentric reading of Foucault's remark could help us better approach – at a distance from the in-crowd – the question of a “possible Deleuzian politics.” What then becomes compelling is not so much the possible meanings of “century” [*siècle*] that would situate Deleuze in the generation that came of age after the second world war and who toward the end of their lives witnessed the dismantling of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, but instead what Foucault leaves undetermined – “one day” [*un jour*]. The temporal ambiguity of the phrase “one day” suggests to us a mood in which the name “Deleuze” designates neither an historical period nor the moment of recognizing the master philosopher of an age, but something more peculiar, an *untimely* event announcing “a new kind of thinking.”⁴ Pursuing this thought and under the influence of this untimely mood the following chapter explores how the name Deleuze might also relate to a few days in the nineteenth-century, a few specimen days.

The extent to which it makes sense to speak of Deleuze and the American nineteenth century in the same breath hangs on our capacities to encounter something unexpected in both. Before turning to a more extensive discussion of *Specimen Days* (1882), the autobiographical prose work which is at the center of Deleuze's late essay “Whitman” (1993), it is necessary to first address some issues that emerge in attempting to make Deleuze's writing on Whitman pertinent for literary study today. Deleuze's essay invites us to a new mode of thought with respect to one of the most recognizable, so-called major American nineteenth-century writers: Walt Whitman.⁵ The thought

⁴ Foucault, 345.

⁵ Few literary critics working on Walt Whitman have taken Deleuze's work seriously. In those few cases, where Deleuze is used, it is without reference to what Deleuze actually wrote about Whitman. Eric Wilson's “Whitman's Rhizomes, is case in point, it offers a “Deleuzian” reading of Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, but does not mention (or seem aware) of Deleuze's essay on Whitman or the references to Whitman, and *Leaves of Grass* specifically, in *A Thousand Plateaus* (e.g. “America is a special case...the conception of the book is

proposed by Deleuze, however, upsets many currently held ideas about the political vocation of the study of literature, putting us on a path that would strike many as profoundly at odds with the basic assumptions of contemporary Americanist literary criticism – namely, the predominance of those methods of analysis that understand literature as primarily a cultural object expressive of historical conditions and, as a result, privilege ideology critique and the historicizing of literary texts. In this context, what is perhaps most striking about Deleuze’s “Whitman” is its implicit rejection of “claims about representative literariness that provide us narratives of scholarly self-legitimation.”⁶ Enabled instead by a conception of writing related to the concept of becoming as something distinct from the process of history, Deleuze’s essay forces us to consider how literary criticism might be related to a political idea of democracy outside the terms prescribed by the question of particular historical conditions and, more broadly, outside the framework of a philosophy of representation. Such a thought requires an anti-historicist gesture of extracting lines of poetry and prose from the complex historical narratives in which they have been embedded, a gesture of freeing literature from a historical reality with which it is all too often understood to be identical to in key respects. Doing so, this chapter argues, Deleuze puts Whitman’s writing back in contact with a becoming-democracy that is not exhausted by its historical actualizations.

different. *Leaves of Grass.*” p 19). See Eric Wilson, “Whitman’s Rhizomes” *Arizona Quarterly* 55, No. 3 (Autumn 1999) 1-21.

⁶Gunter Leypoldt, “Democracy’s “Lawless Music”: The Whitmanian Moment in the U.S. Construction of Representative Literariness” *New Literary History* (2007), 333. While remaining somewhat mired in the very debate it seeks to critique, this essay but provides a very useful account of the post-Kantian philosophical assumptions attending the institutionalization of Whitman as a “representative” poet.

I began by invoking Nietzsche's anti-historicist notion of the untimely, a point of reference throughout all of Deleuze's philosophy, but particularly interesting to consider with respect to the history of U.S. democracy and the supposed "literature of democracy" (Matthiessen). The untimely designates that aspect of an act of creation that Deleuze describes in one place as its "non-historical cloud."⁷ Neither historical nor eternal, but a potentiality accompanying every real event, the untimely is synonymous with Deleuze's concept of the virtual – "every actual surrounds itself with a cloud of virtual images."⁸ Participating in every event, the virtual is no less real than the actual is real.⁹ It designates an aspect of creation, be it artistic or political, that "isn't part of history."¹⁰ Deleuze elaborates further on this strange relation between history and artistic and political experimentations noting, "history amounts only to the set of preconditions, however recent, that one leaves behind in order to 'become,' that is, to create something new."¹¹ In addition to naming the process at work in a specific instance of writing it is precisely this sense for an untimely or virtual aspect in a work of literature that opens the way for experimentation against historicist interpretation, and connects literary criticism directly to the philosophical orientation of "transcendental empiricism" discussed in the introduction. A concise way of stating this approach shared by both could be put as follows: *to engage in a practice of thinking the historical conditions of the new without reducing the new to those conditions.*

Keeping this formulation in mind enables us to think through the complex relationship between specific "language experiments," as Whitman famously referred to

⁷ Gilles Deleuze, "Control and Becoming" *Negotiations*, 170-171.

⁸ Gilles Deleuze, "The Actual and the Virtual," *Dialogues II*, 112.

⁹ See Kenneth Surin, *Freedom Not Yet: Liberation and the Next World Order* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 268.

¹⁰ Gilles Deleuze, "Control and Becoming" *Negotiations*, 170-171.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 170-171.

his writing, and the historical conditions in which they were produced – in this case the mid-nineteenth century in the United States of America – while at the same time remaining open to the ways an act of writing concretely contests those conditions by inventing for itself new conditions (becoming). Every act of writing, every event of creation, carries with it an element that is not exhausted by the historical actualization of its conditions. And it is in the encounter with this untimely element that new experimentations can commence, mapping new lines between a minor American literary criticism and an idea of democracy.

Echoing one of the central characters of Herman Melville's *The Confidence Man* ("our age – the age of joint-stock companies and free and easies"), the historian Eric Hobsbawm aptly designated the period we will be concerned with in what follows, the "age of capital."¹² As emerging industrial capitalism intensified it gave rise to political antagonism between the much lauded American experiment in democracy and the actually existing policies of the United States throughout the nineteenth century. Between an increasingly brutal expansionism that decimated indigenous populations of North America and the enslavement of four million black people in the United States in the years preceding the Civil War these contradictions remained extraordinary. The concept of the untimely, however, constructs a perspective that does not stop at history as the final determination of things. Historical actualizations are not everything. Under the influence of a "non-historical cloud" we begin to perceive a "becoming-democratic" in Whitman that invents relations beneath and below the organizing structures of the "age of capital" and the historical development of the state – a becoming that is intensified in Deleuze's encounter with Whitman but also in our own. An untimely

¹² Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Capital* (New York: Vintage Press, 1996); Herman Melville *The Confidence Man*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 2005), 181.

practice of reading allows us to perceive lines of writing that, while deeply entangled in their age, nevertheless enable us to map becomings “distinct from the histories in which they are developed.”¹³ In *Logic of Sense*, Deleuze defines the untimely as “the extraction from modernity of something that pertains to modernity, but which must also be turned against it – in favor I hope of a time to come.”¹⁴ What this passage suggests is that the untimely is above all a practice. We don’t simply look for the untimely, as though it were already there ready-made waiting for us to discover it; instead we become untimely in concrete acts of reading and writing.

Fredric Jameson, in *Postmodernism, Or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, provides a useful description of how Deleuze and Guattari become untimely through a subversive operation that consists in taking a “great canonical form” and “turn[ing] it back into minor art.”¹⁵ The example Jameson refers to is, of course, that of Franz Kafka. What follows seeks to show how a similar operation is at work in Deleuze’s essay on Whitman. Which is to say, to show how Deleuze extracts from Whitman something that pertains to the historical epoch of the nineteenth-century but is turned against it in favor of experimentation and a future oriented becoming-democratic. Such an untimely attitude can be found in Whitman himself,

We have frequently printed the word Democracy. Yet I cannot too often repeat that it is a word the real gist of which still sleeps, quite unawaken’d, notwithstanding the resonance and the many angry tempests out of which its syllables have come, from pen or tongue. It is a great world, whose history, I suppose, remains unwritten, because that history has yet to be enacted.¹⁶

¹³ Deleuze and Parnet, *Dialogues II*, vii.

¹⁴ Gilles Deleuze, “Appendix I: The Simulacrum and Ancient Philosophy” in *The Logic of Sense*, 265.

¹⁵ Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism: Or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, 102.

¹⁶ Walt Whitman, *Democratic Vistas*, 229.

In *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, Deleuze and Guattari write “we believe only in a Kafka politics that is neither imaginary or symbolic.”¹⁷ What if we reformulated the statement with respect to Whitman,

We believe only in a *Whitman politics* that is neither imaginary nor symbolic. We believe only in one or more *Whitman machines* that are neither structure nor phantasm. We believe only in a *Whitman experimentation* that is without interpretation or significance and rests only on tests of experience: “the final test of poems or any character or work remains. The prescient poet projects himself centuries ahead and judges performer or performance after the changes of time. Does it live through them?”¹⁸

2.2 Becoming-Democratic

A study of Deleuze’s essays on nineteenth-century American literature provides a concrete opportunity to engage the question of Deleuze’s political philosophy and specifically those rare instances in which Deleuze offered thoughts on the concept of democracy. On one hand, Deleuze’s philosophy launches a powerful critique of existing Western liberal democracies and is resolutely opposed to political ideas emerging out of a philosophy of representation and resting on the principle of majority rule. Yet, in *Essays Critical and Clinical* Deleuze refers explicitly to the “democratic contribution of American literature.”¹⁹ And it is rather striking to note that during a moment of post-Cold War triumphalism, when the United States was officially congratulating itself on the global victory of liberal democracy, Deleuze’s essays affirm a concept of democracy pertaining to “camaraderie” and “a march of souls in the open air, on the ‘Open Road.’”²⁰

¹⁷ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka*, 7.

¹⁸ Quotation modified from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka*, 7. The last line comes from Walt Whitman 1855 Preface to *Leaves of Grass*, 21.

¹⁹ Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, 87.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 60.

Statements such as these would seem either to confirm Deleuze's philosophy as merely an "ideology of today's capitalism" (Žižek) or contradict what has been termed Deleuze's philosophical "hostility to democracy."²¹ Both interpretations, however, would effectively reduce "Whitman" to an all too timely reading. 1993 – two years after the first Gulf War while U.S. was exporting (by force) its timeless brand of "democracy," the only option left in the supposedly "post-historical" world, Deleuze turned to American nineteenth century literature for an untimely concept of democracy. What Deleuze extracts from Whitman is neither the evidence of a historical narrative of progress legitimating the present, nor the historical persistence of a contradiction. Consider, for instance, this striking final passage from Deleuze's "Whitman."

The society of comrades is the revolutionary American dream – a dream to which Whitman made a powerful contribution, and which was disappointed and betrayed long before the dream of the Soviet society. But it is also the *reality of American literature*, under these two aspects: spontaneity or the innate feeling for the fragmentary, and the reflection on living relations that must constantly be acquired and created.²²

The "society of comrades is the revolutionary American dream," Deleuze affirms with Whitman, but he also makes an important distinction between the "dream" and the "reality." Two very different visions of a "society of comrades" come into view in this passage. On one hand, we have a *dream*, a complicated concept in itself insofar as it might designate both "a view of literary production as a sort of imaginary world making" and those investments of social desire that manifest themselves primarily as fantasy.²³ It is at the level of the dream that we turn when we think of literature as either utopian or ideological, insofar as the dream always refers to an operation of resolving

²¹ Philippe Mengue, *Deleuze et la question de la démocratie*, quoted in Paul Patton, "Deleuze and Democracy," *Contemporary Political Theory*, 4 (2005), 401.

²² *Essays Critical and Clinical*, 60.

²³ Leypoldt, 345.

real contradictions through an operation of the imagination. The dream is fundamentally a category of representation and to the extent that representation always produces a gap between the imaginary and the real it also gives rise to categories such as “betrayal” and “disappointment.”

But in the above quoted passage, Deleuze provides another possibility in which the “society of comrades” refers not to a dream, but to a *reality*. At this level we are asked to consider two aspects that are not adequately captured by the notion of a dream, but refer instead to *affects* (“an innate feeling for the fragmentary”) and *processes* (“the reflection on living relations that must constantly be acquired or created”). It is under these two aspects that the “society of comrades” becomes a reality. Such a reality names the living experimentation of literature, but also the social conditions upon which such experimentation unfolds, the relations of “cameraderie” that compose a becoming-democratic outside and against the terms of democracy’s official representations and the dreams of a national imaginary. The two aspects of a society of comrades – the feeling for the fragmentary and the practice of living relations – name an untimely reality opposed to the logic of dreams and their betrayal.

“What, then, do we mean by real literature? Especially the democratic literature of the future?” Whitman asks in *Democratic Vistas*. In what follows I extract three notions from Whitman’s writing that express directly this reality of literature: convulsiveness, open air, and the refrain. In each case the question for us is the continuity between a life-experimentation – the relations and practices Whitman invents in his encounters with the world – and a practice of writing that does not represent or give form to these experiences but is better understood as a continuation of a consistent practice. We will come back to these two aspects at length in our discussion of *Specimen Days*, here we wish only to emphasize that both put us on the path of a democratic experiment that is

not exhausted by ideals and their historical disappointments, but affirmed in the “literature-Real.”²⁴

Deleuze’s “Whitman” demands an unapologetic affirmation of the difference between the *institutional use of a writer* (whose name refers not only to the person who wrote the books, but also designates an entire sub-field of literary study) and *literature understood as an autonomous creative act*. Too often we are compelled to read literature as simply a representation or cultural artifact, a relic of the past merely expressing a particular set of historical conditions, and in the saddest cases, as wholly “governed” by them.²⁵ In doing so, we accept the approach that poses the question of aesthetics and politics in terms of representation. Deleuze, however, opens a way out of the inevitable contradictions literary study runs up against when it submits itself and the literary texts it analyzes to a regime of representation and all too historical interpretations, helping us recall what we always thought – literature, like life, is by its nature ungovernable.

To affirm literature as an autonomous act of creation (a literature-Real), irreducible to a historicist interpretation, contrary to how it may at first appear, does not return us to formalism. Instead, as we will show, Deleuze invites us to an experiment that breaks out of the formalist / historicist debates that often hold even the most disparate approaches to a writer like Whitman in a sort of dialectical tension. If Deleuze’s essay opens up an untimely thought, it is precisely because it enables us to cut through the persistence of this dialectic. The untimely draws our attention, not to the narratives in which a work or literature is embedded (a succession of past-presents that

²⁴ Deleuze and Parnet, 38.

²⁵ As for instance Andrew Lawson’s claim that, “‘Song of Myself’ is *governed* by the dynamics of marketplace circulation, which Karl Marx described in 1867 as the process by which human labor is metamorphosed into the abstract form of the commodity” (344 my emphasis). Lawson goes so far as to at one point read Whitman as a “capitalist of the self.” (345) See “‘Spending for Vast Returns’: Sex, Class, and Commerce in the first Leaves of Grass” *American Literature* 75, no. 2, June 2003.

develop along a supposed historical trajectory), but to virtual elements in play in every act of writing. These elements are not only not expressive of a cultural or historical age, but they are also badly described if related to purely formal practices cut-off from the world. Rejecting both eternal *and* historical values, the concept of the untimely and the concept of becoming refer us instead to the production of new values. It is for this reason that in what follows I pay careful attention to those values both Deleuze and Whitman see emerging in literature's relationship to democracy. Against the timeliness of much existing literary scholarship, my emphasis on the untimely and the concept of becoming names a belief in writing not as a form but as *a force of transformation* uncontained by its historical or institutional determinations, an opening to the world rather than a representation of the world.

At the center of his Whitman essay, Deleuze formulates an exceedingly counter-intuitive question, "Is not American literature the minor literature par excellence, insofar as America claims to federate the most diverse minorities?" Quoting Whitman's 1855 Preface to *Leaves of Grass*, Deleuze deploys a concept of "America" conceived not as a unified nation-state, but as a multiplicity, "a Nation swarming with nations."²⁶ The virtue of such a question is that it asks us to think of American literature outside the terms of a national literary tradition and uninvested in debates over canonicity. Deleuze instead suggests that American literature – regardless of its institutional or ideological uses – is better thought of as minor literature, a literature of minorities or of becoming-minoritarian. And it is precisely here that the question of literature, understood as an irredeemably minor practice, connects to the concept of becoming-democratic.

In *What is Philosophy?* Deleuze and Guattari state that revolutionary political desire turns on the construction of "a new people" or a "new earth," but they qualify the

²⁶Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, 57.

statement asserting, such will “not be found in our democracies. Democracies are majorities, but a becoming is by its nature that which always eludes the majority.”²⁷ In that same text, however, they also allude to a “becoming democratic that is not to be confused with present constitutional states.”²⁸ I take up the question of Deleuze and Guattari’s concepts of “majority” and “minority” more thoroughly in chapter three but it is crucial to note that the contradictions of existing democracy emerge precisely from a philosophy of representation and, as a consequence, a notion of democracy based on the rule of a representative majority which, for Deleuze, is grounded in a specific theory of subjectivity. Before we can address with any degree of precision what becoming-democratic has to do with minor literature a few useful distinctions must first be made in relation to Deleuze’s damning pronouncement on Western liberal democracies.

Deleuze’s attack on the fundamental assumptions of the order of democracy emerges out of two related philosophical struggles: first, the overturning of a philosophy of representation (Platonism) and second, a rejection of rationalist formalism derived from Descartes. In the broadest terms Deleuze’s constructivist philosophy is anti-idealist and consequently opposed to the theory of the subject that emerges from that history. For Deleuze, the problems of representative democracies are woven into the long history of the Cogito: we can get out of the contradictions of existing democracies, but this implies (at least for philosophy) radically changing the terms in which problems of political subjectivity are posed. Deleuze describes a logic shared between the order of democracy and what he calls a “rotten theory of subjectivity” quite precisely in a lecture

²⁷ Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 108.

²⁸ On “universal becoming-minoritarian” see Deleuze and Guattari, “Postulates of Linguistics” in *A Thousand Plateaus* (especially pages 105-107); on “becoming-democratic” see the entire chapter “Geophilosophy” in *What is Philosophy?*. (Here I use Paul Patton’s modified translation of the sentence “*Un devenir-démocratique qui ne se confond pas avec ce que sont les Etats de droit*” from *Qu’est-ce que la philosophie?* (Les éditions de minuit: Paris, 1991), 108.

given at Vincennes in the 1970s. In this context – a context in which Whitman’s “self” has often been understood within the terms of this philosophical history (operating a convergence between personal (lyrical) and collective (national) subjectivity) – it is worth quoting from Deleuze at some length.

The history of the splitting of the subject always consists in saying: it is you who command, i.e., you will accede to the commandment to the degree that you submit yourself to an order, which you are not subject to without also being its legislator. *This is the famous order of democracy.* You are a legislator insofar as you are a subject; and it is not by chance that the person who pushed this doctrine, the formalism of this doctrine, the farthest is the inheritor of Descartes from the view of the cogito, namely Kant [in whose work] the submission to reason is presented to us in the manner in which we become legislators.²⁹

This remark is important because it provides a much broader framework in which to understand the formalism (that is, idealism) of any democratic order and what Deleuze and Guattari call the politics of majorities. In defining democracies as majorities, however, Deleuze and Guattari are not simply repeating the ultimately conservative argument that has historically functioned to ward off the possibilities of mass self-government by cautioning against the “tyranny of the majority” (a phrase repeatedly used by reactionary political theorists of U.S. democracy since the moment of constitution). They are, rather, repudiating the democratic order as the order of the “tyranny of no one.”³⁰ What Deleuze and Guattari mean by “majorities” is the operation of turning oneself into a political subject by way of a subjection to a model or standard citizen-subject, which, however, is concretely followed by no one. The rule of majority

²⁹ From a course lecture from the early 1970s: Gilles Deleuze, *Cours Vincennes : dualism, monism and multiplicities* - 26/03/1973. Web Deleuze. On the various ways Whitman’s “self” has been put to use see Scott MacPhail, “Lyric Nationalism: Whitman, American Studies, and the New Criticism,” *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 44, no. 2, Summer 2002.

³⁰ The discourse of checking or restraining majority rule is deeply embedded in the history of American political theory going back to the Federalists, it has had deep and lasting effects on the politics of suffrage for non-property owning citizens, workers, black Americans and women and was also been repeatedly invoked by non-American nineteenth-century commentators such as Alexis de Toqueville and Thomas Carlyle.

operates by what they call the “analytic of Nobody,” which is precisely the operation of the Kantian subject described in the passage quoted above. A “majority,” then, is not simply a quantitative designation; it does not merely name the group with the largest number. It is instead the name given to a constant or standard measure that supports the entire order of representation. The order of democracy is an arrangement that necessarily produces the majority as a rule establishing a field of representation. In *A Thousand Plateaus* the “figure of the majority” that *represents* this standard is described quite precisely as the “average-adult-white-heterosexual-European-male speaking a standard language.”³¹ But it is not only as a really existing identity that such a figure functions as a figure of the majority, but rather *because he appears twice*, “once as the constant and again in the variable from which the constant is extracted.”³² It is through this operation of producing the figure of majority as a standard, or what Deleuze calls an “empty universal,” that a whole range of activities within the order of democracy are given coherence (from elections to theories of language). Majority is the basic unit of a “constant and homogeneous” system of established norms.³³ The capture of democracy by representation, by the state, and most crucially by the “market universals” of capitalism – all fall under this category of majority.

Despite this powerful critique of democracy as essentially a majoritarian form of politics, the philosopher Paul Patton has recently argued that the “thesis that Deleuze is hostile to democracy cannot be sustained.”³⁴ Patton emphasizes that Deleuze’s rejection of “existing democracies” must be read in light of his analysis of the “subordination [of

³¹ Deleuze and Guattari, “November 20, 1923: Postulates of Linguistics,” *A Thousand Plateaus*, 105.

³² Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 105.

³³ Here Deleuze and Guattari are quite close to Jacques Rancière’s notion of the police order of representation as establishing a “count” to cover the social field – what breaks out of this count “a part that has no part” would be very similar to what Deleuze and Guattari call “becoming-minoritarian”

³⁴ Paul Patton, “Deleuze and Democracy” *Contemporary Political Theory*, 2005, 4 (400-413).

different forms of modern government] to the axioms of capitalist production."³⁵

According to the perspective of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* "authoritarian, socialist and liberal democratic states are all regarded as equivalent to one another insofar as they function as models of realization of the global axiomatic of capital."³⁶ Patton goes on, however, to make a convincing argument that despite the widely-held view that Deleuze's political philosophy rejects democracy, Deleuze in fact opens up a concept of democracy as "a politics without foundation in which even the most fundamental convictions expressed in its laws and institutions are open to change."³⁷ Here, Patton enables us to discern the difference between the strong critique of existing democracy that can be found at several points in Deleuze's texts and the persistent potentials that the *concept of democracy* opens in various assemblages and, for our purposes, in relation to the concept of minor literature. The concept of democracy, like all concepts, is untimely and as such it is not reducible to its historical actualizations. "Becoming-democratic," the name given to this irreducible aspect, refers the question of democracy to an ongoing process of experimentation, a "rhizomatic politics," as Patton puts it at one point. Patton unfortunately does not engage with Deleuze's reflections on Whitman, or the specific resources Deleuze provocation to think American literature as minor literature might contribute to the experimental project of becoming-democratic. It is precisely between these two concepts that this chapter seeks to contribute something new.

Deleuze looks to Whitman for expressions of a desire for democracy that would not be limited by a national project or captured by the form of the State. Becoming-

³⁵ Ibid., 405.

³⁶ Ibid., 400.

³⁷ Ibid., 401.

democratic, by contrast, names a desire or enthusiasm that is not toned down or disappointed by history, but is instead a practice understood as the reality of a process of invention. To affirm this reality of literature quite directly opposes the view of literature as ideology. Too many politically inflected studies of American literature start from the premise that literature is a cultural object like any other and that as such the narratives embedded in a literary text lend themselves to an analysis and critique of ideology. Understood in this way, literature gives us access to the past by providing a sort of snapshot of an age; writing simply embeds historical conditions and provides us with historical knowledge that can be analyzed at a critical distance. One interprets literature to understand the past and its effects on the present. I have noted Deleuze and Guattari's rejection of the concept of ideology in the introduction, but in *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze and Guattari formulate the problem in a way that seems particularly forceful in considering how we approach Walt Whitman, particularly since his works have so often been discussed in terms of co-optation.

How poorly the problem of literature is put starting from the ideology that it bears or from the co-optation of it by a social order. People are not co-opted by works, which will always come to awake a sleeping youth and which never cease extending their flame. As for ideology, it is the most confused notion because it keeps us from seizing on the relationship of the literary machine with the field or production.³⁸

The institutional investment in ideology critique often seems to be motivated by a desire to throw water on the "flame" of Whitman's writing and too often keeps us from asking how literature might be hooked-in to our own practice of becoming-democratic.³⁹ When we start from ideology we relate to the past as dead time and subject literature to our

³⁸ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 133.

³⁹ Here a comparison to some recent scholarship on Whitman throws the originality of Deleuze's reading into relief. See for instance Andrew Lawson's already noted readings of Whitman as "capitalist of the self", or in a slightly different vein Scott MacPhail's "Lyric Nationalism: Whitman, American Studies, and the New Criticism."

present concerns to demonstrate contradictions, impasses, and impossibilities, rather than openings. The work of critiquing the inconsistencies of democracy is indispensable, but when critique turns its instruments to literature what it in effect does is pose the problem of both democracy and literature in representational terms – we relate to a “literature of democracy” as an object of analysis, rather than a machine, as though literature awaited our historical interpretation, rather than an ongoing relay of experimentation. In this way ideology critique, despite its often emancipatory intentions, inadvertently contributes to a general loss of confidence in political experimentation.

Deleuze and Guattari do not overlook the ways literature is made to serve power and in fact highlight the tensions between literature serving a “major function” and a “becoming-minoritarian” in their book on *Franz Kafka*. They ask: “How many styles or genres or literary movements, even very small ones have only one single dream: to assume a major function in language, to offer themselves as a sort of state language, an official language?”⁴⁰ With respect to this question Whitman is certainly a complicated case – Whitman after all explicitly understood himself to be inventing a new kind of literature that in many passages is nearly impossible to extract from a national project. More importantly, when we consider the institutionalization of Whitman in the twentieth century we find ample evidence of how a writer can be made to serve a “major function.” But the concept of literature one encounters in Deleuze also names a sort of absolute resistance to these specific *uses* of literature that would reduce it to communication, national ideology, or major function. It is precisely when we consider how much institutional work had to be done to set Whitman up as a major American

⁴⁰ Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, 27. To the extent that literature participated in this history, Deleuze and Guattari isolate James Joyce and Ezra Pound as examples, “adult-white-heterosexual-European-male-speaking a standard language (Joyce’s or Ezra Pound’s Ulysses).” See *A Thousand Plateaus*, 105. The modernist search for this ordinary man, brings to a close the long history of humanism, and is implicated in complicated ways with what Deleuze calls a “majority.”

writer, that Deleuze's affirmation of the "minor" status of American literature appears all the more forceful.

2.3 American Classics

Many mid-nineteenth century American intellectuals and literary critics, from the Young American circle to Ralph Waldo Emerson, were obsessed with the idea of "Americanness" and the question of what characteristics would define a specifically American literature as adequate to democracy. These debates often revolved around the question of the content and forms that would set literary works of the new nation apart from their British and European literary counterparts and forerunners.⁴¹ At some distance from the professional intellectuals of his day, Whitman's investment in a "democratic literature of the future" emerged out of a life radically engaged in social, sexual, and artistic experimentation – a commitment to democracy improvised on the open road with all its inconsistencies. From the first Preface to *Leaves of Grass* (1855) to *Democratic Vistas* (1872) to *Specimen Days* (1882) Whitman's prose works constantly seek to express the lines of convergence between literature and democracy – that is, between writing and the invention of new social relations. Whitman defines his own use of literature as an effort "to bring people back from their persistent straying and sickly abstractions, to the costless average, divine, original concrete."⁴²

The problem of producing a coherent account of the ways nineteenth century American writers distinguished themselves from their predecessors, and in so doing attempted to articulate a distinct voice of the still fairly new nation, becomes significantly more complicated given the specific ways that question became an issue for

⁴¹ These themes are prevalent, for instance, in Emerson's essays, "The American Scholar" and "The Poet."

⁴² Walt Whitman, *Prose Works 1892 Volume I Specimen Days*, edited by Floyd Stovall. (New York: New York University Press, 1963), 295.

literary scholars in the first part of the twentieth century, a very different moment in the nation's history when the study of American literature was becoming institutionalized and instrumentalized as a useful object for producing citizen subjects.⁴³ Carving out this new object of study – American literature – became the task of modernist literary critics. In this context F.O. Matthiessen's *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* (1941) would be used by a generation of scholars in defining the new field of American Studies in the post-war era, a use that contributed significantly to the cultural and ideological work of legitimizing a liberal democratic American tradition within the context of the Cold War.⁴⁴ Given this history, Deleuze's provocation that Whitman might best be thought of as minoritarian writer enables us to cut through an institutional double-bind that began with the construction of Whitman as part of a native literary tradition but persists insofar as Whitman remains a highly charged object of American Studies' disciplinary self-critique.

Given the complex histories in which the relationships among literary production, reception, education and national belonging, has been played out in American universities, Deleuze's use of Whitman strikes us as strange and, well, undisciplined. Deleuze's writings on American literature do not bear the imprint of academic literary criticism or historical scholarship, nor as noted above, do they share the philosophical assumptions of new historicist approaches or ideological critiques of canonical nineteenth century writers. Far from avoiding the question posed by these approaches, however, Deleuze's philosophy undermines the theoretical foundations on which these questions were raised in the first place. The American nineteenth century

⁴³ Recent work on these issues includes MacPhail and Leypoldt (both already mentioned).

See also Priscilla Wald, *Constituting Americans: Cultural Anxiety and Narrative Form*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994).

⁴⁴ See Donald Pease, "New Americanists: Revisionist Interventions into the Canon," in *boundary 2*, 17 (Spring 1990): 1-35.

becomes a problem for thought, not (only) because it is there we must look for the origins of liberal ideology, but also because it contributed something to the production of the *revolutionary concept of democracy*, which is irreducible to its ideological function or its actualization in “existing democracies.”

Deleuze’s claims in the Whitman essay that “the experience of the American writer is inseparable from the American experience, even when the writer does not speak of America.”⁴⁵ Such an assertion that at first seems to re-inscribe the myth of “representative literariness” it has taken a generation of scholars to debunk.⁴⁶ Such a quick dismissal, however, strikes me as a misrecognition of Deleuze’s mischievous (but also creative and perceptive) use of an altogether overdetermined idea of “America experience” both as it emerges in the history of nineteenth-century philosophy and, perhaps even more importantly, in the very moment when “America” seems to be inextricable from a post-Cold War discourse of liberal triumphalism (the mid 1990s). Perhaps, there is something necessarily alien about Deleuze writing as a philosopher outside the institutional setting of American literary criticism and history, but the question remains open, at least in my view, whether the spirit of such a subversive operation can re-invigorate American literary criticism in the ruins of a university that contributed in no small way to setting Whitman up as one of the loudest ideological voices of an American imperialist project.

The story of the institutionalization of Whitman is a long and complex one, but in this context it is important to note that Deleuze’s writings on Whitman, and American literature in general, disclose the considerable influence of D.H. Lawrence’s infamous *Studies in Classic American Literature* (1923). Lawrence’s book has always been at odds

⁴⁵ Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, 58.

⁴⁶ Leypoldt, 334.

with academic criticism and has proved difficult to fully incorporate into the canon of American Studies, it remains in many ways an eccentric text. In addition to offering extremely lively readings of (primarily) nineteenth century writers, Lawrence's book connects in multiple ways with Deleuze's philosophical project, and becomes interesting in this context precisely because *Studies* continues to bear a vexed relation to academic literary criticism. Lawrence is better thought of as a writer-poet-critic, making a quite singular contribution within a "crank tradition" (Creeley) of writers responding to other writers and poets.⁴⁷ At the same time, however, it is well-known that Lawrence was a key source of inspiration for Matthiessen and specifically for the idea of an "American renaissance" – that is, a "rebirth" of those elements of literary excellence associated with classical forms. It is precisely with respect to the notion of "classic" American literature that we see the Deleuze's both finding inspiration in Lawrence and departing from him in significant ways.

Lawrence's collection of essays, originally intended as a series of lectures, went through several major revisions over the course of six years, and were initially conceived as a response to the U.S.'s entry into World War I. Lawrence's studies take up Franklin, Crevecoeur, Cooper, Poe, Hawthorne, Dana, Melville and Whitman.⁴⁸ *Studies* incorporates mythology, Lawrence's views on psychic life (largely produced out of his equally remarkable study of psychoanalysis and the unconscious), and a mix of controversial opinions and still remarkable insights into American thought and culture

⁴⁷ We might identify, roughly, two tendencies Whitman criticism: the first roughly coinciding with the institutionalization of American literature and the specific role of the university in producing a legitimating discourse for the study and dissemination of American Literature; and a second, "minor" tendency – seekers of a line of experimentation, the trajectory of a "crank" or "truly eccentric" American writing – which developed less coherently and usually in response to a pressing practical problem, out of a political or artistic or creative necessity. Writers who turn to Whitman for an experience, a technique, inspiration, fellowship or a good fight. This second tendency is well represented in the collection *Walt Whitman: The Measure of His Song*, eds. Dan Campion, Ed Folsom, and Jim Perlman, (Duluth: Holy Cow! Press, 1995).

⁴⁸ See the Editors' Introduction to *The Cambridge Edition of Studies in Classic American Literature* p lix – lxi.

as he encountered it through and in literature (Lawrence began the project several years before visiting the U.S.). Throughout the text Lawrence is at pains to show that in the excesses, wild philosophies, and lack of rigorous formal principles that characterize Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* or Melville's *Moby Dick* (which in 1923 very few people read), one hears the stammering of a "new voice." Lawrence's essays are neither interpretations, nor are they academic models of literary criticism; they are more like samples out of which Lawrence constructs a new variation, a new artistic thought or experiment.⁴⁹

Something of a radical empiricist himself, Lawrence can be said to have turned to "classic" American literature in order to attempt to think "the conditions under which something new is produced." From the first page, Lawrence insists that there is a "new feeling," a "new real experience" in the "old American books." Deleuze's repeated invocation of the *Studies* strikes one as rather old fashioned in its turn. Yet, it is for this very reason it also registers what I have called above a sort of "untimely" mood, or "non-historical" atmosphere; such is the condition for connecting their approaches to literature.⁵⁰ What is perhaps most interesting in reading the *Studies* alongside *Essays Critical and Clinical* is the effort of both, each in its own historical moment (the twenties and the nineties of the previous century), to construct a curious picture of the American nineteenth-century in order to ask an untimely question: what was new (what is still new) in those "old-fashioned American classics"? In the *Foreword* to the American

⁴⁹ It is for these reasons precisely that early reviewers dismissed the book, "one feels that behind the *Studies in Classic American Literature* there is Lawrence struggling with Lawrence and calling it a study of America" (Kurt Daniels "Mr. Lawrence on American Literature" *New Republic* (24 October, 1923) or, my personal favorite, "Mr. Lawrence is not so much concerned with the writers in themselves as he is with the opportunities they afford for the discussion of his own Philosophy" ("D.H. Lawrence Bombs our Literary Shrines" *Current Opinion* (Sempter 1923). Both of these are quoted in the introduction to *The Cambridge Edition of Studies in Classic American Literature*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008): lix – lxi.

⁵⁰ Like Deleuze, D.H. Lawrence was an enthusiastic reader of Friedrich Nietzsche and it is perhaps this affiliation more than any other that connects Lawrence and Deleuze's approach to literature.

edition of his book, Lawrence makes an astonishingly counter-historicist claim, "The furthest frenzies of French modernism or futurism have not yet reached the pitch of extreme consciousness that Poe, Melville, Hawthorne, Whitman reached. The European moderns are all *trying* to be extreme. The Americans I mentioned just were it."⁵¹

Lawrence produces a surprising picture of nineteenth-century American literary extremism in contrast to the more obvious modernist experimentation of the early twentieth century. In what seemed merely "children's book's" to many of his time, Lawrence insists on something surpassing the "frenzies" of the apparently modern, a modernism *avant la lettre* strangely emerges here. For Lawrence the European avant-gardes were really just playing at being modern and hadn't reached the "pitch" of achieving a truly creative act. The *Studies* are insistent in advising that if we wish to encounter the "really new" one must go back and re-read the nineteenth-century "classics."

A "classic" by definition, however, is not usually thought of in this way. *Classicus* is the antonym of *proletarius*, a distinction that historically registered the difference between an educated, cultured class and an illiterate, laboring underclass. "Classic" names those objects that best expressed the highest cultural achievements – the desires, thoughts, sensibilities – of an elite or dominant class, values to be studied and reproduced. Traditionally (from Aristotle to Kant, who universalizes this perspective), "classicism" refers to any musical, poetic, or artistic object conforming to the principles of symmetrical proportions, regular meters, and the rational balance of content and form. In short, classic names the realization in art of the good, the true, the beautiful.⁵²

⁵¹ D.H. Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature* (New York: Penguin Books, 1977), 4.

⁵² See Fredric Jameson's analysis of the function of "classics," as the "social and collective mirror image" produced in a particular historical moment by a dominant class "recognizing" its values, interest, ideals, "class ideology," in an earlier historical moment. "Marxism and Historicism" *New Literary History* (1979): 44-45.

Defined in this way “classic” is the furthest thing from a “minor literature” insofar as classic refers to an established standard of excellence, a model to copy, a beautiful form, not an extreme or singular “newness.”

For Lawrence to call the “old American books” classics in 1923 was already to stretch the conventional definition of the term. Aesthetically, books like *Moby Dick* or *Leaves of Grass* could hardly be described as “classic,” in the sense of a well-balanced, organic form. A generation of earnest American literary critics would later work to try to claim the reverse, perhaps missing Lawrence’s irony. Despite what Lawrence might have really meant by “classics,” it is even more than ironic that in many ways a very conventional notion of American classic literature would be institutionalized by Matthiessen’s followers as a definitive “literature of democracy.” Lawrence himself betrays the fact that his use of the term is half-facetious when he emphasizes the *extremity* of the American classic. Yet Lawrence does often seem to maintain the aristocratic associations of the term. The “new voice” of American literature invokes a “new whole man,” and it seems to suggest a “superior” class (it is arguably for this reason that Lawrence rejects any notion of a literature of democracy in the first chapter of the book). According to Lawrence’s modernist sensibilities it is only with the emergence of this long-awaited class of “new whole men” that the nonsense of “American democracy will evaporate” and “America will begin.”⁵³

The perspective of Deleuze’s writing on American literature and his essays on Whitman and Melville elaborate several insights and investments gained from the *Studies*, in particular Lawrence’s notion that the aim of literature is “to leave,” which

⁵³ Lawrence sensibilities are more complex than my brief gloss can indicate (and indeed Lawrence himself has been taken up as an example of a sort of proletarian art, as for instance, by Raymond Williams) but suffice it to say that his outlook remained impossible to reconcile with the project of liberal democracy and in spite of the irresistible interest of his *Studies*, his ideas were never easily integrated into the canon building project of the literature of democracy.

bears close resemblance to the concept of literature as a “line of flight.” It is Lawrence’s great insight that literature is a subversion through artifice; it is writing as “subterfuge” that Deleuze repeatedly draws upon in his writings on American literature.⁵⁴ But Deleuze also subverts Lawrence’s positions in important ways. Nowhere is this operation better glimpsed than in the different way each determines the relation between literature and a people, between art and the “spirit of place,” between a “classic” and a class. For Deleuze the “new voices” invoked by literature are not those of a “new whole man” but always “a minor race.” The new earth is not discovered in a “spirit of place” but is an earth to be constructed; the people to come will not be a “superior class,” but an “eternally inferior” people from below.⁵⁵

Aside from their very real differences with respect to the function of “classic” literature, its relation to a “people to come,” or its association with (or disassociation from) a specific place, there is a deeper, and I think more important affinity that exists between Lawrence and Deleuze which returns us to the concept of the “untimely.” This affinity stems in large part from their shared Nietzscheanism and the way they describe the temporality of literature, specifically its resistance to a merely historical meaning. We see this expressed in Lawrence’s claim that there is a “new experience” in the old books as well as in Deleuze’s transcendental empiricism. It is this effort to think the new in the old – a sensitivity to the untimely – that connects their approach to the nineteenth

⁵⁴ “Americans refuse everything explicit and always put up a sort of double meaning. They revel in subterfuge”; “Truly art is a sort of subterfuge.” The etymology of this term is quite interesting *subter* – (“below”) *fugere* (“to flee”). Art as a means of escape or fleeing by going under. D.H. *Lawrence Studies in Classic American Literature*, 3 and 8. Deleuze and Parnet begin their essay “On the Superiority of Anglo-American Literature” with Lawrence and precisely this idea of literature as a means of escape, “To leave, to escape, is to trace a line. The highest aim of literature, according to Lawrence, is “to leave, to leave, to escape” (Deleuze and Parnet, 27).

⁵⁵ For Deleuze the people that art and philosophy invoke are always a “minor race.” Cf. *What is Philosophy?* “Heidegger lost his way along the paths of the reterritorialization because they are paths without directive signs or barriers. Perhaps this strict professor was madder than he seemed. He got the wrong people, earth, and blood. For the race summoned forth by art or philosophy is not the one that claims to be pure but rather an oppressed, bastard, lower, anarchical, nomadic, and *irremediably minor race* – the very ones that Kant excluded from the paths of the new Critique,” 109.

century. While we cannot speak of Deleuze and the nineteenth-century without consideration of Lawrence as a mediator, it would be a great error to limit Deleuze's use of American literature to this reference.⁵⁶

As I have noted, Deleuze's "untimely" approach to literature, while sharing many affinities with Lawrence, is also distinct from the perspective of the *Studies* in important ways. Deleuze's untimeliness relates to specific uses of literature in the 1990s. Deleuze turns to the American nineteenth century at a moment when the defining assemblages of the twentieth century are being drastically reorganized. At precisely the moment when the dominant discourse is proclaiming the "end of history" (meaning the end and exhaustion of the possibility of real collective transformation), Deleuze's primary question remains political and finally concerns not so much the concept of "history," but more fundamentally the concept of "revolution." This concern is expressed directly in the following passage from *What is Philosophy?* written with Félix Guattari two years after the fall of the Berlin Wall:

That the two great modern revolutions, American and Soviet, have turned out so badly does not prevent the concept from pursuing its immanent path...As concept and as event, revolution is self-referential or enjoys a self-positing that enables it to be apprehended in an immanent enthusiasm without anything in states of affairs or lived experience being able to tone it down, not even the disappointments of reason. Revolution is absolute deterritorialization even to the point where this calls for a new earth, a new people.⁵⁷

The contribution made by Walt Whitman to this immanent path of revolution brings Deleuze not to *Leaves of Grass*, as one might expect, but to *Specimen Days*.

⁵⁶ Deleuze discusses the specific function of such "mediators" in an interview in remarking, "Mediators are fundamental. Creation is all about mediators. Without them nothing happens...whether they're real or imaginary, animate or inanimate, *you have to form your mediators*. It's a series. If you're not in some series, even a completely imaginary one, you're lost...you're always working in a group." *Negotiations*, 121. Here we might note again Leslie Fiedler as another important mediator for Deleuze's encounter with American Literature.

⁵⁷ Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 101

2.4 A Few Specimen Days (and, of course, far more unrecorded)

2.4.1 “Convulsiveness”

Walt Whitman’s *Specimen Days* (1882) is an idiosyncratic book that defies generic classification; it is neither autobiography nor historiography. It invents a genre, one might say, that is synonymous with its title.⁵⁸ The book gathers a “huddle of diary jottings, war memoranda of 1862-’65, Nature-notes of 1877-’81,” details of Whitman’s experience, his writing practice, and reflections on other nineteenth-century poets and thinkers. As Whitman himself described it, it is the “most wayward, spontaneous, fragmentary book ever printed.”⁵⁹

Ezra Pound once wrote, “You can learn more of nineteenth-century America from Whitman than from any of the writers who either refrained from perceiving, or limited their record to what they had been taught to consider suitable literary expression.”⁶⁰ Reading *Specimen Days* today one easily perceives that there is much of nineteenth-century America left unrecorded, much the poet either wasn’t aware of or “refrained from perceiving” amidst his “strange, unloosen’d, wondrous time.”⁶¹

⁵⁸ Scholarship on *Specimen Days* has emphasized its “indeterminate genre,” reading the text as source-book for *Leaves of Grass*, as autobiography, as travel narrative, as nature writing, as formalist experiment or carefully constructed allegory self; nation, life review, etc. See also: Joseph Eugene Mullin, “The Whitman of *Specimen Days*” (1992); George Hutchinson and David Drews, “*Specimen Days*”; Edward Chielens, “Whitman’s *Specimen Days* and the Familiar Essay Genre”; Linck Johnson, “The Design of Walt Whitman’s *Specimen Days*”; William Aarnes, “Cut this Out: Whitman Liberating the Reader in *Specimen Days*.”

⁵⁹ Walt Whitman, *Prose Works 1892 Volume I Specimen Days*. New York University Press: New York, 1963, 1. The text is made up of reprinted published writings, new revisions and much material from Whitman’s previously unpublished journals. Despite Whitman’s claims to have “tumble[d] the thing together, letting hurry and crudeness tell the story better than fine work” (1) consulting the manuscripts of the book and the revisions of previously published material, it becomes readily apparent the extent to which Whitman painstakingly prepared the text (and prepared it precisely as a “prose jumble”). See Floyd Stovall’s extensive notes and appendix in *Prose Works 1892* and also Original and Digital Manuscripts in Trent Collection at Duke University Library.

⁶⁰ Quoted in F.O. Matthiessen, *American Renaissance*, 579.

⁶¹ *Specimen Days*, 3. Originally published as *Specimen Days and Collect* (1882). Although Whitman published *Democratic Vistas* in 1871, *Memoranda During the War* in 1875 (both re-issued as *Two Rivulets* in 1876), *Specimen Days and Collect* was the “first carefully edited collection” of prose works put out by the poet. The entirety of Whitman’s prose was published as *Complete Prose Works* in 1892. I focus exclusively on *Specimen Days*, by far the longest of these texts, in what follows. For a complete publication history of Whitman’s

In the penultimate chapter of her well-known study *Whitman the Political Poet*, Betsy Erkkila remarks on those historical actualities left out of Whitman's book,

By essentially eliminating the period of Reconstruction and the public and private disease associated with those years, Whitman moves his narrative directly from the tragedy of the war to the restoration of an eternalized nature that bears no sign of political struggle and the wounds of history.⁶²

And it's true, Whitman writes very little in *Specimen Days* about the years immediately following the Civil War or the complex set of questions the U.S. faced as a result of the emancipation of four million formerly enslaved black Americans. Referring primarily to Whitman's war poetry, Erkkila notes, "the unvoiced question of black emancipation is one of many questions about the consequences of war that 'convulsed' the democratic texts of *Drum-Taps* and *Sequel* in 1865."⁶³ An interesting figure emerges out of this characterization of Whitman's writing, as though some element not expressly named nevertheless vibrates between the lines.

In *Specimen Days*, Whitman inserts "An Interregnum Paragraph" between his account of the war and the later part of the book. The entry operates a curious temporal passage leaping across an eleven-year interval between the end of the war in 1865 and the beginning of the section immediately following it. Dated 1876, the section is entitled, rather abruptly, "New Themes Entered Upon." The transition paragraph briefly mentions Whitman's service in the Attorney General's department through '66 and '67 (which as Erkkila perceptively notes would have placed him directly in the midst of the debates and issues of Reconstruction) and then moves on to an account (again very

prose see Floyd Stovall's Preface to *The Collected Writings of Walt Whitman* (New York: New York University Press, 1963.)

⁶² Betsy Erkkila, "Representing America," *Walt Whitman Political Poet*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989) p 295.

⁶³ Erkkila, *Whitman the Political Poet*, 221

brief) of the event of February '73, when Whitman suffered a stroke and was "stricken down by paralysis." The section concludes with a description of the poet's move to Camden, New Jersey, and his later years spent regaining strength near Timber Creek. According to Erkkilä's account quoted above, it is precisely this prompt transition that functions to cover over the signs "of political struggle and the wounds of history" and enables a "restoration of an eternalized nature."

In addition to eliminating the period of Reconstruction, Whitman makes very few references to slavery or the root causes of "attempted secession" in *Specimen Days*.⁶⁴ These are massive historical gaps in the text, but Whitman also passes over the death of his mother in 1873 without a word and writes very little about the intense disillusionment and depression he experienced in these post-war years. While it is tempting to interpret all of these silences as an attempt to suture the personal and historical wounds of the period in a coherent narrative of restoration, this section argues that Whitman's *Specimen Days* records personal and historical intensities that, while not made explicit, tremble and stir between the words and beneath the surface of the text.⁶⁵ It is precisely these convulsions in Whitman's sentences that Deleuze enables us to read.

Deleuze's "Whitman" deals almost exclusively with *Specimen Days*. In the course of the essay, Deleuze calls our attention to unexpected frequencies at play in Whitman's prose writing, extracting from Whitman's "spontaneous fragments" an "element

⁶⁴ As Erkkilä points out, the "issue of slavery appears only as a footnote" (208). Cf. "But what can I say of that prompt and splendid wrestling with secession slavery, the arch enemy personified, the instant he unmistakably show'd his face?" "National Uprising and Volunteering" *Specimen Days*, 24. See also a paragraph Whitman excised from *Specimen Days* on the "former Slave States," which includes the following question, "Did the vast mass of the blacks, in Slavery in the United States, present a terrible and deeply complicated problem through the just ending century? But how if the mass of the blacks in freedom in the U.S. all through the ensuing century, should present a yet more terrible and more deeply complicated problem?," *Prose Works 1892*, Appendix, 326.

⁶⁵ Throughout *Whitman A Political Poet*, Erkkilä traces the extent which the "organic metaphor" (of body and body-politic) became an "insistent figure in Whitman's work." Whitman says as much in many places, but the texts themselves bear a different insistence.

through which, or in the intervals of which, we attain the great and carefully considered visions and sounds of both Nature and History.”⁶⁶ In a sort of reversal of “symptomatic reading” where one treats the writer as a sort of patient acting out the politically and historically repressed, Deleuze affirms Whitman’s “almost mad sentences” as expressing a great health.⁶⁷ Deleuze’s use of Whitman produces a convulsive experience of history that far from serving a restorative function, disrupts organic conceptions of the body, the self, the nation, and the text. In doing so, Deleuze draws our attention not to what Whitman failed to do or left out, but instead to those aspects of Whitman’s contribution to the society of comrades that consists first and foremost in sending out “the most wayward, spontaneous, fragmentary book every printed.”⁶⁸

Deleuze places *Specimen Days* in an assemblage of “autobiographical” writing, but what is of interest is the singular relationship Whitman constructs between direct, personal, lived experience, and the composition of an impersonal, collective, artficed life. The difference between the two (lived experience and impersonal life) marks a line that far from “imposing a form of expression on the matter of lived experience,” instead poses writing as a “question of becoming, always incomplete, always in the midst of being formed.”⁶⁹ It is here, according to Deleuze, that literature engages a process or “passage of Life that traverses both the livable and the lived.”⁷⁰ One wants to say that *Specimen Days* commences an experiment somewhere *between* autobiography and

⁶⁶ Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, 60.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 60.

⁶⁸ Whitman, *Specimen Days*, 1.

⁶⁹ Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, 1.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

history, on a continuous line connecting Whitman's experience(s) of the mid-nineteenth century and the sensations and affects he produces in writing.⁷¹

In several places, Whitman expresses a desire to create a mode of writing that could carry the intensity of certain scenes, events, and experiences to a future reader. Chief among the experiences we encounter in the text are those derived from the notebooks Whitman kept during the years he spent attending to wounded soldiers during the Civil War. Several critics have pointed out that what is unique about Whitman's "democratic perspective" on war is that it does not emphasize heroic battles or particularly brave leaders, but instead focuses on the "average bulk," the motley crew of rank and file soldiers with whom he comes in contact.

The centrality of the experience of contact with the soldiers in Whitman's text goes much further than simply representing their struggles or recollecting the time he spent with them. Instead what he continuously recreates in these passages is an experience of listening, of becoming receptive to events outside and beyond his direct experience. In a brief section entitled "Soldiers and Talks," the poet-become-war-nurse reports having heard numerous personal accounts of "fights, marches, and the strange, quick changes of that [an] eventful campaign."⁷² The *content* of the events narrated to him by common soldiers (which include confederate "escapees" and union soldiers) are not the main issue for Whitman. It is rather the whole concrete assemblage of social relations in which these narrations took place – the *experience of listening, touching, and passing time* with these soldiers and "comrades" – that Whitman tries to convey. Such

⁷¹ In her recent book *The American Counterfeit: Authenticity and Identity in American Literature and Culture* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2006) Mary MacAleer Balkun has interpreted the text as a literary equivalent of the Natural History museum that was becoming institutionalized in the late nineteenth century. Deleuze's perceptive reading of Whitman's concept of "history" enables us to see the specific ways he in fact escapes this form of narrative or organic history. See Balkun's chapter on *Specimen Days*, "Whitman's Natural History: Specimen Days and the Culture of Authenticity," 18-41.

⁷² Whitman, *Specimen Days*, 62.

encounters lead Whitman to a significant reflection, “I now doubt whether one can get a fair idea of what this war practically is, or what genuine America is, and her character, without some such experience as this I am having.”⁷³ Whitman notes in *Democratic Vistas*, that he “use[s] the words America and democracy as convertible terms.”⁷⁴ In this passage “genuine America” is deployed as a vision of democratic social relations where “camaraderie” is realized concretely in an *event of listening and relating* that takes place irrespective of formal political representation.

At several points in *Specimen Days* – and in fact in all of Whitman’s writing – the practical problem of conveying or transmitting direct experience is a kind of obsession (which I will come to in a moment), but in these passages the issue of transmitting experience emerges as profoundly political, a question pertaining to more than representing something that has happened. Instead, it is a question of transmitting a *practical reality*. The potential to *convey* relations – the effort to give a reader an intense, sensuous experience at the moment of reading – is a crucial element of Whitman’s vision. This effort to convey and invent relations is what he names “camaraderie.”

Several passages of *Specimen Days* clearly attempt to produce just such an experience of contact, but what is not so immediately evident is the very specific relationship Whitman constructs between such a thoroughly *personal* and *present* “experience as this I am having” and the shape of the book as a whole. *Specimen Days* in its entirety, as Whitman repeatedly asserts, must be understood as hooked into a democratic desire to put the reader “in rapport.”⁷⁵

⁷³ *Ibid.* (my emphasis).

⁷⁴ Whitman, *Democratic Vistas*, 204.

⁷⁵ Whitman, *Specimen Days*, 205. Linck Johnson, in an article entitled “The Design of Walt Whitman’s *Specimen Days*,” argues “It is this ‘rapport’ that the style and design of SD are meant to achieve, as Whitman attempts to preserve for his future readers those moments which he found to be of enduring significance.” In a similar vein, Nathaniel Mackey notes Whitman’s intense interest in “turning the reader away from the text” and back toward the world. See “Phrenological Whitman.”

The war writing of *Specimen Days* registers much of the tension between the most radical democratic tendencies of American life and the ongoing experience of poverty, civil war, and of an emergent industrial capitalism. But it does not always do so overtly. A vital passage comes near the end of the long middle-section on the war and indicates the extent to which these tensions cannot be given in narration, but instead in the inflections and modulations of the writing itself. In a passage that Deleuze will seize on in his essay, Whitman reflects on the printing proofs of what would become *Memoranda During the War* (and subsequently *Specimen Days*). The poet pauses and notes the fine line between chaotic disintegration and a tentative composition of his text (and by extension the poet's "self" and the still unstable Union). It is remarkable that Whitman chose (and chose twice) to include this brief note on the process of the writing contained in the book. Whitman could not be further from a restorative mood when under the heading "convulsiveness," he writes,

As I have look'd over the proof-sheets of the preceding pages, I have once or twice fear'd that my diary would prove, at best, but a batch of convulsively written reminiscences. Well, be it so. They are but parts of the actual distraction, heat, smoke and excitement of those times. The war itself, with the temper of society preceding it, can indeed be best describe by that very word convulsiveness.⁷⁶

War names the experience of both the individual body and political bodies in processes of division, dismemberment, amputation, and hemorrhaging. As a daily visitor to the hospitals around Washington D.C., Whitman had repeatedly caught "glimpses" of such "hell scenes" and witnessed first-hand the grass he so intensely loved soaked with blood: "red life-blood oozing out from heads or trunks or limbs upon that green and dew-cool grass."⁷⁷ As numerous critics have noted, these events radically transformed Whitman and to a large extent shook the youthful enthusiasm one

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 112.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 79.

encounters in the first editions of *Leaves of Grass*. Walking among corpses, Whitman wrote down in his notebooks what he saw and what he heard. But what is particularly striking in this passage is that it attests to the fact that in addition to shaking-up Whitman's conceptions of the ideal organic unity of a body or a nation, "convulsiveness" (the spasms and disjunctures of a body) also pertains to *writing* itself. Deleuze emphasizes this point,

In America, literature is naturally convulsive...But "convulsiveness," as Whitman makes clear, characterizes the epoch and the country as much as the writing. If the fragment is innately American, it is because America itself is made up of federated states and various immigrant peoples (minorities) – everywhere a collection of fragments, haunted by the menace of secession, that is to say, by war.⁷⁸

Deleuze's isolation of "convulsiveness" as a quality not just of Whitman's writing but of all American literature insists that writing constantly shatters the American dream and the myth of an organic national, personal, and poetic body. America, Deleuze writes, is everywhere splintered, "a collection of fragments, haunted by war." To be an American writer, according to Deleuze, is to register this convulsive experience of social, political, historical fragmentation and the relations that this experience invents. It is in this sense that "America" names a "schizo-culture."

Deleuze's statements challenge interpretations of Whitman as a representative poet or a voice of restoration. Drawing out convulsiveness from Whitman's description of the Civil War, of those years as well as the experience of "convulsively" writing about that time (which refers to the physical experience of writing, both Whitman's shaking hand that kept the notebooks and the old paralyzed man that later gathered them together into one of his last books) Deleuze expands Whitman's concept of "convulsiveness" as a description of the "American experience" as such. It is to this

⁷⁸ Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, 57.

irreconcilable convulsiveness that Deleuze refers when he writes, “the experience of the American writer is inseparable from the American experience, even when the writer does not speak of America.”⁷⁹

And yet, as Erkkila rightly points out, Whitman does not explicitly treat the convulsive relationship between the experience of the Civil War and the experience of slavery and emancipation. To bring these questions more clearly into view, it is necessary to invent a relation connecting *Specimen Days* to W.E.B Du Bois’s *Black Reconstruction in America* (1935). Whitman’s word “convulsiveness” helps operate the connection. Reading Du Bois we note that he also used the word “convulsive” to describe what two generations of historians had covered over, a defining experience of the American nineteenth-century, specifically the *black reconstruction of democracy*.

War and especially civil strife leave terrible wounds. It is the duty of humanity to heal them. It was therefore soon conceived as neither wise nor patriotic to speak of all the causes of strife and the terrible results to which sectional differences in the United States had led. And so, first of all, we minimized the slavery controversy which *convulsed* the nation from the Missouri Compromise down to the Civil War.⁸⁰

A careful writer, Du Bois makes a critical distinction between two ways of relating to our collective past. Du Bois affirms that “it is the duty of humanity to heal” the wounds of war and civil strife, but he also shows us how it is also precisely this desire to “heal” that often covers over and disavows the real causes and conditions of civil strife. Much depends on the specific investments in play in a desire to heal.

In Du Bois’s analysis of “The Propaganda of History,” he writes that the work of historians (when they are not explicitly lying, which in the case of late-nineteenth century writers was often the case) too often invests in a desire to produce a non-convulsive narrative, a story of progress, and in doing so serves a *restorative* function.

⁷⁹ Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, 58.

⁸⁰ W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America 1860-1880*. (New York: The Free Press, 1992), 714.

Aiming to treat symptoms by ignoring the disease, which in this case is the deep racism that has underwritten the exploitation of black labor for centuries on this continent, history often effects a minimalization process or, in the worst cases, covers over the very processes that humanity invents *to heal itself* at a distance from historians.

Du Bois provides a new passage into a question in which both Deleuze and Whitman are also deeply invested, namely, the relationship between “health” and the practices of art, literature, and music. American historiography, as Du Bois demonstrates throughout *Black Reconstruction*, normally functions to anaesthetize us to both the joy and pain of the past (ignoring or stealing those creations of a people’s struggle to survive in conditions of intolerability and even more frequently exacerbating the wounds). Throughout *Specimen Days* Whitman explicitly figures both writing and nature as elements of “healing,” and for this reason he is often accused of being invested in restoration. The questions Du Bois enables one to ask is whether Whitman’s text really is operating in this “restorative” way, to what extent *Specimen Days* covers over the wounds of history, offering more of the same bad medicine America has been prescribed and overdosing on for centuries, or whether there is a health in Whitman’s nature-notes that is doing something completely different.

After the entry on “convulsiveness,” Whitman brings the war section of *Specimen Days* to a close with three separate passages leading up to the “Interregnum Paragraph,” mentioned earlier. Each passage repeats much of the same material as though Whitman were struggling for words or stuttering, agonizingly searching for a vehicle that would enable him to pass into new themes. A first attempt is made in “Three years Summ’d Up,” in which Whitman describes the war years as “the most profound lesson of my

life.”⁸¹ Describing his activity during the war as a “ministering,” Whitman declares that the relations he entered during that time provided “my most fervent view of the true *ensemble*.”⁸² It is also in this section that Whitman notes his encounter with black soldiers, which is the only time he does note their presence. Whitman writes, “Among the black soldiers, wounded or sick, and in the contraband camps, I also took my way whenever in their neighborhood, and did what I could for them.”⁸³

The section that follows attempts a second time to summarize the experience of war and give it narrative closure, but instead, “The Million Dead, Too, Summ’d Up” unfurls what is probably the longest sentence in the book (over 36 lines of text). Whitman begins with a subject, “The dead in this war,” and quickly leaps into a present tense vision (embedded in a numerous digressions set off by dashes), “there they lie,” which is immediately followed by an exhaustive series of attributive phrases that are never resolved by a finite verb, as though the stillness of death – these motionless dead laying in uncountable fields – cannot be captured by a verb, will not give themselves to narrative closure, *cannot finally be represented*. In the midst of this intensely convulsive sentence, Whitman writes,

...and blackest and loathesomest of all, the dead and living burial pits, the prison pens of Andersonville, Salibury, Belle-Isle, &c., (not Dante’s pictured hell and all its woes, its degradations, filthy torments, excell’d those prisons) – the dead, the dead, the dead – our dead – or South or North, ours all, (all, all, all, finally dear to me)...⁸⁴

The repetition “the dead, the dead, the dead” sounds a lifeless dull thud and is followed by a plural possessive, “our dead,” announcing a radical camaraderie, a relation to these dead that is reminiscent of Lincoln on the field at Gettysburg, but different in a key way.

⁸¹ Whitman, *Specimen Days*, 113.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 113.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 113-114.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 114.

“Ours all,” the dead of the entire Union, north *and* south, does not finally resolve into a statement of union; rather it continues in an additional parenthesis “(all, all, all, finally dear to me)” followed by still more, equally fragmented, partial descriptions of bodies strewn across various fields, further catalogues of places and half glimpsed scenes, broken bonds and mass graves. The attempt to render the war as “summ’d up,” to give an account of “all, all, all” finds no relief in restorative closure. The open syntax of this sentence exhausts itself finally in a statement of the countlessness of war’s casualties,

the *infinite* dead – (the land entire saturated, perfumed with their impalpable ashes’ exhalation in Nature’s chemistry distill’d, and shall be so forever, in every future grain of wheat and ear of corn, and every flower that grows, and every breath we draw)...⁸⁵

A curious, embedded parenthetical statement carries the only trans-animate force of vitality amidst these innumerable dead bodies, “every breath we draw,” a crucial element of Whitman’s democratic perspective that will be elaborated in the next section of the book. But folded into the series, these striking lines proclaim that the multitudes of *our* dead persist and will persist (by virtue of this radical immeasurability), not in a project of national dedication (Whitman in fact proclaims that no material monument can ever commemorate these dead), but in a living process in which “every future grain of wheat and ear of corn, and every flower that grows, and *every breath we draw*” becomes part of a collective experience.⁸⁶ Whitman’s concept of Nature as process emerges from this experience of encountering these countless dead, an experience which gives rise to a vision of History and Nature intertwined in a continuous process of life. A force of transformation issues from these infinite dead’s “impalpable ashes’ exhalation” that will be carried into the final pages of Whitman’s book.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 114.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 115.

Deleuze makes several key observations concerning sentences such as the one described above. Reading *Specimen Days*, Deleuze emphasizes how Whitman's convulsive sentences destroy the syntax and organization that would make the sentence a "totality capable of referring back to itself."⁸⁷ Instead of composing sentences that would work to refer back to, or represent, a rational self or subject as the ground of its coherence (or would function to enclose and represent a national unity), Whitman invents, according to Deleuze, "a particular type of sentence that modulates the intervals"--that is, a sentence that proceeds by ruptures and leaps, rapidly changing directions and speeds in an effort to pursue the paths of inorganic life, the "motor that drives both Nature and History."⁸⁸ Here one can see concretely what is meant by "minor use" of a major language insofar as Deleuze points to the way Whitman's sentence rejects forms of syntactical enclosure maintained by a standard grammar. The elements of the sentence are not related by a process of interiorization that would cohere in a "self" or a "national identity." Instead, Whitman's eccentric line enacts a deterritorialization of language as a whole, setting free "an infinite asyntactic sentence which prolongs itself or sprouts dashes in order to create spatiotemporal intervals."⁸⁹ One might say it is in these intervals that the virtual "non-historical cloud" materializes. Here, a past more intense than what can be stated directly or given narrative form pulsates. Such convulsive experiences push toward the limits of language or towards

⁸⁷ Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, 59. In providing a concrete analysis of "convulsiveness" as *a-syntactic process* Whitman's line emerges in Deleuze's reading as something quite at odds with, for instance, reading's of Whitman's "convulsions" that fold these perturbations back into a figure of narrative closure. Cf. Andrew Lawson (reading a line from "Song of Myself" "the trained soprano...convulses me like the climax of my love-grip" LG, 52) who writes, "These urges and convulsions have an outcome that links national identity, poetic creation, and commercial success." "Spending for Vast Returns," 350.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 58.

language's outside, enacting a "passage of life within language that constitute[s] Ideas."⁹⁰

And so it is fitting that Whitman ends the part of *Specimen Days* dealing with the Civil War abruptly. He proceeds with a long counter-historiographical meditation, "The Real War Will Never Get Into the Books," declaring that the "real experience" of war cannot be recorded by history. But have we not just seen that some experience – not of war alone, but of life – has been recorded? Of the Civil War, Whitman states, "Its interior history will not only never be written – its practicality, minutiae of deeds and passions, will never be even suggested."⁹¹ Isolating that site of war with which he was most familiar, Whitman concentrates the entire "untold and unwritten history of the war" in an image of "one vast central hospital."⁹² Commenting on this passage, Deleuze writes,

Relations in ever greater numbers of increasingly subtle quality: this is, as it were, the motor that drives both Nature and History. War is just the opposite: its acts of destruction affect every relation, and have as their consequence the Hospital, the generalized hospital, that is, the place where brothers are strangers to each other, and where the dying parts, fragments of mutilated men, coexist absolutely solitary and without relation.⁹³

The destruction of war and its culmination in the figure of a "generalized hospital" names a situation in which relations are reduced to an absolute zero point. The impossibility of establishing any relation whatsoever would be the figure for the limit of Whitman's "society of comrades." Whitman writes against this limit and in doing so unleashes his mad-sentence.

⁹⁰ Deleuze, "Literature and Life," *Essays Critical and Clinical*, 5.

⁹¹ Whitman, *Specimen Days*, 117.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 117.

⁹³ Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, 59.

2.4.2 “Open Air”

Moving past the gruesome scenes Whitman witnessed and through the unrecordable convulsions of war indicated by Whitman’s syntax – a syntax that would well be defined as “shot to hell” – and into the final section of *Specimen Days*, one is struck by Whitman’s repeated conviction that “Nature” names a healing force or relation.⁹⁴ These pages are usually read as a *restorative narrative* that, aiming to heal both the wounds of war and the personal tragedy of Whitman’s stroke, sutures both the divisions of the national union and the relationship of that union to its representative poet. Such a reading, however, assumes that what Whitman means by “Nature” is an organic form or system, something prior to or opposed to the corruptions of history and its actually existing social relations. But as I have shown above, war itself becomes immanent to nature in Whitman’s writing. I have already indicated Whitman’s complicated way of thinking writing’s relation to history in the previous section, but in the final pages of *Specimen Days* one encounters an equally strange and altogether unrecognizable concept of nature at work in the poet’s book.

At the end of the abrupt “Interregnum Paragraph,” which ends on a surprisingly optimistic note, describing the poet’s daily jaunts to “a charmingly recluse and rural time spent along Timber creek,” a voice addresses the reader directly, “If the notes of that outdoor life could only prove as glowing to you, reader dear, as the experience itself was to me.”⁹⁵ Whitman doesn’t say here what would happen *if* such a thing were to really happen, but in the next section, “New Themes Entered Upon,” one begins to see Whitman composing these “notes” as synonymous with the healing power of nature. It is in these final sections that a writer-as-physician begins to emerge. Here Whitman

⁹⁴ Here I borrow an all too apt phrase Cesare Casarino uses in a different context to describe the “syntax-in-flight” of one of Herman Melville’s sentences. See *Modernity at Sea*, 134-135.

⁹⁵ Whitman, *Specimen Days*, 119.

presents a writing as health in a very specific way – a becoming-nature of literature. This is not exactly Whitman the “wound-dresser,” suturing a ripped body, but literature as nature, as health, as exercise, encounter, process, invention.

Deleuze writes some extraordinary passages on the relationship between writers and health that make possible a reading of Whitman’s post-war writing that does not reduce it to a narrative of restoration, nor to a simple “return,” as Erkkila suggests, to a pre-existing concept of “eternalized nature.” In “Literature and Life,” the introductory text of *Essays Critical and Clinical*, Deleuze writes,

The writer as such is not a patient but rather a physician, the physician of himself and of the world. The world is the set of symptoms whose illness merges with man. Literature then appears as an enterprise of health: not that the writer would necessarily be in good health...but that he possesses an irresistible and delicate health that stems from what he has seen and heard of things too big for him, too strong for him, suffocating things whose passage exhausts him, while nonetheless giving him the becomings that a dominant and substantial health would render impossible. The writer returns from what he has seen and heard with bloodshot eyes and pierced eardrums. What health would be sufficient to liberate life wherever it is imprisoned by and within man, by and within organism and genera?⁹⁶

There is no power of “health” or “nature” outside Whitman’s own practice of writing; it is in this sense, and in this sense only, that Whitman becomes a “physician of himself and of the world”; it is *in his notes* that “the irresistible and delicate health” of what Whitman calls “nature” subsists, *notes* that as I have suggested, carry many things that are too much for the poet.

Whitman describes the nature-notes in the following way:

After you have exhausted what there is in business, politics, conviviality, love, and so on — have found that none of these finally satisfy, or permanently wear — what remains? Nature remains; to bring out from their torpid recesses, the affinities of man or woman with the *open air*, the trees, fields, the changes of seasons—the sun by day and the stars of heaven by night. We will begin from these convictions. Literature flies so

⁹⁶ Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, 3.

high and is so hotly spiced, that *our notes may seem hardly more than breaths of common air*, or draughts of water to drink. But that is part of our lesson.⁹⁷

Whitman's conviction that after all else fails nature persists to move and reanimate, "the affinities of man or woman with the open air," cannot but call to mind that less than three pages earlier one learned that the "air we breathe" is infused with the "infinite dead." Such a passage compels us to think a relationship between "nature" and "notes" that would not separate them, but instead would have us take seriously Whitman's statement that writing itself carries "breaths of common air, or draughts of water to drink."⁹⁸ Throughout *Specimen Days*, Whitman affirms a force of nature that, far from separating life and death, health and war, nature and history, consistently associates these elements in a process which enables new relations. Whitman's democratic question, his question for the future, is precisely how his notes might convey "processes and passages of life" through and against the zero point of war, which is a very different operation from that of restoration.

In a footnote attached to the passage quoted above, Whitman allows himself to go quite a bit further in his ambitions for the nature-notes:

Who knows, (I have it in my fancy, my ambition) but the pages now ensuing may carry a ray of sun, or smell of grass or corn, or call of bird, or gleam of stars by night, or snow-flakes falling fresh and mystic...⁹⁹

In this note Whitman thinks the pages themselves in their immediate becoming ("now ensuing"), not as the restoration of an order, but as contributing to the production of new relations carrying vibrations of color and sound, smells and sensations, "visions and auditions stemming from what he has seen and heard" (Deleuze).

⁹⁷ Whitman, *Specimen Days*, 120.

⁹⁸ Cf. "tipsy with water," Emerson "the Poet" 461. (or later, Henry Miller, "drunk on water").

⁹⁹ Whitman, *Specimen Days*, 120.

Earlier I described the elements from which Whitman's "notes pencill'd in the open air" are composed, but it is perhaps more in Whitman's desire to destine these pages now ensuing that this particular "note" tells us something unexpected about Whitman's "delicate health" and his ambitions for a "wayward book." Whitman's footnote continues, eagerly hoping that it might one day make its way, "...to denizens of heated city house, or tired workman? –or maybe in sick-room or prison—to serve as cooling breeze, or Nature's aroma, to some fever'd mouth or latent pulse."¹⁰⁰

Nature, the "open air" – "a ray of sun," or "smell of grass or corn" as it is thought of in the above passage – is not outside or beyond the trauma of war, it is nothing transcendent; it is in fact nothing, in any commonsensical way, outside the very book we hold in our hands. Instead of performing a restoration of a pre-existing order *Specimen Days* itself *assembles an outside*. In drawing its rhythms not only from the wind and rivers and trees and grass around Timber Creek, but also the social relations of the hospital experience, and also necessarily from the infinite dead's "impalpable ashes' exhalation," the book unfolds a continuous and immanent process. Writing and Nature, *Specimen Days* tells us, invent new conditions in the manner of a distilling factory, concentration and intensification, "draughts of water to drink" precipitating from a "myriad of time."

Composing on this edge between "notes" and common air distilled from "war's hell scenes," Whitman produces a relation between writing nature, *a nature-writing*, conceived of as joyful exposure and invention - an opening in which it is no longer possible to separate the one from the other. Neither seeking to enclose nor to interiorize,

¹⁰⁰ It is interesting to note here that Whitman described *Leaves of Grass* as "a book for the criminal classes, because the other people do not need a poet" (quoted in Traubel "Whitman in Camden," 375.)

Whitman's "nature-writing," explodes organic notions of form that would resolve personal or historical experience into a coherent or stable narrative.

In his essay on Whitman, Deleuze draws our attention to the specific ways in which *Specimen Days* constructs, not a reconciliatory operation, but an "encounter with the Outside." As I have noted earlier, Deleuze refers this act of encounter to a practice of writing "a particular type of sentence." In the passage quoted above one encounters a sentence similar to those found in the war writing, but here the line – having passed through the zero-point of war – can now affirm life precisely in its "ensuing." If for Deleuze, Whitman "set[s] free an infinite asyntactic sentence, which prolongs itself or sprouts dashes in order to create spatiotemporal intervals," one might add here that these intervals also carry "breaths of common air." The creation of a "spatiotemporal interval" does not narrate a past experience or history, but modulates the relations between history (and what cannot be recorded by history) and a process of life. A sentence that carries the force its own creation and does not fold back on a creator or author; an elaborate line that does not impose itself on life or nature, but instead makes way for it: a procession. Deleuze writes of *Specimen Days*,

The relations between sounds or bird songs, which Whitman describes in marvelous ways, are made up of counterpoints and responses, constantly renewed and invented. Nature is not a form, but rather the process of establishing relations. It invents a polyphony: it is not a totality but an assembly, a "conclave," a "plenary session."¹⁰¹

Whitman insisted in the passage quoted earlier that nature is the only thing that remains after a break or a disaster, but, as Deleuze reads Whitman, "nature" would simply be the name the poet gives to a "process of establishing relations," the process of creating in the break.

¹⁰¹ Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, 59.

Such an understanding of nature has several consequences for reading some of the more striking passages in *Specimen Days* that move the explicit discussion of nature toward social and political questions. In addition to naming that point of contact between nature and writing, Whitman's refrain of the "open air" will be consistently linked to a notion of "democracy."¹⁰² In turning our attention to this key term of not only *Specimen Days*, but all of Whitman's writings, it is necessary to resist the temptation to assume we already know what this word named for Whitman. Closely reading the singularity of Whitman's vision opens a relation between "becoming-democratic" and these "notes pencill'd in the open air."

In the final entry of *Specimen Days* Whitman writes, "Democracy most of all affiliates with the open air, is sunny and hardy and sane only with Nature—just as much as Art is."¹⁰³ This last "specimen" of Whitman's wayward book concerns equally a political practice and an artistic practice insisting that both must continuously "affiliate" with the processes of Nature. In this passage one encounters Whitman's unwavering confidence in an American experiment conjoined to an equally steadfast conviction that without contact with "open air," democracy and art "will certainly dwindle and pale."¹⁰⁴

All of *Specimen Days* arranges for an encounter with "open air." Whitman offers us a democratic vista, a vision that would draw us from our "torpid recesses." In doing so, Whitman's "password primeval" of democracy also demands one seeks to invent new relations between his book and our world.

¹⁰² In his field-defining study, *American Renaissance*, F.O. Matthiessen heralded Whitman as a "poet of democracy." The final chapter of his well-known book was in fact called "Man in the Open Air." It is important here then to note that our reading of Whitman's "democracy" seeks to estrange this concept of "open air" from the Cold War liberalist discourse of "democracy" Matthiessen can be said to have founded and the specific way Whitman was used by several generations of American Studies scholars to produce American literature as an "establishment literature," but at the same time also seeks to affirm Matthiessen as a very careful and close reader of all of Whitman's work.

¹⁰³ Whitman, *Specimen Days*, 294.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 294.

2.4.3 “Refrain”

In an entry dated February 20, 1877, Whitman records “a solitary and pleasant sundown hour,” during which an event so unanticipated occurs it would be easy to miss. The editor’s note informs us the inclusion of the passage “was probably an afterthought,” because unlike the other two entries that appear under the same section heading (February 10 and February 11) what Whitman recorded in his “nature-notes” for February 20 was not previously published. Instead, the passage appears to have been among those “diary-scrap” Whitman reeled-out specifically for inclusion *Specimen Days*.

Under the heading, “Spring Overtures – Recreation” Whitman records a series of “audible” events that accompany and increase the pleasure he enjoys while exercising by a pond and contribute to Whitman’s construction of “nature” and the “open air” discussed above. Among these “overtures” announcing the coming good weather are the “chirping, almost singing, of a bird,” and what Whitman calls “the first hum and preparation of awakening spring.” It’s mid-February, a month before the first day of spring and probably still quite cold; here, as elsewhere, Whitman’s perceptions are untimely, literally out of season.

Then we come to the entry for February 20.

A solitary and pleasant sundown hour at the pond, exercising arms, chest, my whole body, by a tough oak sapling thick as my wrist, twelve feet high-pulling and pushing, inspiring the good air. After I wrestle with the tree awhile, I can feel its young sap and virtue welling up out of the ground and tingling through me from crown to toe, like health’s wine. Then for addition and variety I launch forth in my vocalism; shout declamatory pieces, sentiments, sorrow, anger, &c., from the stock poets or plays—or inflate my lungs and sing the wild tunes and refrains I heard of the blacks down south, or patriotic songs I learn’d in the army. I make the echoes ring, I tell you! As the twilight fell in a pause of these ebullitions, an owl somewhere the other side of the creek sounded *too-oo-oo-oo-oo*, soft and pensive (and I fancied a little sarcastic) repeated four or

five times. Either to applaud the negro songs – or perhaps an ironical comment on the sorrow, anger, or style of the stock poets.¹⁰⁵

This note enables us to return to the allegedly “unvoiced question of black emancipation” in Whitman’s post-war writing discussed earlier. Here, in this seemingly minor passage, one unexpectedly encounters a “vocalism” quite attuned to a life – a black life – outside the book. What forces converge to carry *this* song into the book? “As the twilight fell” Whitman writes, noting the exact time of day – that brief, often imperceptible transit between darkness and light – something happens.

In the “pause of these ebullitions” an owl contributes a to-oo-oo-oo-oo. As previously noted, Deleuze also picked up on the “relations between sounds and birds songs” in *Specimen Days*. But it is worth pausing to consider how this bird signals the invention of a new relation. This particular bird brings to mind the “owl of Minerva,” companion of poets who sees in the dark something normally imperceptible, and also recalls the famous passage from Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*, “when philosophy paints its gloomy picture then a form of life has grown old. It cannot be rejuvenated by the gloomy picture, but only understood. Only when the dusk starts to fall does the owl of Minerva spread its wings and fly.”¹⁰⁶ For Hegel, the owl of Minerva is a symbol of fading life, the moment of concrete understanding in which a form of life becomes sedimented in history. And, importantly, Hegel’s owl does not screech or hoot but silently flies away. Whitman’s owl, however, gives us a “too-oo-oo-oo-oo” as if to keep the song going even as Whitman catches his breath, as though the form of life expressed in the song itself began to make echoes rebound.

¹⁰⁵ Whitman, *Specimen Days*, 143.

¹⁰⁶ G.W.F. Hegel, “Preface” to *Philosophy of History* (New York: Cosimo, 2007), 87.

In this twilight passage *Specimen Days* gives us a concrete sense of how the “wild tunes and refrains of the blacks down south” returns – and returns as difference – through the “open air.” If democracy is to be “affiliated with open air,” it is in this passage more than any other that we encounter it. Whitman “inflates his lungs,” and what bounces back? It’s as though the sounds of black reconstruction of democracy asserted themselves here, signaling, not the “passing of a form of life,” but an affirmation of polyphony, a living black refrain. Nathaniel Mackey, writing on Whitman, has noted how the “repressed acknowledgement of the manifest cause of the war, the enslavement of African Americans, creates curious perturbations.”¹⁰⁷ This passage offers an instance of the striking deviations Whitman’s songs take. Here is a “passage of the refrain,” which Deleuze and Guattari define as the movement of a living sound between two assemblages or territories.

As has been noted, *Specimen Days* and Whitman’s war writing more generally world does not seem to include the experience of black slavery or emancipation. But in this “overture” a new world enters the book. There’s an encounter and a passage of life – an opening – that establishes a wholly new relation that comes quite unexpectedly from the outside.

The point in drawing out this passage is not simply to say that Whitman reproduces the songs of black emancipation; this is not a scene of minstrelsy, nor is it an instance of that familiar lyrical gesture Whitman often makes, incorporating into himself the voices of others (i.e. “through me many long dumb voices, voices of generations of slaves, voices of prostitutes and of deformed persons...through me forbidden voices”¹⁰⁸). Instead, this passage records an event quite singular in Whitman’s writing. What occurs

¹⁰⁷ Nathaniel Mackey, “Phrenological Whitman” *Conjunctions* 29 (Fall 1997). Available online at <http://www.conjunctions.com/archives/c29-nm.htm> (last accessed June 3, 2010).

¹⁰⁸ Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass: the First (1855) Edition*, 48.

on this night is a fleeting life that passes *through the book*, through Whitman's body, a song outside the book, and in fact outside Whitman's conscious perceptions. "I inflate my lungs and sing the wild tunes and refrains of the blacks I heard down south." These tunes are in the air, it is the force of the songs themselves asserting a claim on the "open air." Whitman literally inhales these songs in the open air and it is only then that they return as refrain, *a refrain that he heard*. Whitman quite literally doesn't know what hit him. There's an intense uncertainty – ambivalence even – echoed back at Whitman in the too-oo-oo-oo-oo of the owl, an audible trace of difference that upsets the poet's sovereignty and adds a new sound to his song.

The word "overture" announcing the passage probably couldn't be more precise for naming that process of establishing relations that occurs here, a gesture of opening. I have previously pointed out that Whitman's notes for *Specimen Days* repeatedly offer the singular experience of listening or receptivity gathered "out of the myriads of my time," throughout the notes recounting his war experience one finds Whitman making all kinds of "overtures," opening his ears and his body to others and to the world. But this passage is particularly astounding insofar as it records the "unvoiced question of black emancipation" that while not clearly articulated or even understood, resonates in the multiplicity of Whitman's experience. Previously unheard of affiliations converge in this passage and bring the book into contact with the songs of black emancipation carried on the open air. What virtual events are sounded in these echoes? What democratic refrain do we encounter here?

If earlier I underscored Whitman's belief in a democracy in touch with "open air," this passage requires a re-formulation of the "unvoiced question" of slavery, emancipation, and reconstruction as it vibrates the intervals of *Specimen Days*. This question – not Whitman's but *our* question – does not seek to show what Whitman

eliminated or what his vision lacked, but how and where Whitman's "democratic book" opens up a space for new relations, where, to follow Mackey once again, "something moves" in Whitman that would be "more than surface conviction."¹⁰⁹ A refrain echoes, a "maroon intangible" enters the book; this is the line to follow because it is the line that also "turning the reader away from the text" opens a passage to something else.

Taking up this song – and again mapping a line from *Specimen Days* to *Black Reconstruction* – further attunes one to the sort of encounters to be had in the open air. At the end of the chapter "The Coming of the Lord," in *Black Reconstruction*, Du Bois gives us a better description of the "refrains" Whitman must have heard. Du Bois writes,

There was joy in the South. It rose like perfume – like a prayer. Men stood quivering. Slim dark girls, wild and beautiful with wrinkled hair, wept silently; young women, black, tawny, white and golden, lifted shivering hands, and old and broken mothers, black and gray, raised great voices and shouted to God across the fields, and up to the rocks and the mountains.

A great song arose, the loveliest thing born this side of the seas. I was a new song. It did not come from Africa, though the dark throb and beat of that Ancient of Days was in it and through it. It did not come from white America...It was a new song and its deep and plaintive beauty, its great cadences and wild appeal wailed, throbbed and thundered on the world's ears with a message seldom voiced by man. It swelled and blossomed like incense, improvised and born anew out of an age long past, and weaving into its texture the old and new melodies in word and in thought.¹¹⁰

Du Bois also underscores atmosphere, specifically connecting the new song to something in the air, a "perfume" that "shouted to God *across* the fields" – a sensation of sound and scents persisting outside work and outside the narratives of history. A non-historical cloud? A new song arose and is arising in joyful – here Whitman gives us the word – *recreation*.

But Du Bois also calls our attention to how hearing these "new world songs" of black America, songs announcing the black reconstruction of democracy in process,

¹⁰⁹ Nathaniel Mackey, "Phrenological Whitman" *Conjunctions* 29 (Fall 1997).

¹¹⁰ W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 124.

many “sneered at it – those white Southerners who heard it and never understood” and some “those white Northerners...*listened without ears.*”¹¹¹ What Du Bois enables us to perceive is not just the song, but the receptivity to the song – the question becomes not only *who* hears this song, but more precisely: how does one *become capable* of hearing the song?

Quite apart from those “without ears,” Whitman’s encounter with the “refrains...heard of the blacks down south,” tells us much about Whitman’s physical relation to the world around him, his extraordinary capacity for reception. All of Whitman’s writing constantly records an engagement with the world that requires the construction of a new and extremely sensitive body, *a receptive body*. No organic body will do, we need a constructed body. In “Song of Myself,” Whitman pauses, arrests his song, and writes, “I think I will do nothing for a long time but listen, and accrue what I hear into myself....and let sounds contribute toward me.”¹¹² Constructing ears implies a relay between an experience of listening to the world (an experience of intensification and receptivity) and a process of writing. It is in this relay that Whitman shows us how he “establishes non-preexistent relations.” It is precisely in this process that Whitman composes “polyphony” – sound *as* multiplicity. “Spring Overtures” composes a line to life outside Whitman’s book. Fragile – almost imperceptible – relations. If anything, the joy of literary criticism would be their amplification.

Convulsiveness, open-air, refrain – pages now ensuing between minor literature and becoming- democratic. To this point I have shown what Deleuze can do for Whitman, the final section aims to show what Whitman does for Deleuze.

¹¹¹ W.E.B Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 125.

¹¹² Whitman, *Leaves of Grass: The First (1855) Edition*, 51.

2.5 Deleuze's "Whitman" (1993)

Deleuze's reflections on Whitman appear as the eighth entry in the *Essays Critical and Clinical*. More a short statement (it is less than five pages long) the text unfolds – like D.H. Lawrence's earlier well-known study – under the simple title "Whitman."¹¹³ As we have noted, Deleuze deals almost exclusively with *Specimen Days*, a decision that could be explained by the text's relatively minor status with respect to *Leaves of Grass*, or by the fact that Deleuze almost never comments on poetic works. A more surprising detail, however, is that in the same year, Deleuze's son, Julien Deleuze, translated Whitman's late prose work into French for *Mercure de France* under the title *Commes des baies de genévriers*.¹¹⁴ Whatever the reason, *Specimen Days* can also be seen to mark a beginning in the experimental autobiographical tradition Deleuze consistently returns to in all of his writings on American Literature.¹¹⁵

"Whitman" is neither an interpretation, nor a comprehensive survey of the poet's body of work, but something more like a highly concentrated study that extracts two essential ideas from *Specimen Days*. As noted at the beginning of this chapter, Deleuze claims that two aspects realize, or counter-actualize the reality of the "society of comrades." The two conditions under which American literature becomes such a reality

¹¹³On the proper name and its difference from the "author function," see *Dialogues II*, 38-39. "The proper name does not designate a subject, but something which happens, at least between two terms which are not subjects, but agents, elements. Proper names are not names of persons, but of peoples and tribes, flora and fauna, military operations or typhoons, collectives, limited companies and production studios. The author is a subject of enunciation, but the writer – who is not an author – is not. The writer invents assemblages starting from assemblages which have invented him, he makes one multiplicity pass into another...the assemblage is co-functioning, it is 'sympathy.'"

¹¹⁴ The title Julien Deleuze settled on roughly translates an alternate title Whitman had considered for the book, "One time I thought of naming this collection "Cedar-Plums Like" (245). The phrase is translated from a section in *Specimen Days* of the same name in which the poet contemplates no fewer than twenty-eight possible titles he thought of giving his book before settling on *Specimen Days*.

¹¹⁵ Deleuze observes in the "Whitman" essay a curious effect of American writing to render "the most personal autobiography... necessarily collective." (57) Deleuze names Thomas Wolfe and Henry Miller specifically as continuing Whitman's "tradition," both are discussed in the conclusion of the dissertation along with Jack Kerouac.

are defined as the “innate feeling for the fragmentary” and the “reflection on living relations.” Deleuze’s “Whitman” rejects a reduction of literature to historical conditions and suggests that these two processes enable us to encounter something *in* nineteenth-century American literature that is not quite *of* the American nineteenth-century. I described this earlier as the “untimely” element Deleuze consistently pursues in his reading of literature – the untimely as that which escapes purely historical determinations.

Whitman provides Deleuze not only with a vision of American democracy, but more precisely the concrete elements of that vision, the specific conditions in which it is made. Deleuze’s short essay is a thought-experiment that takes place in the convergence between among literature and philosophy. Of primary interest for Deleuze are Whitman’s concepts of “nature” and “history” as both have been highly contested in the history of philosophy, and specifically the history of dialectical thought. Deleuze picks up *Specimen Days* as a weapon in philosophical combat, “using” Whitman to shatter the Hegelian notion of totality and thought as a process of totalization. As a philosopher, Deleuze is sensitive to the long tradition of the dialectical determination of the concepts of nature and history as the temporal unfolding of absolute spirit or subject.¹¹⁶ In a *Thousand Plateaus* these notions are closely related to what Deleuze and Guattari call “state-thought,” a designation discussed at length in chapter three.

Much of Deleuze’s philosophical project, his turn to empiricism, Spinozism, Nietzsche, and so on, can be understood as an attempt to produce new concepts that escape the organicist implications of the philosophical tradition arising from

¹¹⁶ Debates over the relation between a possible “dialectic of nature” and a “dialectic of history” could be traced from Hegel, through Marx, Lenin, Lukacs, and in a more critical vein in the turn from Hegelianism in the work of Louis Althusser. Jean-Paul Sartre provides an extremely clarifying discussion of these terms in the Introduction to *Critique of Dialectical Reason*. On Deleuze’s complex relationship to Hegelianism see Christian Kerslake, “The Vertigo of Philosophy: Deleuze and the Problem of Immanence.”

Hegelianism. Deleuze's "new type of thinking" is above all an attempt to affirm thought without recourse to a subject as the condition of thought, and to think events without recourse to a notion of historical totality. Deleuze makes Whitman an (unwitting) ally in this project to subvert the Hegelian "image of thought."¹¹⁷

The "Whitman" essay concentrates several points Deleuze will consistently make concerning American literature and is thus important for the rest of this dissertation. Reading the essay as part of a much longer trajectory allows us to more carefully situate it in Deleuze's anti-dialectical project. For instance, the "reflection on living relations that must constantly be created" recalls themes of Deleuze's collaboration with Claire Parnet – *Dialogues* (1977) – and especially the longest essay in that book, "On the Superiority of Anglo-American Literature," which will be a point of reference throughout this dissertation. Drawing on the radical empiricist idea that relations are "external to their terms," Deleuze and Parnet make the somewhat shocking claim that "it is only the English and Americans who have freed conjunctions and reflected on relations."¹¹⁸ Anglo-American philosophy, according to Deleuze and Parnet, developed in directions that were not determined by an emphasis on Being or the Subject, but rather inventing a style of thinking that began with questions of relation and, more importantly, creation.

In the Preface to the English edition of *Dialogues* (written in 1986, without Parnet), Deleuze explains how Anglo-American philosophy is a particularly strong approach to thinking that breaks out of the established framework of rationalism. Rather than starting from universals or a concept of the One, Anglo-American philosophy begins with "multiplicities," which are "neither unities or totalities" but instead "states

¹¹⁷ Deleuze's "aesthetics" also subverts organicist notions of form that can be seen for example in Lawrence and Matthiessen. This is important because Deleuze "uses" Whitman to subvert the very aesthetic tradition many literary scholars have attempted to situate him within. The question is not to discover the "real" Whitman, but to see what one can make of Whitman's writing, what *more* one can do.

¹¹⁸ Deleuze and Parnet, *Dialogues II*, 42.

of things.” Deleuze expands on this point and its relationship to literature. He describes “the great project of American literature” as the attempt to “get close to such multiplicities,” and, more importantly for this discussion, emphasizes that the relations invented in this literature are made up of “becomings without history and individuations without subjects.” It is in this text that Deleuze first alludes to Whitman, specifically in connection to the concept of multiplicity. In a passage that recalls the well-known introductory chapter of *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze writes, “every multiplicity grows from the middle, like a blade of grass or rhizome.”¹¹⁹ According to Deleuze, this capacity to start in the midst of things – to be spontaneous – enables a different type of thinking, a new experiment, a “thinking in lines” (Parvese). In Whitman’s writing one does not begin with a point (a subject, an author), one is always already on a line.

In *Specimen Days* Deleuze encounters a writer with a particular sensitivity or feel for a “spontaneity of the fragmentary,” i.e. the primacy of multiplicity. Deleuze makes much of Whitman’s resolve to begin “still quite unprepared,” carried away by a fragmentation that has no recourse to a prior or future totalization. Such an approach to writing begins by inventing non-preexisting relations, which for Deleuze are also *processes of life*. It is in Whitman’s resolve to begin with life understood in this way – in the middle of things – that Deleuze encounters a comrade in *Specimen Days*.

In the first entry of *Specimen Days* Whitman describes the process of assembling his text. He says he had contemplated a form and waited for the right occasion to publish his new book, but finally resolved to follow his “happy hour’s command” by “tumbling the thing together, letting hurry and crudeness tell the story better than fine work.”¹²⁰ The title also suggests Whitman’s resolution to write a partial, unfinished

¹¹⁹See Gilles Deleuze, “Preface to the English Language Edition” of *Dialogues II*, vi-viii.

¹²⁰ Whitman, *Specimen Days*, 1.

book, an experimental text that collects specimens of days, thoughts, memories, ranging from minor everyday occurrences to major historical events.¹²¹ A “specimen” naming a fragment or element that may or may not be put into a new relation, and that exists as such, not as a part of a pre-existing whole.

The “paradoxical whole” produced by gathering days not as consecutive parts in an unfolding story but precisely as “specimens” leads Deleuze to consider what concept of history Whitman might be working with (even implicitly) as he assembles his book. In addition to the numerous passages of *Specimen Days* that affirm a concept of nature itself as a wayward process, which I discussed in the previous section, Deleuze draws on Whitman’s lack of formality and his sheer confidence in undertaking his project in order to underscore a difference between history as a process of developing totalizations and Whitman’s fragmentary assemblage.

This difference also enables Deleuze to approach the aesthetic problem of organism. At first quite obliquely, Deleuze opens the essay on Whitman with an allusion to German romanticism. Deleuze defines romanticism as a way of approaching the problem of “acquir[ing] the fragment” after a whole – or the possibility of imagining a whole – has been destroyed. For Romanticism the fragment gives itself to form as recollection of a prior disintegration. Romanticism asks the question of aesthetic form in terms that imply that the reason nature and history cannot be grasped in their totality is

¹²¹ Along these lines, Mary MacAleer Balkun’s recent study, *The American Counterfeit: Authenticity and Identity in American Literature and Culture* (2006) is of particular interest. In her chapter, “Whitman’s Natural History: *Specimen Days* and the Culture of Authenticity.” Balkun connects Whitman to the “trope of the American counterfeit” and reads *Specimen Days* as a literary equivalent to the Natural History Museum (which uses “specimens” and “cases” as part of an overarching historical narrative that presents itself as “authentic”). Whitman’s well-known “counterfeits” and “schemes” (everything from his mischievous use of Emerson’s letter praising the first edition of *Leaves of Grass*, the favorable reviews of his own poetry Whitman wrote under pseudonyms, to his presentation of his texts as “spontaneous”) certainly back up such a reading, but that reading also obscures the singularity of Whitman’s literary inventiveness. It may indeed be the case that Whitman is a “con-man,” but as we will show in the following section, it is also this characteristic that makes him an artist (and not a natural historian!). In addition to this *Specimen Days* also strikes one as a particularly strange use of a term borrowed from experimental science; “specimen” also implies a unique constellation between science and literature in the nineteenth century.

that the totality has been lost. In doing so, Romanticism nostalgically preserves the concept of totality. For this way of thinking, the fragment is never thought of as autonomous, but as that which remains and recollects a prior whole, a ruin or souvenir grasped in “tragic reflection or an experience of disaster,” some event that shattered a pre-existing whole. For Romanticism, aesthetics primarily revolves around the necessity to acquire a feel for the fragment (to re-member the whole in the fragment), and in doing so *produce the fragment itself as a literary work suggesting the totality of nature and history*. The romantic concept of the fragment, Deleuze emphasizes, was born of the “innate sense of organic totality.”¹²²

In contrast to the romantic problem of the *achieved* fragment, achieved after disaster as an element of recollection, Deleuze claims that *Specimen Days* allows us to see that what is “characteristic of America is the *spontaneity* of the fragmentary.”¹²³ Deleuze’s fascination with the use of fragments in Whitman’s text, however, does not lie solely in the fact that it is completely foreign to the notion of the fragment in romanticism, but also and perhaps more interesting to Deleuze, it is the way *Specimen Days* arranges the *relations between these fragments*, the way these “specimens” are put together not in order to suggest a prior-whole, but one that “comes after the fragments and leaves them intact,

¹²²Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe have analyzed the dialectic of fragment and totality developed by the German romantics, the Schlegel’s in particular, and its inherent organicism. Detailing the ways the genre necessarily suggests completion or totalization (in either the past or some future) they develop an astute theory of the relationship between romanticism and the form of interiority implied by the fragment/ totality dialectic. Moreover, with respect to the source or agency of artistic production they assert, “the romantic Fragment conclusively confirms and installs the figure of the artist as Author and Creator.” Cf. “The fragment is the romantic genre par excellence” (40), “the ‘foundation’ that fragmentation presupposes consists precisely in the fragmentary totality in its organicity” (44), “an ideal politics [‘free and equal fellowship’]... , an *organic politics*, furnishes the model of fragmentation” (45), “in the Self all things are formed organically,” and “if in this manner the fragment signals its adherence to the order of the organic, this is first of all because the organic itself is engendered from and through the fragment, and because the organic is essentially auto-formation, or the genuine form of the subject” (49). Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, “The Fragment: The Fragmentary Exigency” in *The Literary Absolute: the Theory of Literature in German Romanticism*, (New York: SUNY Press, 1988).

¹²³ Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, 56.

making no attempt to totalize them.”¹²⁴ According to Deleuze, Whitman’s sense that “a kind of whole must be constructed,” or “tumbled together” as Whitman puts it, disturbs the fundamental (transcendent) assumptions that drive the Romanticist problem - there is no totality to begin with! There is no pre-existing organic totality (no abstract One, Whole, Subject) to be discovered, remembered or nostalgically mourned. Instead, it is “wholes” themselves that are made after the fact – a creative act always beginning in the middle – one starts with multiplicity.¹²⁵ It is for this reason that Deleuze affirms Whitman’s intuition that fine work doesn’t get one any closer to the whole story than “hurry” and “crudeness” do. *Specimen Days* tells a story of a life in loosely affiliated fragments gathered together in a rush.

Whitman gives very interesting names to many of the sections of *Specimen Days* that help us better perceive what is meant by the “spontaneity of the fragmentary.” Many “specimens” are presented as undetermined singularities: “A Connecticut Case,” “Some Specimen Days,” “A Silent Night Ramble,” “A Glimpse of War’s Hell Scenes,” “An Afternoon Scene,” etc. In connecting these singularities Whitman invents a whole series of relation somewhere between a commonplace book and a modernist novel, but what this also tells us is that this is how Whitman thought of all of the relations he entered into. These elements strike Deleuze as pertaining to the construction of a “society of comrades,” a social formation that constructs non-pre-existing relations out of fragments, singularity, specimens, making no attempt to totalize them into the form of a state.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 58.

¹²⁵ Cf. Deleuze, “Preface to the English Language Edition” *Dialogues II*, vi. Empiricists begin with “multiplicity,” instead of seeking to “discover pre-existing concepts,” they extract (and in extracting produce) new concepts.

One of the essential distinctions to be taken away from Deleuze's "Whitman" essay lies in his description of (at least) two kinds of relations or "syntheses," two ways of putting specimens or fragments together in order to give them consistency as parts of larger compositions, whether those compositions be political, artistic, or philosophical. Simplifying, one could define two ways of assembling things: one that attempts to realize or discover an organic whole (realized in the state, the subject, the work of art, universal history as a coherent, grand narrative, etc.); and an "empiricist," or even "constructivist," approach, that begins with multiplicities in order to invent non pre-existing relations, inorganic, non-totalized wholes (a democracy, a self, a bundle of specimens tied together with string, leaves of grass "fetched with full hands," an "incongruous story full of skips and jumps"). Importantly, for Deleuze, it is only the latter way of assembling relations and inventing new assemblage that possess a force, or "health," to "liberate life."¹²⁶

Deleuze can be said to use Whitman's text to subvert the romanticist's problem of the fragment and the totality, but he also uses Whitman to subvert Whitman himself in all sorts of ways. In an entry on Thomas Carlyle near the end of *Specimen Days*, "Carlyle from an American Point of View," Whitman indulges in a bit of philosophical speculation. At one point he presents a rough summary of one of the most influential philosophies of the nineteenth-century by, as he says, "recount[ing] Hegel a bit freely."¹²⁷ Deleuze seizes on this entire section, and especially one of Whitman's more extravagant claims, "in my opinion the above formulas of Hegel are an essential and crowning justification of New World democracy in the creative realms of time and

¹²⁶ "What health would be sufficient to liberate life where it is imprisoned by and within man, by and withing organisms and genera?" Deleuze, "Literature and Life," *Essays Critical and Clinical*, 3.

¹²⁷ The section should be read in its entirety. See Walt Whitman, *Specimen Days*, "Latter Thoughts and Jottings. Carlyle from an American Point of View," 254-262.

space.”¹²⁸ The camaraderie Deleuze establishes with Whitman does not make him follow him to the letter, however, because in response to Whitman’s passionate claim that “America realizes Hegel and posits the rights of an organic totality,” Deleuze goes all the way in subverting Whitman in order to affirm the novelty of the American experiment.¹²⁹ In taking all too seriously a theory from Europe, Whitman loses sight of his own singularity.¹³⁰ Remarking on Whitman’s passion for Hegel, Deleuze humorously notes, “he’s then expressing himself like a European.” But Deleuze’s subversion of Whitman’s “justification of New World democracy” through Hegel teaches an important ethical lesson. He does not merely critique Whitman or use this statement to reveal the deeper literary and philosophical underpinnings of American imperialism (which certainly would be easy to do), but instead establishes a new relation and draws out a truly new statement, a “child, that is [Whitman’s] but nonetheless monstrous.” Deleuze writes, against Whitman’s professed Hegelianism, that “when Whitman speaks in his own manner and his own style, it turns out that a kind of whole must be constructed, a whole that is all the more paradoxical in that it only comes after the fragments and leaves them intact, making no attempt to totalize them.”¹³¹ Whitman’s claim that “America” realizes an idea of “an organic totality” misses several elements of the American experience that continuously exceed such a concept (and this excess includes *Specimen Days!*), but Deleuze does not waste time faulting Whitman for his philosophical

¹²⁸ Whitman, *Specimen Days*, “Latter Thoughts and Jottings. Carlyle from an American Point of View,” 25

¹²⁹ A great example of Deleuze’s method, described at one point as a philosophical “ass-fuck,” which entails “approaching an author from behind and giving him a child that would indeed be his but would nonetheless be monstrous.” See “I Have Nothing to Admit” trans. Janis Forman, *Semiotexte, Anti-Oedipus 2*, 3 (1977), 12. Recounted in Brian Massumi’s Translator’s Foreword to *A Thousand Plateaus*, see page x.

¹³⁰ Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, 58.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 58. In an early-unpublished lecture, Whitman claimed, “Only Hegel is fit for America – is large enough and free enough.” The grandiose remark of the young poet is well-known and at one time generated a substantial amount of critical work and no little debate. See note 11 in Erkkila; Boatright “Whitman and Hegel” (1927); and Olive Wrenchel Parsons “Whitman the Non-Hegelian” (1940).

passions, instead he affirms that it is Whitman's writing itself that subverts some of his more outrageous claims.

The so-called "rights of organic totality" proposes the whole as a "form of interiority": thought as a process of internalization in a subject, history as development or enclosure. In this way of thinking, nature and history appear as set of pre-existing forms or relations to be developed through a process of totalization. According to Deleuze, the subversiveness of Whitman's "America" is precisely in all the ways it resists – sometimes deliberately, sometimes quite unwittingly – these interiorizations and instead "offers as many meanings as there are relations with its various interlocutors: the masses, the reader, States, the Ocean." It is in this process that Whitman affirms the necessity of "establishing non-preexisting relations." Such relations anticipate processes of capitalism, but for Deleuze *Specimen Days*, while on the same line, goes in the opposite direction: it "races along a line of flight...establish[ing] relations between the most diverse aspects of the United States geography – the Mississippi, the Rockies, the Prairies – as well as its history, struggles, loves and evolution."¹³² For Deleuze, the relations Whitman establishes are not internal to a national project, but glimpsed in the processes of a writing that invents each time a new connection, a writing unleashed at the limit of language and existing relations, a sentence in touch with the outside.

Deleuze's untimeliness is above all expressed in his insistence that thought is an effort "not to rediscover the eternal law or universal, but to find the conditions under which something new is produced."¹³³ Such "conditions of creation" are, according to Deleuze, precisely what Hegelianism (and its inheritors) cannot think; in fact, *their*

¹³² Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, 58 -59.

¹³³ Deleuze, Preface to *Dialogues II*, vi.

function is to impede this thought. Deleuze uses Whitman, and *Specimen Days* specifically, to tease out this delightfully non-Hegelian idea: the whole only “comes after the fragments and leaves them intact, making no attempt to totalize them.” Whitman’s free and ecstatic lines – despite what Whitman might say in his more speculative moments – think something far more eccentric than the “rights of organic totality.”

Unlike many critics who have analyzed the containment of difference in the unity of the poet’s “self” – who, for instance, interpret a relationship between the imperialism of the “I” in *Leaves of Grass* and the production of a “coherent national identity,” – Deleuze’s “Whitman” suggests that Whitman’s “self” – “always splintered, fragmentary, and relative” – is also a sort of constructed whole, and might be read against and in opposition to concepts of a “substantial, solipsistic, totalizing” subject.¹³⁴

2.5.1 ...and...and...and...

Whitman’s use of the conjunction “and” in all of his writing, and particularly in his famous catalogues in *Leaves of Grass*, are often read as “a syntactic enactment of the principle of many and one,” and interpreted as the “underlying myth of [Whitman’s] poem.”¹³⁵ On this reading, the incorporation of the multitude into an organic whole would be Whitman’s way of enacting an “imaginary representation of real conditions,” his contribution to the American dream. But what is important to notice here is that when one interprets the dream, one reads the conjunction as the “syntactic enactment” of a *form of interiority*. The poem becomes a form of enclosure totalizing the diversity of persons, animals, objects, natural phenomenon in an organically conceived of “self.”

Deleuze’s emphasis on the function of AND to construct “relations of exteriority” enables us to read the reality and produces the exact opposite reading - *disjunctive*

¹³⁴ Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, 57.

¹³⁵ See Erkill, *Whitman Political Poet*, 94-97 for the fullest elaboration of this interpretation.

synthesis. In a brief section of Deleuze and Parnet's "On the Superiority of Anglo-American Literature" the "discovery of the 'externality of relations'" is described in the following way,

It is only the English and the American who have freed conjunctions and reflected on relations...The AND is not even a specific relation or conjunction, it is that which subtends all relations, the path of all relations, which makes relations shoot outside their terms and outside the set of their terms and outside everything which could be determined as Being, One, or Whole. Thinking with AND, instead of thinking IS: empiricism has never had another secret. Try it, it is a quite extraordinary thought, and yet it is life.¹³⁶

This reflection on the externality of relations begins in the thinking of multiplicity, the "spontaneity of the fragmentary." "A multiplicity is only in the AND" and contains the force to "send dualism off its course." Literature is not the affair of a subject or a structure; it is not a system or coherent order, but rather a multi-dimensional, vibratory stammering or stuttering without a subject, a space of passage for the convulsions of life.

Whitman's use of language, his enthusiasm for joining together people, animals, machines, events through the deployment of dashes, ellipses, and above all his abundant use of AND is better read as a "disjunctive synthesis," a way of establishing relations across difference, as a practice of transversality. Rather than the "syntactic enactment" of interiorization (subsuming vast catalogues of people, things, events) into a pre-existent "self," Whitman's "mad sentence" dismantles language as such, pushing it to its limit or outside. Deleuze invites us to think what a literary criticism attuned to this outside and these aspects might add, not to the literature of democracy, but to a becoming-democratic that must constantly be invented.

¹³⁶ Deleuze and Parnet, *Dialogues II*, 42.

3. Belief in the World: Melville's *Confidence-Man*

3.1 Melvillian Psychiatry

Specimen Days – like all of Whitman's writing – demands the reader's trust. As the previous chapter has shown, nearly every page expresses a desire to forge a bond with the reader through the act of writing. "I only seek to put you in rapport."¹ Whitman repeatedly asks for one simple, but perhaps it is the most difficult, gesture on the part of the reader: her confidence. Whitman's appeal to the readers' confidence emerges out a strong sense of the continuity between life and books. "Camerado! This is no book; Who touches this, touches a man." In this way Whitman can be said to follow the tradition of Rousseau's *Confessions*.² He invites the reader to a particular kind of pact and asks us to believe in the world and life inscribed in the book. Such "overtures" – a sort of unconditional demand for trust – have aroused many readers' critical capacities.³

Turning to Herman Melville's *The Confidence Man: His Masquerade* (1857), this chapter moves into an analysis of the problems attending these proposals for confidence in a world in which bonds of trust become synonymous with relations of exchange, and "confidence" circulates primarily as "the indispensable basis of all sorts of business transactions."⁴ With Melville's late novel, however, we also move into the *realm of fiction*.

¹ Whitman, *Specimen Days*, 292.

² Cf. Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Confessions* (1782), "le amitie, le plus saint de tous les pactes" and Philippe Lejeune's work on the "autobiographical pact," as a correlate to the social contract, but also as *distinct* from it insofar as it produces a non-legalistic, bond of equality between reader and writer at a distance from civil society. In his notebooks Whitman described *Specimen Days* as "an autobiography after its sort," and refers to both Rousseau and Montaigne as "sort 'o synonyms." See Betsy Erkkila, *Whitman the Political Poet*, 294

³ In *The American Counterfeit: Authenticity and Identity in American Literature and Culture* (2006) Balkun connects Whitman to the "trope of the American counterfeit," drawing attention to Whitman's well-known "counterfeits" and "schemes" (everything from his mischievous use of Emerson's letter praising the first edition of *Leaves of Grass*, the favorable reviews of his own poetry Whitman wrote under pseudonyms, to his presentation of his carefully edited texts as "spontaneous"). It may indeed be the case that Whitman is a "con-man," but there is no need to read him moralistically – being a counterfeiter is also precisely what makes him an artist.

⁴ Melville, *The Confidence Man*, 133.

In reading *The Confidence Man* we encounter issues that perhaps only fiction can think.⁵ Fiction enables Melville to produce an experiment in which the problems of American optimism (and perhaps more importantly, its dialectical twin: cynicism) are treated, not through an appeal for the reader's unconditional trust ("what I assume, you shall assume"), but instead through the "powers of the false." It is for this reason this chapter will argue, that Deleuze's extensive reflections on this far less optimistic nineteenth-century American writer do not lead to pessimism, but instead affirm a "belief in the world" composed in a mode Whitman rarely tried.

There is a long tradition of playing Whitman and Melville against each other, and in a sense, Deleuze's inclusion of both Whitman and Melville in *Essays Critical and Clinical* (they are in fact the only essays devoted entirely to American writers) can be read as following this tendency (D.H. Lawrence, C.L.R. James, Eduardo Galeano, to name a few).⁶ Deleuze avoids comparisons, however, reading each in their own terms and in so doing extracts figures of thought that are immanent to each writer's singular project. Nevertheless, there is a striking difference in mood that emerges between the two. We might consider this difference in terms of the clinical perspective Deleuze brings to all his analyses of literature.

Similar to what I have noted in the previous discussion of Whitman, the interest Melville holds for Deleuze stems from his sense that a writer "is not a patient but rather a physician, the physician of himself and of the world." The "irresistible and delicate health" of a writer expresses a specific capacity of literature to produce "passages of

⁵ William S. Spanos has underscored the necessity for "*reading Melville's fiction*," in contrast to "abstract" readings that "under the influence of 'theory' all too often treat the novel as if it were a philosophical treatise." While strongly influenced by Deleuze's philosophy, what follows seeks to maintain this crucial difference between philosophy and fiction, a difference Deleuze himself explicitly affirms. See William S. Spanos, *Herman Melville and the American Calling* (2006), 259-260.

⁶ See D.H. Lawrence, "Herman Melville's Typee and Omoo," "Herman Melville's Moby Dick," and "Whitman" *Studies in Classic American Literature*; C.L.R. James, "Whitman" and "Melville" *American Civilization*; Eduardo Galeano's entries for "Whitman" and "Melville" in *Memory of Fire Trilogy Part 3*.

life.”⁷ Deleuze will thus speak of a “Melvillian psychiatry,” and Melville’s characters (in this case Bartleby) as a “doctor of a sick America.”⁸ Such an approach strongly rejects interpretations that would reduce Melville’s fiction to “a formal rehearsal of nineteenth-century market place values.”⁹ Deleuze instead refers the literary procedures of Melville’s fiction and in doing so invite us to think the specific power of fiction to *invent new values*.

In his introduction to *Essays Critical and Clinical*, Daniel W. Smith writes, “Deleuze’s writings on literature are primarily linked with the problematic of life” and goes on to explicate an essential relationship maintained by Deleuze between medicine and art. What art and medicine share, for Deleuze, is a relation to the world from the perspective of a physician, a perspective that ultimately refers us to concepts of nature and life. As such, Smith notes, medicine and literature hold in common three vital activities: “*symptomatology*, or the study of signs; *etiology*, or the search for causes and *therapy*, or the development and application of a treatment.”¹⁰ Deleuze’s clinical approach forces one to consider *the uses of literature* for life.

In the previous chapter Whitman emerged as a writer primarily concerned with “the application of treatment,” prescribing “open air” as the necessary complement to becoming-democratic. But Whitman rarely enters into diagnoses of problems – or, to continue the clinical vocabulary – he does not offer a symptomatology of a specific

⁷ Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, 3.

⁸ *Ibid.* 90

⁹ Deleuze’s reading of Melville thus challenges in important ways the sort of so-called “ideology critique” of Melville that is to be found in books such as Wai-Chee Dimock, *Empire of Liberty*. For Dimock, *The Confidence Man* not only presents the “market place values” that were rapidly taking over the United States in the antebellum period, but argues that the novel is entirely “governed” by the logic of what she calls the “market economy” (188). Arguing against readings that would see the novel as a critique of these values (much less the production of new values), Dimock instead offers a highly determinist reading of the novel, finally interpreting *The Confidence Man* as doing no more than “rehearse[ing] the double logic of market individualism itself” (211). See “Personified Accounting” *Empire for Liberty*, 176-214..

¹⁰ See Daniel W. Smith, “A Life of Pure Immanence” Introduction to *Essays Critical and Clinical*, xiii-xvi.

disease. As Du Bois reminds us, an overly therapeutic approach has massive problems insofar as it often leads to simply covering over wounds. Melville's "psychiatry" names a method quite distinct from that of Whitman insofar as Melville's fiction relentlessly engages in a search for causes and a scrupulous study of signs. If Whitman prescribed a therapy for mid-nineteenth century America, it is Melville's novels (and particularly his last novel) that diagnosed the disease. But what is most striking about Deleuze's reading of Melville is not found at this level only because "Melvillian psychiatry" also pertains to the therapeutic dimension, "doctoring sick America." Deleuze distills from Melville, despite the apparent pessimism of his last novel, a powerful medicine: "not belief in another world, but confidence in this one."¹¹

Here it should be emphasized that Deleuze does not come to Melville haphazardly. While his essay on Melville is relatively short, it is clearly the product of an extensive knowledge of Melville and it is not the only place that Deleuze discusses Melville. The name Herman Melville appears in several of Deleuze's books. There is, for instance, an important discussion in *A Thousand Plateaus* of *Moby Dick* (1851) as "one of the greatest masterpieces of becoming," where Captain Ahab is described as a figure of the "anomalous," a sort of intense machine unleashing affects on the edge or line between a character and a multiplicity, a character referred to as "neither an individual nor a species."¹² Melville also appears in an important section in *What is Philosophy?* linked to "a politics of experimentation."¹³ Informed by these instances of conjunction

¹¹ Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, 87.

¹² For the extended discussion of *Moby Dick*, see "Becoming-Intense, Becoming-Animal, Becoming-Imperceptible" in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980) pages 186-189. Deleuze and Guattari's approach to Melville in *A Thousand Plateaus* is ambivalent, Melville's novel is seen as both the production of these "anomalous" affects and also referred to as hopelessly falling back into Oedipal arrangements: "Is it always your daddy and mommy that you meet when you travel, even as far away as the South Seas, like Melville?"¹² Again, the approach is largely influenced by D.H. Lawrence's *Studies*.

¹³ Cf. Deleuze and Parnet, *Dialogues II*, 27-31 and Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 109.

between Melville and Deleuze and Guattari's collaborations, in what follows I will be primarily concerned with the use of Melville in Deleuze's writing without Guattari; namely, *Cinema II* and *Essays Critical and Clinical*.

The long essay, "Bartleby, or the Formula," attests to a wide-ranging study of nearly all of Melville's writings (from *Moby Dick*, to *Pierre*, to the short stories, and most important for our own analysis, Melville's most bewildering novel *The Confidence Man*). Similar to the essay on Whitman, "Bartleby, or the Formula" unfolds a series of striking insights that minoritize a major writer whose work (thanks to the ideological work of Cold War Americanists) has in many contexts become almost synonymous with the established canon of American literature.¹⁴ In a similar operation to that of the "Whitman" essay, in introductory essay of *Critical and Clinical* Deleuze links Melville's "Hawthorne and his Mosses" to a notion of "minor literature." In that essay Melville emerges as a precursor of Kafka insofar as both "present literature as the collective enunciation of a minor people, or peoples, who find their expression only in and through the writer."¹⁵

In addition to *Essays Critical and Clinical* Melville comes up in another striking comparison made in *Cinema II*, a comparison that orients our own experiment in this chapter. In an important passage in that text Deleuze links Melville's name to another great nineteenth-century symptomologist: Friedrich Nietzsche. Deleuze writes, "In

¹⁴ For recent critiques of the function of Melville, and most specifically *Moby Dick*, in Cold War American Studies discourse see, Donald Pease "Moby Dick and the Cold War" in *Rethinking the American Renaissance*, and William Spanos, *The Errant Art of Moby Dick: The Canon, the Cold War, and the struggle for American Studies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995). Wei-chee Dimock's claim that Melville's *The Confidence Man* "really does no more than rehearse the double logic of market individualism itself." (*Empire for Liberty*, 211). Such approaches reduce literature to a set of determinations that are external to writing, it makes literature nothing more than the register of social contradictions and cannot think writing as a practice that exceeds or actively resists these determinations. William V. Spanos' recent book *Herman Melville and the American Calling* (2006) would be a striking exception insofar as it engages rather profoundly with Deleuze's writing on Melville, though Spanos seems less concerned with the place of American literature in all of Deleuze's philosophy or the effect Melville has on Deleuze

¹⁵ Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, 4.

literature and philosophy, the two greatest texts to have developed such chains of forgers or such series of powers are the last book of *Zarathustra*, in Nietzsche, and Melville's novel, *The Confidence Man*.¹⁶ In both cases what is at stake are the specific forces of fiction as a counter-attack to nihilism – the “powers of the false” as affirmation of the world as becoming.

A careful analysis of Deleuze's remarks on Melville, however, not only presents us with a radically new reading of Melville's texts, but also provides a distinctive passage into a set of problems the encounter with nineteenth-century American literature opens up within Deleuze's philosophical project. In the simplest terms Melville enables Deleuze to pose the question of the conditions of belief in *this* world? Again, it is not only a matter of what Deleuze does for Melville, but also what Melville does for Deleuze. A profound alliance between Melville's literary project in the middle of the nineteenth century and Deleuze's philosophical project at the end of the twentieth, lies in posing this question in the face of a world that often seems well beyond belief. Such an affinity may well explain Deleuze's life-long interest in Melville.

3.2 The Age of Capital

The question of democracy appears very differently in Melville than it does in Whitman. By the time Melville wrote *The Confidence Man* (1857), his enthusiasm for the democratic experiment had all but vanished in the face of the increasing subsumption of all affective bonds and values to relations of capitalist exchange. In *Moby Dick*, a still believing Melville writes,

But this august dignity I treat of, is not the dignity of king and nobles, but that abounding dignity which has no robed investiture. Thou shalt see it shining in the arm that wields a pick or dives a spike; that democratic dignity which, on all hands, radiates without end from God: Himself! The

¹⁶ Deleuze, *Cinema II*, 134. .

great God absolute! The center and circumference of all democracy. His omnipresence, or divine equality!¹⁷

No such passage occurs in *The Confidence Man*. In contrast to Melville's often moving paeans to democracy in his earlier novels, *The Confidence Man* would seem to make a final, deeply negative pronouncement on the "society of comrades." The "series of forgers" appearing and disappearing through a succession of bewildering con-games primarily demonstrates the impossibility of establishing bonds external to the reduction of all relations to the general equivalence of the money-form of value. In symptomological terms it is easy to say that Melville diagnosed the problem of realizing universal equality in very similar terms to Deleuze and Guattari, who write, "If there is no universal democratic State, despite German philosophy's dream of foundation, it is because the market is the only thing that is universal in capitalism."¹⁸ But perhaps something further follows from this masquerade.

In his incomparable study *Modernity at Sea*, Cesare Casarino posits the nineteenth-century sea narrative as emerging in the *interference* between "two sets of experiments." Casarino reads Melville's writing between the given "forms of representation of modernity" and those "conceptual-affective and conceptual perspective constellations that resisted modernity."¹⁹ This reading, I think, performs a similar operation to what was described in chapter one with respect to the "untimely." Reading literature as a heterotopian space of writing in which "a new historical era" becomes a "problem for thought," Casarino's general approach adds a crucial dimension to our study of Deleuze's persistent interest in the literature of the American nineteenth

¹⁷ Herman Melville, *Moby Dick* (New York: Norton, 2002), 103.

¹⁸ Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 106.

¹⁹ See "Philopoiesis: A Theoretico-Methodological Preface" in *Modernity at Sea: Melville, Marx, Conrad in Crisis*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), xiii-xli.

century, and Whitman and Melville in particular. Casarino enables a reading of Melville as “the writing of the other limit” of capital, a writing that is “the presentation of the unrepresentability of the desire of communism.”²⁰

For Casarino, the reconfiguration of the capitalist mode of production (from mercantile to industrial capitalism) in the 1840s and 50s gave way to an intensified “crisis of modernity” – that incessant crisis of modernity understood to express the contradiction between the development of the forces of production and the ultimately capitalist relations of production. For Casarino this contradiction is not only *unthinkable for capital* (it is in fact its ever foreclosed limit pushed back and infinitely deferred), but it is also *unthinkable for thought*. It is precisely here, in this “non-thought” of philosophy, that literature makes a singular contribution because it produces affects in this space. It is also here that Deleuze’s concept of literature as mapping a “line of flight,” rather than embedding a contradiction, becomes most crucial.

Deleuze and Guattari’s “schizoanalysis” of capitalism departs from more traditional Marxist theory in defining a society “not by its contradictions, but by its lines of flight.”²¹ This perspective has several consequences for understanding not only Deleuze’s *concept* of literature, but far more importantly for this analysis, for understanding the relationship between that concept and the mechanisms of capitalist production. For Deleuze, writing is not “in the last instance” determined by historical conditions and therefore cannot be read against the persistent contradiction between relations and mode of production. Writing, for Deleuze, actively produces a space in which the real threshold of capitalism is not only approached, but effectively crossed. This outside of capital is what Casarino calls “the other limit.” It is in fact, according to

²⁰ *Modernity at Sea*, 183.

²¹ See the interview with Antonio Negri, “Control and Becoming,” in *Negotiations*, 169-182.

Deleuze and Guattari, that writing as “absolute deterritorialization” produces a “new land,” a line mapping a new earth. Unlike dominant modes of discourse and communication (which one might add, are determined by the capitalist mode of production and serve its ends), literature is understood as a deterritorialization of language as such, a “creative act,” a process of becoming that actively (that is, constructively) “escapes” determinations by a historical mode of production.²²

For these reasons it is perhaps useful to first approach Deleuze’s encounter with Melville not so much through Marxist categories of crisis or contradiction, but by formulating the mechanisms by which the *value of life* becomes a problem in the age of capital. On one hand, the nineteenth-century will give way to experimental sciences like biology that seek to establish a set of rational principles governing life; on the other hand, the nineteenth century will see the accelerated “capture” of life (of living-labor) by the calculus of the money-form of value. That said, one can isolate two related historical processes in this period that call into question all pre-existing “truths,” which might be characterized, in addition to a crisis of modernity, as a crisis of confidence, or in Nietzschean vein, *a crisis of all pre-existing values*. The question then becomes: how does literature enable us to think the contradictions of modernity without positing a utopian solution or falling into nihilism?

For Melville, the crisis of value presented itself as first and foremost a theological crisis: the rapid secularization of both public and private life, the loss of faith in traditional theological explanations, the infamous “death of god,” all abolish the ground of faith and the security of a transcendent guarantor of truth or justice. We know from Nathaniel Hawthorne that the problem of belief had gotten hold of Melville at the time he was writing *The Confidence Man* in the mid-1850 and that while Walt Whitman was

²²This concept is elaborated further in the discussion of George Jackson in Chapter Four.

affirming “I believe in you my soul...loaf with me on the grass,” Melville was facing the unbearable decision “to be annihilated.”²³ A second process (which may well be the condition of the first) has to do with the emergence and proliferation of the specifically capitalist form of value (i.e. money as the hegemonic form of value, value in the form of general equivalence and exchangeability), which sweeps away all pre-existing relations and transcendent values for its own, and establishes a regime of immanence in which the basic distinction between being (essence) and seeming (appearance) is no longer guaranteed by a transcendent principle of judgment. To the extent that the rapid modernization of the U.S. in the latter half of the nineteenth-century undermined traditional beliefs and authorities it is in more ways than one a “world without mythic fathers,” a world in which no “genuine coin” will be found.²⁴ Identities are no longer grounded in the bedrock of reason, nations cannot be legitimated by the rational unfolding of history or an ancient bond to the land. The claims of the sons are delinked from those of the fathers; everything proliferates without foundation or guarantee. *All that is solid melts into air...*

3.3 (Something further may follow of this masquerade...)

3.3.1 Against Interpretation

Melville’s last published novel, *The Confidence Man* (1857), stages such a world on board the steamship *Fidèle* ; it is a world “built around characters who are made fools or

²³ “Melville, as he always does, began to reason of Providence and futurity, and of everything that lies beyond human ken, and informed me that he had “pretty much made up his mind to be annihilated; but still he does not seem to rest in that anticipation, and, I think, will never rest until he gets hold of a definite belief.” The text is well known. Quoted in Charles Olson, *Call Me Ishmael*, 91.

²⁴ In *Subversive Genealogy*, Michael Rogin puts this quite succinctly in relation to *The Confidence Man*, ““Melville abandoned stone monuments, walls, and mountains in CM. He imagined for the first and last time, a world without the mythic fathers. The *Fidèle* was no oceangoing whaler, pirate ship, or man-of-war. It was a riverboat steamer, exclusively under the sway of the marketplace masquerade,” 236.

knaves by money.”²⁵ The ship’s name ironically recalls the virtue of “faith,” while the action unfolds, fittingly, on April Fools Day. As the steamer makes its way down the Mississippi River, a “variety of characters appear” who, one after another, call into question the authenticity of their identities, the veracity of the stories they narrate, and who all, to varying degrees, become involved in relations of exchange. The novel is usually read as an allegory, in which a single character (the devil) transforms himself into a series of imposters primarily motivated by greed.²⁶ But such an approach has the unfortunate consequence of restoring an all too coherent narrative as though the novel, despite appearances, nevertheless unfolded a rationally organized structure “behind” the proliferation of characters. Such readings distract us from the actual operations in play in the text. More importantly, allegorical interpretations have the effect of displacing the very real problem the system of values implied by the money-form unleashes, both for literature and for the social body as such, onto a recognizable “evil” character who simply slips on successive disguises.

The literary procedure Melville invents to sustain such a proliferating text as a single work of art – a singular experiment in fiction – demands one refuse the temptation to approach the novel allegorically. To think that behind the series of supposed disguises (a mute in cream-colors, Black Guinea, the man with the weed, the man in gray, the man in the traveling-cap, the Black Rapids Coal Agent, the herb-doctor, the man from the Philosophical Intelligence Office, and finally the cosmopolitan) one

²⁵ F.O. Matthiessen, *American Renaissance*, 401.

²⁶ Hershel Parker, “The Confidence Man’s Masquerade,” and the excessive interpretive footnotes which overdetermine the reading in the Norton Critical Edition are a case in point. Even William Spanos, whose much more complicated reading of the novel remains invaluable, still assumes “Melville derives the Confidence-Man from the figure of Satan in the Book of Job” (172). What is perhaps more interesting, is not the figure of Satan, but the figure of the *diabolical* (which tears identities apart) and could be understood as precisely a figure of the “powers of the false” detached from any grounding agency or subject.

could identify some ultimate “confidence man” misses the point and imposes a interpretation on the novel that is quite at odds with its far more interesting operations.

Despite the fact that the novel would seem to demand from us precisely such an interpretive gesture (indeed, it could well be argued that one of the designs of the novel is precisely to seduce the reader into such an approach, drawing her into a kind of complicity with the suspicious or paranoid readings of character we encounter on every page), the issues raised by the novel cannot be contained by a single hermeneutic, nor can they be adequately approached by focusing on the *moral* status of a character. The multiplicity presented by the novel forces us to get out of this moral paradigm and demands a reading of, each in their singularity, the quality of relations established in specific encounters. One gets at Melville’s fiction by paying attention to the specific arrangements the text sets up between characters, and ultimately between the act of reading and writing itself. Allegorical approaches avoid what is finally a situation of absolute undecidability – the immanence of being and seeming – that the novel stages and into which every reader is pitilessly thrown. We miss the point if we fall into the trap of trying to tease out a moral or to resolve the various positions presented in the novel by formulating a final interpretation. Melville asks us to take seriously the problem that, “many men have many minds,” no final interpretation will resolve this problem.

Deleuze notes the extreme ambiguity every reader of the *Confidence Man* has surely encountered. He writes, “are these false brother’s sent by a diabolical father to restore his power over *overly credulous* Americans? But the novel is so complex one could just as easily say the opposite: this long procession of con-men would be a comic version

of authentic brother, such as *overly suspicious* Americans see them."²⁷ This undecidability, between credulity and suspicion is part of the design. Melville produces a rigorous experiment in which it would be impossible to answer definitively Deleuze's question or come to an ultimate meaning of the story because *there simply isn't just one story*. Melville's "psychiatry" demands a "schizophrenic procedure." It is, I think, precisely an experiment pitched against both neurotic optimism and paranoia, a demand for a reading practice that is neither credulous nor suspicious – a Melvillian schizoanalysis that hurls a new kind of writing against "psychological novelists."²⁸ *The Confidence Man's* procedure demands a different kind of thinking – a reading as defiantly experimental as the novel itself.²⁹

Reading *Confidence Man* with and alongside Deleuze enables us to extract a common problem that each comes to pose in his own way, and each for his own age: how can one come to a concept of "belief" in a world that has abolished the grounds of all belief? How can the forces of creation be mobilized against the intolerable reality of modern capitalism? What new values might challenge the "axioms" of capitalism and affirm the world despite the "truths" of nihilism?³⁰

²⁷ Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, 89.

²⁸ Melville, *The Confidence Man*, 76.

²⁹ The allegorical approach to the novel has largely been determined by questions initially set up by the "myth and symbol" school, which were influenced in no small way psychological and psychoanalytic theoretical frameworks. Give the persistence of this approach perhaps a crucial difference can already be observed between F.O. Matthiessen and Charles Olson. Consider Matthiessen reading that in Melville "two contrasting methods of reporting and of allegory were fused through his discovery of what could be achieved by the symbol...*But by the time of the Confidence Man the split between these two tendencies had carried him virtually to diagrammatic abstraction.*" (286, my emphasis) and Charles Olson's originality in diverging from this entire framework, emphasizing not "diagrammatic abstraction," but instead "black art" and *the powers of the diabolic* in Melville – the diabolic as a category, not only distinct and opposed to the function of the symbol, but naming a principle of original creation. Olson's insights into Melville's more diabolic procedures remains extremely suggestive for understand the relation between a "diabolic" mode of fiction and the "infernal machine" (Marx) of capitalism.

³⁰ This shared problematic would also be what links Nietzsche, Melville, and Deleuze in a sort of constellation – the diagnosis of nihilism *but also* the affirmation of art as a way out, a higher "power of the false."

The fictitious world of Melville's novel is staged on a Mississippi steamship. Like most of Melville's writing the "ship" functions as a microcosm of society, and also links Melville's texts to a long tradition of "sea narratives" and here in particular the figure of the "ship of fools." Cesare Casarino has noted how the appearance of the steamship in Melville's fiction might be read as the "direct herald" of "an increasingly techno-industrial future."³¹ He demonstrates the concrete links between the emergence of industrial capitalism and the crisis of belief on every level (political, economic, theological, psychological) that emerges in nineteenth-century America. And *The Confidence Man*, according to this reading, is of Melville's novels, the work "most directly concerned with the substitutability of identity and the shattering of the self."³² The primary question the novel puts before us would thus be: *how can we read this novel without restoring identity? What reading protocols are demanded to avoid positing a transcendent guarantee or a belief in some other world beyond the one presented in the text?* And, avoiding these, how can the encounter with multiplicity the novel presents as microcosm of society give way to something more than cynical despair?

Against the grain of most interpretations of *The Confidence Man* I do not think it is written out of a nihilistic perspective: it is no more the work of a misanthrope than it is of a naïve philanthrope. Instead, *The Confidence Man* painstakingly constructs a real break from this deeply persistent dialectic of American exceptionalism – the mutually reinforcing relation between an unreflected American "optimism" and its cynical opposite. William V. Spanos has described this logic well, when in his reading of the sequence on the "Metaphysics of Indian Hating" he states, in rather clinical terms, that

³¹ See Casarino, *Modernity at Sea*, p 2-4.

³² Casarino, *Modernity at Sea*, 164.

“misanthropy is endemic to the American philosophy of optimism.”³³ He convincingly points to Melville’s use of parody as a mechanism that both presents this dialectic and subverts it. Drawing on Michel Foucault’s reading of Nietzsche, “Nietzsche, History, Genealogy,” Spanos highlights the function of parody in *The Confidence Man* in subverting the typically American optimism that was becoming increasingly prevalent in the mid-nineteenth century. Quoting Foucault (quoting Nietzsche), Spanos reads Melville’s masquerade as genealogy:

The new historian, the genealogist, will know what to make of this masquerade. He will not be too serious to enjoy it; on the contrary, he will push the masquerade to its limits and prepare the great carnival of time where masks are constantly reappearing... ‘Perhaps, we can discover a realm where originality is again possible as parodists of history and buffoons of God.’³⁴

I would add to this argument, following Deleuze, that the term that breaks free of the above mentioned mutually enforcing dialectic, would be precisely “confidence.” I think this term, which should not be confused with the parody of the “genial misanthrope” Melville prophesies, opens the possibility of thinking a “confidence” radically distinct from optimism – a “belief in the world” having nothing to do with passive acceptance or credulity, but instead with an anti-dialectical affirmation of the “powers of the false.”

Optimism cannot affirm a “belief in the world” because it always refers us to a belief in *another* world (a world to come, a transcendent “goodness” or “justice”). More mundanely, optimism demands faith in existing authorities and the acceptance of the

³³ See William V. Spanos, “Cavilers and Con Men” in *Herman Melville and the American Calling*. “Melville understands the *Fidèle* as the American Ship of State and the folly of its passengers as the folly of the collective American national identity... the action of the novel [is] intended to foreground the entire history of America, or rather, of the formation of the optimistic American national identity, from the Puritans divinely ordained exceptionalist “errand”...to the rise of capitalism; a history that like Weber’s analysis of Western modernity, point not simply to the continuity of the Puritan ethic and the predatory Spirit of capitalism, but also to the accommodational and reductive philosophy of optimism that informs them,” 179.

³⁴ Foucault underscores the point that Nietzsche makes with respect to monumental history, in being “devoted to veneration, [it] bars access to *the actual intensities and creations of life*.” (Foucault, quoted in Spanos 177-78).

status quo (what Spanos aptly names with his phrase the “American calling”). It is this deep logic of American optimism that underwrites exceptionalist policies ranging from Manifest Destiny to pre-emptive national security; all guaranteed by an idealist outlook grounded in the perfectibility of man. An optimism that the U.S. continually uses to legitimate its world-historical mission. Optimism in this sense requires a transcendent principle of identity and must find its ground in an unshakeable belief in a religious or metaphysical *system of laws*. It is indeed the “ordained imperative of optimism” that supports American exceptionalism, including its investments in the so-called “free market” – the market we are told will “take care of itself” insofar as it is governed by rational laws and self-regulating. *Confidence*, by contrast, while it may indeed be the “basis of all sorts of business transactions,” is not founded on any transcendent principle nor is it guaranteed by any law. More importantly, it is not exhausted in relations of exchange. Because confidence also names the conditions of producing alternative social relations. It does not primarily refer to an object, other, or transcendent god, but to a disposition or comportment that orients a practice in this world without transcendent guarantee or goal. Which is to say, confidence is the condition of inventing non-pre-existing relations: it is the motor of creation. The confidence Melville’s novel asks us to think is better understood as an ethic (as opposed to a moral), a disposition enabling the invention of new values pitched against the money form. Such would be the name for a belief driving the writing itself.

Melville’s *Confidence Man* stages the extreme conditions of its own creation – the lack of guarantee or values beyond the money-form that is the situation of writing in the mid-nineteenth century – and in doing so the novel produces a sort of “symptomatology” of the crisis of value; a diagnosis of the loss of belief in the world. It presents us with a series of fictional characters, who either ask for confidence or have

confidence to give. But it does more than that. It also suggests to us a “disposition ungovernably bacchanalian.”³⁵ It is not finally in the character of the cosmopolitan, as we might expect, that Melville contributes to our “belief in the world,” it is instead only in the act of writing itself that this absolute, *ungovernable* belief is expressed.

One need not seek to discover a meaning in Melville’s text, but rather to demonstrate how a deceptively simple question – what can fiction do? – both emerges out of a real crisis of values and, as a necessity, provides the conditions for inventing new values. The problem is at once *historical-political*: how can the belief in democracy be extracted from a faith in the founding fathers?; *economic*: how can belief be extracted from the social investment in money as the “genuine coin”?; and finally, *theological-philosophical*: how can belief in the world be extracted from transcendence (god, fathers) without becoming a cynical acceptance of the regime of capitalist immanence (relations of exchange)?³⁶ All of these problems pose a question of the relation between belief and fiction.

The Confidence Man: His Masquerade does not revolve around a central character and does not unfold a single, consistent narrative. No Captain Ahab appears, no

³⁵ Melville, *The Confidence Man*, 167.

³⁶ Rogin’s, “Revolutionary Fathers and Confidence Men,” in *Subversive Genealogy*, goes a long way in extracting the central problem of “a world without mythic fathers” (236). Rogin argues, “there is no self under the confidence man’s disguises...self and world have dissolved into theater” (224), but Rogin ends up – due to an overemphasis on Melville’s biography – in a sort of bizarre oedipal argument in the end (“The ur-story underneath the CM is the bankruptcy, madness, and death of Allan Melville...The CM, which concerns the consequences of the absence of authority, is Melville’s novel about his father.” (249). By contrast Deleuze’s insight on the theme: “The danger of a “society without fathers” have often been pointed out, *but the only real danger is the return of the father*...The Civil War already sounded the knell...The birth of a nation, the restoration of the nation-state – and the monstrous fathers come galloping back in, while the sons without fathers start dying off again” (88). Deleuze cites Alexander Mitscherlich’s *Society without the Father* in the Melville essay as a bad, psychological interpretation of these questions. Deleuze tries to get out of the (obviously) gendered implications of affirming the revolutionary virtues of fraternity (“society of comrades” as “society of brothers”) but it’s not entirely satisfying. This is also the major disappointment of Casarino’s otherwise excellent book, his definition of communism as “love of the same,” raises some compelling questions about how women or feminism would lead one to a slightly different formulation. This is, of course, a problem inherent to Melville’s fiction and it remains an open question what lines of escape out of this highly masculine world one might invent.

resolution to the story is found at its end; we are instead left with a kind of to be continued open text. What is extraordinary about *The Confidence Man* is not so much that it unfolds a series of disguises, or even characters, but rather that it is composed of a series of divergent stories that work to expose and undermine the reduction of all relations to “business transactions” – the novel itself is a masquerade. About these multiple stories and characters we encounter in this strange and disturbing novel, one can never definitively conclude, “is he, or is he not, what he seems to be?” because the one of the key questions the novel poses is how the collapse of the difference between seeming (appearance) and being (essence) can be the condition of a new creation. Moreover, it is this very collapse that invites a relation that would not base confidence on certainty, but open a sort of radical encounter with difference, “don’t be too sure what I am.”³⁷ In this way, *The Confidence-Man* demands a different “style of thinking” from *both the reader and the writer*. Far from being satisfied by a fixed content of belief, which consists in reducing the question of belief to one of knowledge and effectively displaces ethical problems with epistemological ones, Melville’s novel affirms a process that thinks its very shape.

3.3.2 Divergent Stories and the Inconsistencies of Life

The crisis of belief repeatedly found refuge in a powerful discourse of nature in the nineteenth century. To some extent we encountered this discourse in the discussion of Whitman in the previous chapter. If one could no longer find meaning in theological discourses, if society proved too contradictory and politics had become a sham, one could still rest on the goodness of nature. In order to demonstrate the extent to which Melville’s symptomatology rejects this last great confidence in nature as some great and

³⁷ Melville, *The Confidence Man*, 225.

persistent guarantee outside the inconsistencies of experience and history, it is necessary to begin our reading of *Confidence Man* by first taking up a passage in which just such a naïve faith in nature's goodness, its fundamental rightness, is offered as *medicine* to a sick man. The Herb-Doctor, rejecting the novel thesis of disease in nature (brought up by his reluctant patient) asserts a typically romantic view of nature,

As if nature, divine nature, were aught but health; as if through nature disease is decreed! But did I not before hint of the tendency of science, that forbidden tree? Sir if despondency is yours from recalling that title, dismiss it. Trust me, nature is health; for health is good, and nature cannot work ill. As little can she work error. Get nature, and you get well. Now, I repeat, this medicine is nature's own.³⁸

The Herb-Doctor (much like present day pharmaceutical companies) peddles his "Omni-Balsamic Reinvigorator," to the passengers on the *Fidèle* promising that it will restore "happiness" and "security," that it is a "pain dissuader," and that for just "fifty cents," one can obtain the "genuine medicine." The Herb-Doctor does not just invoke nature, but expresses a fundamental belief in nature's *goodness*, its supposed independence from the corruptions of society, and from this he reasons it is impossible for nature to do harm.

The Herb-Doctor is of particular interest for this chapter since he bears such a close resemblance to the figure of the "writer as physician." He seems to recall Whitman. But really the two couldn't be more different. For the Herb-Doctor nature is not a process, but a guarantee. If we agree that nature is good, we will trust in the goodness of the medicine and buy it. In addition to positing nature as a sort of benevolent and transcendent entity existing outside the world as we know it, such a perspective assumes that a life without such a guarantee of goodness (a life that included error, pain, uncertainty) could only be understood as an anomaly or pathology opposed to the

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 87. The editors of the Norton Critical Edition, trace this idea to Dr. Jacob Bigelow's book *Nature in Disease* (1854). Here the discoveries of experimental medicine are played off the homeopathic attitude of the Herb-Doctor.

healthy, normal, functioning, goodness of life in nature. As a consequence, any such phenomena as these, being the opposite of “goodness,” appears evil. What such a perspective amounts too is a moralistic view of nature and a judgment against everything that lives in a condition of incoherence and inconsistency – but *The Confidence Man* suggests that such are the conditions of life itself.

The Herb-Doctor’s confidence in the restorative power of nature seems to confront a compelling counter-force in chapter twenty-one. Here, the reader encounters “a hard case,” the Missouri bachelor, a man without family, without people of his own, who, having “no confidence in boys, no confidence in men, no confidence in nature,” would seem to cut the figure of the absolute misanthrope. According to “Pitch,” a name the bachelor has (presumably) given himself, the “yarbs, yarbs; natur, natur” the genial herb-doctor has been peddling to some of the more naïve passengers aboard the *Fidèle* are just another version of the same naïve view of nature one finds in those poets who would

... send out the sick spirit to green pastures, like lame horses turned out unshod to the turf to renew their hoofs. A sort of yarb-doctors in their way, poets have it that for the sore hears, as for sore lungs, nature is the grand cure. But who froze to death my teamster on the prairie? And who made an idiot of Peter the Wild Boy?³⁹

Gun in hand, the Missouri bachelor speaks unflinching truths about everything from quack doctors and their herbal cures to the politics of work and the inconsistencies of abolitionists. Pitch concedes that “Nature is good Queen Bess,” but he takes no consolation in it. His staunch convictions that “truth is like a thrashing machine,” (or, reminiscent of Emily Dickinson, “like a loaded gun”) are by far some of the “strongest thoughts” in the entire novel. Far from resting on the solid foundation of the assured goodness of nature or man, truth according to Pitch is a machinic thing, assembled and

³⁹ Melville, *The Confidence Man*, 112.

radically indifferent to the reasoning of man, "its particular virtue being unguessed, unless, indeed, by indiscreet handling, it should happen to go off of itself."⁴⁰

Unlike so many of the characters gathered on the *Fidèle*, Pitch has no story to tell. He presents himself directly, speaking "from fifteen years' experience," and he's not trying to convince, persuade, or sell anybody anything.⁴¹ Pitch is a man of knowledge, a man of truth, a deeply rational creature. He is a kind of radical Cartesian who has "confidence in distrust."⁴² If Pitch stands out among the passengers of the *Fidèle* as a "hard case" it is above all because of the way he refuses the consolation of any belief whatsoever and his cold approach to the problem of truth.

The Missouri bachelor recalls other monomaniacs in Melville's fiction. But there is an important difference. His approach doesn't bar him from trying something new. Shortly after his encounter with the herb-doctor Pitch is "accosted" by a Philosophical Intelligence Office. And contrary to all the solid reasons he presents in the long dispute these two characters sustain over the course of chapter 22, Pitch surprisingly decides to try a boy again, "for the sake of purely scientific experiment."⁴³ Pitch experiments hoping to make money. His ultimate dream being to do away with messiness and unpredictability of living labor, Pitch looks for a labor he can exploit without fear of its unpredictable excesses.

Given Pitch's rejection of nature and his absolute lack of confidence in boys, the reader may at first be a little shocked by this transformation, but the exchange between Pitch and the Philosophical Intelligence Officer is not the only time in the novel where confidence is presented as an "experiment." There are in fact two more: the first appears

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 115

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 122

⁴² *Ibid.*, 113.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 133.

when the man with the weed suggests that the collegian “by way of experiment, simply have confidence in me” and finally (and most importantly), near the end of the novel, when the cosmopolitan – who *has* confidence – proposes to the ship’s barber that he try an “experiment in trusting men.”⁴⁴ Regardless of how they disrupt our first impressions of these characters, in spite of the success or flawed nature of the premises on which they rest, there is a profound consistency in presenting confidence as experiment. While there are important differences to be drawn out between these experiments, it is precisely in these differences that the novelty of *The Confidence Man* is expressed. In the midst of these inconsistent personalities, their divergent stories and distracted, unreliable narrators, these brief leaps of faith signal an opening to something unpredictable. In the case of Pitch the industrialist, who *gives* confidence and decides to try an experiment with child-labor in the hope it will be profitable, in the case of the man-with-the-weed who *asks* for confidence (specifically “confidence in me”) hoping to persuade his interlocutor to invest in him, and finally the cosmopolitan, who’s got his own, who “loves mankind” and invites others to an unconditional “experiment of trusting men.”⁴⁵

Confidence names an experimental relation to the world, but getting at the meaning of these various decisions to experiment is not nearly as important as becoming aware of the fact that the novel repeatedly presents unpredictable transformations, whatever their significance. In fact, it is only these unpredictable transformations and inconsistencies of character that the novel finally affirms. These events produced by the novel have strange effects in which not only the character undergoes a transformation, *but the reader too*. The reader repeatedly experiences the bewildering effect of something

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 36; 229.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 233.

unanticipated by the development of a character or the unfolding of a psychologically coherent narrative taking place; multiple scenes in which an un-called for “event” presents one with a “life unfettered.” Living characters would, by necessity, have to be created as radically inconsistent, incalculable and unpredictable. In inventing such characters Melville continuously disturbs our expectations of what a novel should be.⁴⁶ These effects are what lead Deleuze to define as the “non-rational logic” in play in Melville’s writing, an operation that, for both Deleuze and Melville, would be synonymous with the logic of life itself.

In the first appendix of *Logic of Sense*, “The Simulacrum and Ancient Philosophy” Deleuze sketches out this sort of play as the precise situation of the work of art as experimentation. The force of the “modern work of art” is to be found in those rare occasions when the conditions of experience in general become conditions of real experience. Writing enters into this experimentation (what Deleuze will later call becoming, “to write is to become”) when it takes up not the problem of possible experience (imagination), but *real experience* (life). According to Deleuze, such a thought contains all the coordinates of the “reversal of Platonism” and aesthetic theory that follows from it.⁴⁷

Art has always been disturbing to Platonism, obsessed as it is with discovering the faithful copy, the genuine heir, the legitimate son, and aesthetic theory has also tended to displace the “powers of the false” by referring art to the realm of the imaginary (copies or representations of the world). But what Deleuze is talking about is something different – *art as real* insofar as acts of creation are not representation but real forces in the world. The affirmation of these powers asserts the rights of the simulacra

⁴⁶ Spanos describes *The Confidence Man* as the “first post-modern novel.”

⁴⁷ Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, 260.

against the father's "unfounded pretention."⁴⁸ Scandal of Platonism, the simulacrum unleashes a "power of the false" that "establishes a world of nomadic distributions and crowned anarchies."⁴⁹ Not traceable to any origin, simulacra are originals in and for themselves (conditions of real experience); a creation without Creator.

In that same text, and of particular interest for reading *Confidence Man*, Deleuze discusses those "literary procedures that permit several stories to be told at once" such that each produces a "distinct landscape" for itself corresponds to each point of view. Out of this multiplicity or unformed chaos emerges a "power of affirmation, the power to affirm all the heterogeneous series."⁵⁰ There are of course countless examples to be found of such procedures for telling several stories at once in many literary texts: texts like *The Ship of Fools*, *The Canterbury Tales*, or *Arabian Nights*, all unfold dialogic, carnivalesque texts that proliferate multiple stories and eccentric characters, but what is unique about Melville with respect to these earlier models is that *Confidence Man* provides no coherent frame for the divergent stories. What's more, the philosophical reflections on fiction that appear, often rather abruptly, in the interpolated chapters do not provide clarity, but are themselves the opening of yet another divergence, they function to dis-orient the reader even further. Unlike the eighteenth-century British novel, which is full of such interventions, these chapters do not assert authorial control, but instead produce "real breaks," eccentric passages that do not establish a coherent "meta-narrative" and in no way resolve the complexities of character or the multiplicity of stories.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 262.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 263.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 260.

The first indication that the novel will not unfold a coherent narrative, but instead take the “forking path of divergent stories” (Deleuze) is no doubt to be found in the set of unattributed remarks that open the second chapter, “Showing that Many Men Have Many Minds.” Unlike the explosive staging of the multiple voices of the crew in Chapter 40 “Midnight, Forecastle” of *Moby Dick* which this passage brings to mind, this chapter presents *a series of utterances detached completely from any determinable speaker*. Fragments of speech unhinged from speakers - *language as a real multiplicity*. This dismantling of a speaker from an utterance will be the condition of a procedure that shapes the entire novel, a machinic procedure in which an inorganic life breaks through language itself.

In an exchange that takes place in chapter 13 between the “man with the traveling cap” and the “country merchant” discussing an “unfortunate man’s story” one stumbles upon on a radical thesis: “the common occurrences of life could never, in the nature of things, steadily look one way and tell one story.”⁵¹ Quickly rejected by both men in favor of a “true light” (evidently not found in the “nature of things”) this thesis asserts a problem for the entire novel, it not only disrupts any possibility of interpretation, but poses a practical question at the level of writing itself. It is no overstatement to say that unlike that of the herb-doctor, the nature invoked here would best be conceived in terms of a rhizome insofar as it consists of divergent paths and functions according to a non-rational logic. The proliferating shape the novel takes has everything to do with an attempt to get at the “nature of things” understood in this way, to reach the conditions in which writing becomes infused with an inconsistent, at times incoherent, and above all comic multiplicity.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 71.

The allegorical interpretation will never approach the “nature of things” in this way or raise the question of conditions of real experience because in discovering a narrator “behind” the story (a “devil behind the mask,” a doer behind the deed), it subjects the story to a pre-existing principle, as if finally things could look one way and tell one story. This assumption always reduces to a question of whether or not a narrative can be trusted – the reader must judge: is what this man is saying true? does it derive from an appearance? an error? a lie? Such a “style of thinking” forecloses more radical possibilities, questions that emerge if one takes seriously the idea that “the common occurrences of life could never...tell one story.” The logic of referring a discourse to a subject of enunciation standing outside that discourse makes it impossible to think another great problem posed by the novel: how is it that a “story would seem to make its narrator”?⁵²

The Confidence Man presents a series of situations in which different beliefs and different experience (usually the exchange of money, but not always) become actualized. But far from undermining belief, the literary procedure described above, has the capacity not only to affirm belief, but also to evaluate the forces each belief (each character, each experience) is able to compose, to approach the question of the conditions in a “belief” is produced.

For these reasons it is strictly impossible to recount the plot of the novel (there isn’t just one plot), but one can recall some of the stories in more detail to see how this procedure works. Early in the novel the man with weed says to the country merchant, “I will tell you my story,” but instead of pursuing the narrative one would expect to unfold after such a statement, the text instead records *the effect of the story on the country*

⁵² *Ibid.*, 208.

merchant. We are presented not with a story, but with the *interest* a listener takes in a story, an interest that is registered in the increasingly large bills the merchant prepares to give to the storyteller.

At every disclosure, the hearer's commiseration increased. No sentimental pity. As the story went on, he drew from his wallet a bank note, but after a while, at some still more unhappy revelation, changed it for another, probably of a somewhat larger amount; which when the story was concluded, with an air studiously declamatory of almsgiving, he put into the stranger's hands; who, on his side, with an air studiously declamatory of alms-taking, put it into his pocket.⁵³

What this first (untold) story presents to the reader is not at all the meaning of a story. At this point we have no idea what happened to the "unfortunate man" or what value besides a monetary one his experience or history might have (either for him or the man to whom he relates the story). Instead, in this first iteration of the story the reader is asked only to consider *the effects of the story, its value in purely monetary terms*. It is not the truth or counsel (Benjamin) one may gain from a storyteller that matters here, but only the bank notes. Extracted from its content, *what* the man with the weed told the country merchant to illicit his interest, his commiseration, his bills, is of absolutely no concern; what matters is *the fact that it paid*, and as Melville was intensely aware, not all stories pay.⁵⁴

The story then appears to be re-told by the man with the wooden-leg to prove he wasn't laughing at the young clergyman or the man in gray, but instead laughing about "a story [he] happened to call to mind." This story strangely resembles what will come to be called the "story of the unfortunate man," but like the previous (non) story it is not given directly. It is at this point that the stories begin to lose their threads, their connections to an origin. Unlike the original exchange that took place between the man

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁵⁴ See Hershel Parker's "Damned by Dollars," and Michael Rogin's *Subversive Genealogy*, etc.

with the weed (i.e. the “unfortunate man”) and the country merchant (an original telling that, *while never given*, we presume to have been a first-person account of an experience), the second telling is both a retelling and a revision. The reader is presented with a softened version of a story that was actually recounted by one who, it is strongly suggested, had little sympathy for the unfortunate man (indeed the effect it had on him was comic). But instead of following “his porcupine way, and with sarcastic details, unpleasant to repeat” the reader is given the “story of the unfortunate man” (now the Frenchman of New Orleans) and his unfaithful wife in censored “good natured version.”⁵⁵

In addition to raising the question of censorship, editorial interventions, and the various way a story is made palatable to the public (themes that are repeated in the end of the novel, from the Story of the China Astor to the Apocrypha) the opening chapters of the novel present a sort of splitting in narration itself.⁵⁶ As though this weren’t already more than enough to get the point, the good country merchant (now known as Mr. Roberts) finally recounts the story he heard of the unfortunate man (the absent story of chapter 4), but he does not tell it himself; instead the impersonal (but by no means omniscient) narrator “ventures to tell it in other words than his, though not to any other effect.”⁵⁷ It is not until Chapter 12 that the reader is given the story (presumably in full) but not without (once again) putting a question in the reader’s mind with respect to the

⁵⁵ Melville, *The Confidence Man*, 65.

⁵⁶ Another example of this procedure of splitting and breaking off narratives and narrative voices is given in the next chapter. The man in the gray suit begins to give “a little history of our asylum,” and then,

at an interesting point of the narration, and at the moment when, with much curiosity, indeed, urgency, the narrator was being particularly questioned upon that point, he was, as it happened, altogether diverted both from it and his story by just then catching sight of a gentleman who had been standing in sight from the beginning, but, until now, as it seemed, without being observed by him. *The Confidence Man*, 43.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 66.

character about whom it is told. The chapter, we recall, comes under the heading, "The story of the unfortunate man, from which it may be gathered whether or no has been justly so entitled."

A dizzying proliferation of stories (all revolving around the telling of another story), by chapter 13 we are at some remove from whatever genuine misfortune such a man may (or may not) have befallen this poor man. Most readers by now will have lost interest in *what happened* and it is exactly at this point that the *disposition of the unfortunate man with the weed* that is brought into question. The man with the traveling-cap: "did he despond or have confidence?"⁵⁸

Following the discussion of this question the consistency of a different character – the country merchant – cracks wide open. The country merchant, who has been presented up to this point as a man of confidence, a good man, a trusting man, utters these words,

"Ah," he cried, pushing his glass from him, "ah, wine is good, and confidence is good; but can wine or confidence percolate down through all the stony strata of hard considerations and drop warmly and ruddily into the cold cave of truth? Truth will not be comforted. Led by dear charity, lured by sweet hope, fond fancy essays this feat; but in vain; mere dreams and ideals, they explode in your hand, leaving naught but the scorching behind!"⁵⁹

The merchant's outburst is described in loaded terms: a "black brightening." Although couched in a somewhat comic scene, in Melville such terms often designate some "terrifically true" but unbearable insight. The country merchant's "black brightening" indicates a sort of conversion, an event of thought or transformation. *Something crucial has happened to the good country merchant – he has lost his optimism.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 70.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 71.

What is important about this event is not only located in the nihilistic meaning to be drawn out of the merchant's brief speech (the fact that it presents a loss of confidence), but also that the merchant's "black brightening" signals a kind of reversal in Melville's own procedure, insofar as it reverses the tragic function of "dark characters" he had famously analyzed in Shakespeare's plays. One might here recall the often repeated lines from "Hawthorne and His Mosses" where Melville notes, Shakespeare "craftily says, or sometimes insinuates the things, which we feel to be so terrifically true, *that it were all but madness for any good man, in his own proper character, to utter, or even hint of them.*"⁶⁰ The "black brightening" of the country merchant presents *the horrific conditions in which precisely a good man begins to unravel* and starts spurring out unbearable, but "terrifically true," statements. At just this point the reader arrives at the first of three interpolated chapters on the uses of literature and the nature of fiction.⁶¹ A narrator remarks on the outburst of the good country merchant in chapter 14 writing,

to some it may raise a degree of surprise that one so full of confidence, as the merchant has throughout shown himself, up to the moment of his late sudden impulsiveness, should, in that instance have betrayed such a depth of discontent. He may be thought Inconsistent."⁶²

The mysterious narrator of chapter 14 notes the discontent, but the investment here is very different. Aside from whatever meaning such a possible experience might have for

⁶⁰ Herman Melville, "Hawthorne and His Mosses," Norton Critical Edition of *Moby-Dick*, 522.

⁶¹ And the divergent stories proliferate well beyond chapter 14, as for instance, when the Herb Doctor demands of the soldier of fortune, "give me your story," and we receive not one, but two stories of misfortune, one that goes straight to the "black fact" in "a story of prisons," which the herb doctor, like most people, "cannot believe" and the other which the soldier has invented out of the necessity for receiving charity, "since hardly anybody believes my story." The story of Colonel John Moredock, the infamous "Indian hater" is also split and related second-hand, "I heard his history again and again from my father's friend" "I can render you the judge on the colonel almost word for word" (and as numerous commentators have noted, makes it an even question exactly whose perspective on Indians is being presented, "There, I have done; having given you, not my story, mind or my thoughts, but another's") And last and most strange of all: "I will tell you about China Aster, I wish I could do so in my own words, but unhappily the original story teller here has so tyrannized over me, that it is quite impossible for me to repeat his incidents without sliding into his style...the story would seem to make its narrator." *The Confidence Man*, 208.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 74-75.

someone, chapter 14 affirms the fictional event of the country merchant's transformation – its trueness even if it seems *irrational* – as pertaining to real experience. The inconsistency of the country merchant is described in the following way, “in real life a consistent character is a *rara avis*...the distaste of readers to the contrary sort in books, can hardly arise from any sense of their *untrueness*.”⁶³ The intruding voice goes on to defend the “author who draws a character” in just such an inconsistent way may, insofar as such a writer remains far more “faithful to the facts,” than those “psychological” novelists who make it their business to unravel all the discrepancies of a character into a single, comprehensible form or rationality. Chapter 14 essentially affirms a reality in fiction that emerges precisely where the fiction follows the circuitous path of life. The narrator asserts, “If reason be judge, no writer has produced such inconsistent characters as nature herself.”⁶⁴ What's more the dictum that emerges from this wild thought follows an extremely novel and quite funny logic – “as elsewhere, experience is the only guide here; but as no one man can be coextensive with what is, it may be unwise in every case to rest upon it.”⁶⁵

Having given some sense of the procedure of divergent stories it is now possible to return to the discussion of Deleuze's reading of Melville. In “Bartleby, or the Formula,” Deleuze describes *The Confidence Man* in very similar language to that used in *Logic of Sense* and points to this chapter in particular as an affirmation of the “rights of a superior irrationalism.”⁶⁶ Melville's superior irrationalism pitches a merciless and, once again quite comic, force of divergent stories against the psychological novel (not doubt the most highly valued in the literary market-place of Melville's time and maybe even

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 75 (my italics).

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁶⁶ Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, 80.

our own) who “have for their end the revelation of human nature on fixed principles.”⁶⁷ But all such principles – which would include *a priori* conditions of merely possible experience – can never provide a sufficient “map” to life in the real world. The reader is asked to consider the value of a world without guarantee or fundamental principles of judgment, a world lacking “one story” and without a consistent plot or consistent author. Such is the world encountered aboard the *Fidèle*, a world inseparable from “real life.”

The novel unfolds an experiment of storytelling in which the stories themselves have been set free, literally unhinged, from the “author function.”⁶⁸ One loses sight of the experiment if one tries to judge the “truth” of a story by asking whether its narrator can be trusted. There is no transcendent criteria, no standard of truth and falsity, with which to evaluate this theater of forces; the whole experiment rests on presenting a world without guarantee and posing the question of whether one can still have confidence in such conditions. One discovers in the three chapters on the art of fiction that interrupt the various narratives that such forces cannot be reduced to a supposed rational principle, nor to a benevolent creator. *Fiction (like life) does not issue from a transcendent origin* (author, father, god), and therefore cannot be evaluated with respect to a pre-existing origin or standard (a meaning of the whole). It is for this reason that psychological novels – which resolve the inconsistencies of character by presenting a rationale for everything that happens – are considered as peddling little more than

⁶⁷ *The Confidence Man*, 76.

⁶⁸ Cf. Michel Foucault, “What is an Author?” “I think that, as our society changes, at the very moment when it is in the process of changing, the author function will disappear, and in such a manner that fiction and the polysemous texts will once again function according to another mode, but still with a system of constraint – one that will not longer be that of the author but will have to be determined or, perhaps, experienced.” *Aesthetics, Method, Epistemology (The Essential Works of Michel Foucault, 1954-1984, Vol. 2)* ed. James Fabion. (New York: New Press, 1999), 222.

cheap tricks by these chapters. Such novels never really face the chaotic conditions of creation. Each of the divergent stories, each “confidence man” encountered, can only be affirmed to the degree that they create not only something *original* (a new real experience) but also, and simultaneously, *the conditions of that new and original experience*.⁶⁹ Each story must be evaluated in relation to itself and the forces it is capable of composing.

3.3.3 But is it true?

At three distinct and memorable points in the novel, an impersonal, though by no means omniscient, narrator interrupts the “comedy of action” (as the divergent stories of *The Confidence Man* are referred to) in order to advance a “comedy of thought.”⁷⁰ These excursions, the eccentric narrator suggests, play *thought off action*. Despite never being deemed worthy in the literary market place of the late nineteenth-century, these passages have repeatedly “proved worthy of consideration,” by Melville’s readers.⁷¹

In an almost jaded tone each title subtly puts the question of value into play. On first reading them, they appear to be tautologies (chapter 14: “worth the consideration of those to whom it may prove worth considering;” chapter 33: “which may pass for whatever it may prove to be worth,” and chapter 44: “...which will be sure of receiving

⁶⁹ The conditions include history – it is here that the prophetic powers are forged. Melville did not write fiction to escape the world, but brings fiction to the world (to his “age” or “milieu”) in order to resist the present, escapes its historical determination, in favor of a time to come. Cesare Casarino’s *Modernity at Sea* careful reading of *Moby Dick* provides the most compelling demonstration of this point.

⁷⁰ *The Confidence Man*, 77.

⁷¹ These chapters are by far the most commented on in the history of the reception of *The Confidence Man*. Charles Olson described chapter 44 as the “most interesting passage” of all of Melville’s remarks on characterization and, as we will see, Deleuze seizes on Melville’s theory of “original characters” as a profound description of the “creative act.” See also Elizabeth Foster, “The ‘shock of wit’ in Melville’s Revisions of Chapter 14,” Harrison Hayvord, “Melville’s ‘smoky’ Revisions of Chapter 14,” and Tom Quirk, “Sours for Chapters 14 and 44 in *The Confidence Man*,” (all included in the Norton Critical Edition p 260 - 268.

more or less attention from those readers who do not skip it”), but read closely the titles don’t so much repeat the same thing twice as produce an astonishing repetition of a difference.⁷² Each chapter posits a sort of minimal difference in the concept of value itself; the worth of the text will be realized only in a relation that enables that worth. There’s no intrinsic value attributed to the short chapters – value will only be actualized in use. As I have shown in rehearsing the divergent stories that make up the text of *The Confidence Man*, all of the stories raise the question of value, but these chapters raise the stakes well beyond the literary marketplace or the relatively trivial problem of being duped by a con-man. The question of these chapters is how to “create new values that would be those of life.”⁷³ Chapter 14, “Worth the consideration of those to whom it may prove worth considering,” as I have already discussed in the previous section, presents the inconsistencies of real life as a necessity for fiction; if it is to be consistent with life, fiction must tarry with chaos and produce inconsistent characters, characters in the process of transformation. A careful consideration of the remaining two chapters will lead us into a more precise description of the importance of Melville’s practice of fiction for Deleuze.

Chapter 33, “Which may pass of whatever it may prove to be worth,” like chapter 14 situates the “comedy of thought” in the mode of the future anterior (what the worth of the passage *will have been* can only be determined in retrospect *after* it proves itself useful in some as yet undetermined reading), but it would obviously be too simple to read this statement as a mere speculation about the prospective monetary-value of the strange and uncertain coin the narrator slips to the reader. Wedged between the story of

⁷² Wei-chee Dimock, reading chapter 14, 33, and 44, writes, “As a circular construct, the accountable self finally accomplishes what Melville has, in book after book, gone in search for. Here, in the shadow of the marketplace, he was finally found a form of individualism that works for him: one that perfectly enclosed figures, on that works in fact as perfect tautology.” *Empire of Liberty*, 211.

⁷³ Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, 100.

the madman Charlemont and the response of Charlie Noble to the telling of that story, chapter 33 is called for as a response to a basic philosophical problem “is it true?”

An impersonal voice interrupts the smooth unfolding of the Cosmopolitan’s announcement at the end of chapter 32 that he “will tell [Charlie Noble] the story of Charlemont, the gentleman madman” and the actual telling of that story that unfolds in chapter 34. To complicate matters further, it is only when we come to chapter 35, which follows both the story and the interpolated chapter, that Charlie Noble asks the question that goes straight to the heart of the value of fiction. He asks, “but is it true?” The cosmopolitan, “evinced the artlessness of his nature,” provides a commonplace response (which one might also recognize as the reigning idea in the mid-nineteenth century American literary marketplace regarding the uses of literature). He assures his auditor, “of course not; it is a story which I told with the purpose of every story-teller—to amuse.”⁷⁴ The narrator of chapter 33 can be said to have anticipated the cosmopolitan’s response. While to a certain extent this narrator agrees that the worth of telling a story lies in its capacity “to amuse,” there is a world of difference in how the narrator of chapter 33 presents the relationship between life and fiction and the commonplace response the cosmopolitan gives in chapter 35.

The narrator goes much further than the comic harlequin figure. “Books of fiction,” it turns out, lead some well beyond “mere entertainment.” Amusement for these readers is not at all a matter of escaping reality, but an avenue to “*more reality, than real life itself can show*” (186, my italics). According to the narrator of chapter 33, such a view cannot be attained by rational argument because it leaps over the question of truth and falsity.⁷⁵ Fiction demands a sort of partisan affirmation, a faith even; with respect to

⁷⁴ Melville, *The Confidence Man*, 189.

⁷⁵ Melville, *The Confidence Man*, 186 (my italics).

those who go to a work of fiction for a real experience, the text is quite clear, it is “with this class we side.”⁷⁶ Chapter 33 declares what at first seems a statement pertaining to fiction as imaginary-world making, “It is with fiction as with religion: it should present another world,” but what is compelling about this passage is that no sooner do we think we know the “world” fiction and religion present then we are told that it is one “to which we feel the tie.”⁷⁷ What is this link or attachment to life – to a world – that only fiction enables us to perceive?

3.4 Belief In the World

In *Cinema II*, Deleuze diagnoses a “modern fact,” which Melville experienced with a degree of intensity that would be hard to describe, and which is no doubt the precise situation the passengers of the *Fidèle* find themselves in. Deleuze writes,

The modern fact is that we no longer believe in the world. We do not even believe in the events which happen to us, love, death, as if they only half concerned us...The link between man and the world is broken. Henceforth, this link must become an object of belief: it is the impossible which can only be restored within a faith. Belief is no longer addressed to a different or transformed world...Whether we are Christians or atheists, in our universal schizophrenia, we need reasons to believe in this world. It is a whole transformation of belief. It was already a great turning-point in philosophy, from Pascal to Nietzsche: to replace the model of knowledge with belief. But belief replaces knowledge only when it becomes belief in this world as it is.⁷⁸

To “replace knowledge with belief” is the great achievement of empiricism as Deleuze understands it; to undermine all principles of knowledge, all foundations, all values, one must understand thought itself as an act of belief, an experiment, a force to create new

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 186.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 187.

⁷⁸ Deleuze, *Cinema II*, 171-173. While the main argument tends in quite a different direction than our own, in her chapter on *The Confidence Man*, “Tone,” Sianne Ngai makes a remarkably similar observation, writing, “*The Confidence Man* offers its most compelling allegory for the problem posed by tone, as well as for tone’s unusual resonance for the analysis of literature and ideology: in these audible demonstrations that whether the feeling is vested in abstract system or in personal relationships, the world of the novel’s story runs on a feeling that no one actually feels.” *Ugly Feelings*, 69.

values.⁷⁹ But what is the world if it does not rest upon the solid, consistent ground of knowledge or truth of pre-established concepts? Nietzsche would say it is will-to-power: becoming, transformation, experimentation, a world corresponding to life as the narrator of chapter 33 describes it: “nature unfettered, exhilarated, in effect transformed.”⁸⁰

For Deleuze, it is in the creations of artists and philosophers that the vital bond between man and the world is forged. “Physicians of the world” who invent relations to this world. Belief names the link between man and world, the process by which we come to “feel the tie.” Chapter 33 describes the practice of the writer of fiction in quite loaded terms, “to minister to what, as he understands it, is the implied wish of the more indulgent lovers of entertainment.”⁸¹ Melville’s invocation of such a heretical practice of “ministering,” a ministering through the production of fictions indicates an important shift in the activity of the writer. With these lines one moves from a symptomological register into one that, more like Whitman, suggests a therapeutic occupation. Such a radically secular ministry, a ministry that takes no refuge or comfort from eternal transcendent truths, however, can only be developed on the limits of existing values (whether these be of knowledge or of monetary worth).

As the novel relentlessly demonstrates the conditions in which “nature unfettered, exhilarated, in effect transformed” can be expressed are deeply tied to the deterritorializing effects of money; such a “freeing” can only take place by creating different values. A thinking of value that does not rest on “essence” or “appearance” (one can never know for certain “is he or is he not what he *seems* to be”) emerges when

⁷⁹ See Gilles Deleuze, Preface to *Empiricism and Subjectivity*.

⁸⁰ Melville, *The Confidence Man*, 186.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 187.

both the real and apparent world have ceased to exist.⁸² A life comes into existence in fiction that refuses the choice of essence *or* appearance: a world in process, a world of becoming that is continually constructed and painstakingly ministered.

The Confidence Man convincingly shows it is not easy to believe in such a world. On one hand, in the proliferation of irreconcilable and divergent stories de-linked from any central instance or guarantee of truth life loses its meaning or justification – it may be experienced as an intolerable or unlivable world. Melville’s novel relentlessly presents this nihilistic perspective as an infinite series of possible cons, a world in which nothing can be firmly established or trusted. In “Bartleby, or the Formula” Deleuze makes more explicit the connection between *The Confidence Man* and the problem of belief in the world. Deleuze reads Melville as a “proto-pragmatist” who “attempts to transform the world, to think a new world or new man insofar as *they create themselves*.”⁸³ Such an attempt, such an experiment, requires a radical shift in perspective; it necessitates not only the representation of “new experience,” but the construction of the conditions of that experience. Above all, as noted above, it requires the destruction of the transcendence, the “paternal function.” *The Confidence Man*, according to Deleuze, achieves precisely the conditions of belief in the world – not because it is naïvely optimistic, but because it does away with the need for an external guarantee, it places its “faith,” so to speak, in a “schizophrenic vocation” that does not rest on any authority. Deleuze writes,

But to reach this point, it was also necessary for the knowing subject, the sole proprietor, to give way to a community of explores, the brothers of the archipelago, who replace knowledge with belief, or rather with “confidence” – not belief in another world, but confidence in this one, and in man as much as God.⁸⁴

⁸² Melville, *The Confidence Man*, 38.

⁸³ Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, 86.

⁸⁴ Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, p 87.

Deleuze may be that “nicest critic” Melville envisioned at a key point in his novel, one who would discern the specific difference between an imaginary optimism and a real confidence.⁸⁵ *The Confidence Man* never presents the content of this belief; instead what the novel produces are the very conditions in which such a belief in the world becomes not only possible, but necessary. Of all the characters on the *Fidèle*, the cosmopolitan – a man without national belonging, in multi-colors, a comic harlequin character encouraging the passengers to “experiment with confidence” – comes closest to affirming such a belief (but again his “confidence” cannot be completely de-linked from the fact that he appears to be a man of means). Nevertheless, the Cosmopolitan puts on the stage a character who is “ungovernably good natured.”⁸⁶ This is how Deleuze describes the Cosmopolitan in “Bartleby, or the Formula,”

...not a uniform piece of clothing but a Harlequin’s coat, even white on white, an infinite patchwork with multiple joinings, like the jacket of Redburn, White Jacket or the Great Cosmopolitan: the American invention par excellence, for the Americans invented patchwork...But to reach this point, it was also necessary for the knowing subject, the sole proprietor, to give way to a community of explorers, the brothers of the archipelago, who replace knowledge with belief, or rather with “confidence” – not belief in another world, but confidence in this one, and in man as much as God.⁸⁷

3.5 Quite an Original

The penultimate chapter of *The Confidence Man* (“In which the last three words of the last chapter are made the text of the discourse, which will be sure of receiving more

⁸⁵ *The Confidence Man*, 164.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 167

⁸⁷ Gilles Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, 86-87. A comparison of Deleuze’s reading of the “patchwork” to Melville’s description of “A Bosom Friend” in *Moby Dick* may prove worthwhile. “Upon waking next morning about daylight, I found Queequeg’s arm thrown over me in the most loving and affectionate manner. You had almost thought I had been his wife. The counterpane was of patchwork, full of odd little parti-colored squares and triangles; and this arm of his tattooed all over with an interminable Cretan labyrinth of a figure, no two parts of which were of one precise shade – owing I suppose to his keeping his arm at sea unmethodically in sun and shade, his shirt sleeves irregularly rolled up at various times – this same arm of his, I say, looked for all the world like a strip of that same patchwork quilt” (37)

or less attention from those readers who do not skip it”), provides the most explicit link between Melville’s literary project and Deleuze’s philosophy. Deleuze discusses the chapter at length in the “Bartleby” essay, and it is in this chapter that one finds the most profound affirmation of acts of creation that are radically detached from their creator. At stake, is the concept of “original characters in fiction,” those creatures encountered in a work of literature who take shape not only as a “singular form,” but also possess “original instincts.” It is through fictional characters such as these that new values enter the world.

The “text of the discourse,” as the impersonal narrator describes it, follows the exchange between the cosmopolitan and the barber, in which the cosmopolitan has tried (unsuccessfully, one soon enough finds out) to convince the barber to take down his “no trust” sign and “try the experiment of trusting men.” As the cosmopolitan exits the scene, the barber’s friend’s “unite in thinking him Quite An Original,” but it is important to note that the narrator of chapter 44 intervenes precisely to “show, if possible, the impropriety of the phrase, *Quite an Original*, as applied by the barber’s friends.”⁸⁸ Accordingly, one can venture that in spite of its quite singular shape and the proliferation of “novel,” “odd,” and “striking” characters, *The Confidence Man* contains no original characters. But it is precisely because of this lack that the novel thinks the conditions of creation of such a character.

What is an “original character,” according to the narrator of Chapter 44? Two qualities define such a character. The first is that such a character, while being “of the age” exceeds any definition that would be confined to its age. Original characters are no more “personal” than they are historical; instead they are “like a revolving Drummond light, raying away from itself all around it – everything is lit by it, everything starts up to

⁸⁸ Melville, *The Confidence Man*, 236; 238.

it...an effect, in its way, akin to that which in Genesis attends upon the beginning of things.”⁸⁹ What is remarkable about an “original” is that the character’s “origin” is immanent to its effects. An original character is not governed by any law outside itself, nor is it subject to a creator (whether one conceives of such a creator as god, as an author, or even of history). Only original characters let loose “a nature unfettered, exhilarated, in effect transformed,” and in doing so “surpass all subjectivity,” untimely creatures who are incarnated in an act of writing but in no sense subject to any pre-existing laws of reality, not even to the laws of language. Deleuze elaborates on Melville’s theory of “original characters” in the following way,

Each original is a powerful, solitary Figure that exceeds any explicable form: it projects flamboyant traits of expression that mark the stubbornness of a thought without image, a question without response, an extreme and nonrational logic. Figures of life and knowledge, they know something inexpressible, live something unfathomable. They have nothing general about them, and are not particular – they escape knowledge, defy psychology. Even the words they utter surpass the general laws of language as well as the simple particularities of speech, since they are like the vestiges of projections of a unique, original language, and bring all of language to the limit of silence and music.⁹⁰

Deleuze describes Bartleby as such an “original,” but in this description one can’t help but think of the Figure that haunts the entire text of *The Confidence Man*, the Christ-like, deaf-mute introduced in the first chapter who does not speak, but writes and rewrites the text of Corinthians 13. Perhaps not an “original” in the sense described by the narrator of Chapter 44, but the phantom or specter of a once original creature (“a new law-giver, a revolutionizing philosopher, or the founder of a new religion”) whose words vanish in the “all infusing spirit of the west” and whose very disappearance provides the conditioning event of the fiction.

⁸⁹ Melville, *The Confidence Man*, 238.

⁹⁰ Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, 83. On the fact that such creations “surpass subjectivity” see “To Have Done With Judgment” also in *Essays Critical and Clinical*, 135.

But it is the second quality of an “original character” that enables us to more fully articulate the dimensions of what might be meant by “a creation without a creator.” Convention assumes a very peculiar relation of causality between events and their conditions – for every creation there is a creator, for every deed a doer (a subject, an author) – but this way of thinking about the “origins” of things always leads back into transcendence. One posits a transcendent cause external to its effect. As I have shown, Deleuze’s entire philosophy – his commitment to a transcendental empiricism – rejects this way of determining relations. Melville’s “text of a discourse” on “original characters” also rejects such a way of determining relations. Chapter 44 interrupts the text with an affirmation of a creation without a transcendent cause (a creator, an author, a subject):

To produce [odd] characters, an author, besides other things, must have seen much, and seen through much; *to produce one original character*, he must have had much luck. There would seem but one point in common between this sort of phenomenon in fiction and all other sorts: it cannot be born in the author’s imagination – it being as true in literature as in zoology, that all life is from the egg.⁹¹

This “most confidential passage” amounts to a rejection of both any theological principle of transcendent creation and any notion of an author as the creator of life (whether in “fiction” or “zoology”). In thinking the “conditions of creation” it asserts a belief in contingency (“luck”) and what’s more, an immanence of the condition in the creation (“all life is from the egg”).

As I have noted above, *The Confidence Man* (according to the narrator of chapter 44) presents us with no “original characters,” in this sense. Failing to produce such an “event,” the novel often breaks into a philosophical discourse that articulates a problem shared by fiction and phenomena of all other sorts. The fact that this passage follows

⁹¹ Melville, *The Confidence Man*, 239.

immediately after the erroneous suggestion is made that the Cosmopolitan is “quite an original,” indicates a limit to the experiment. I have already suggested that this limit emerges at the precise moment when it is revealed that the Cosmopolitan is not in “want of money,” but in conclusion I would also say that such a limit throws us back into a reading of those figures of extreme poverty encountered on board the *Fidèle* (the Deaf-Mute, Black Guinea, the “soldier of fortune,” and the barefoot “juvenile peddler” of the final chapter). At the end of the novel the reader is left wondering what their chances for “confidence” may be and to contemplate the way each, inventing a minimal fiction, relates to the other passengers. In no sense “original,” it is perhaps these minor characters who open questions beyond the limits of the book.

The novel ends abruptly with the Cosmopolitan “kindly” leading an old man into darkness. The final sentence of *The Confidence Man*, “Something further may follow of this Masquerade” frustrates most readers and many critics have seen it as weak device to avoid resolving the complexities the novel unfolds – a failure.⁹² Matthiessen interpreted the ending (and consequently the structure of the entire novel) as revealing the fact that it was written “by a man not at all able to write the kind of books he wanted to.”⁹³ But perhaps it is not only a “man” who could not write such books, but a form and a language restrained by a particular set of historical conditions and values that work against such resolution. It is not in the resolution of this complex novel that one should look for a “line of flight,” but rather in the breaks and divergent stories, the interpolated chapters and unresolved conclusions that register a desire to push the masquerade beyond these limits and for fiction to transform these conditions.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 251.

⁹³ Matthiessen, *American Renaissance*, 491.

4. Lines of Escape: George Jackson's *Soledad Brother*

The second half of this study moves away from Deleuze's writings on nineteenth-century American literature and explores the use of two twentieth-century American writers in the books Deleuze wrote in the 1970s. To the extent that the previous chapters could be characterized as an exploration of the revolutionary American dream of a society of comrades, this second part takes the realities of an American nightmare as its starting point.

4.1 Jackson and the Prison Information Group

Written between the years 1964 and 1970 from the hell that was and still is the United States prison system and first addressed to his parents and siblings (but finally to his defense team), George Jackson's prison letters resist the destiny of their author who spent his entire adult life behind bars before being shot down by San Quentin prison guards on August 21, 1971. That Jackson's name and words repeatedly appear in nearly all of Deleuze's philosophical texts of the 1970s (mostly written in collaboration with Félix Guattari and Claire Parnet) is just one example of the persistence of the life running through Jackson's letters and their defiance of the conditions in which they were produced.

Soledad Brother: The Prison Letters of George Jackson was first published in the United States by Coward-McCann in 1970. The following year, a translation of the book appeared in France in the series *Témoins* issued by the prestigious Editions Gallimard. At the time of publication, Jackson, along with his fellow inmates Fleeta Drumgo and John Cluchette, was facing charges for the alleged murder of Soledad prison guard John V. Mills. Initially conceived by Jackson's lawyer, Fay Stender, the idea to publish a book of Jackson's writing was part of a broader strategy of the Soledad Brothers Defense

Committee. Had it not been for an encounter between Stender and Jean Genet in April 1970 (an encounter that resulted in Genet's agreeing to write the introduction to the collection) it is unlikely the book would have been translated so quickly or achieved the second life it did France in the 1970s.¹

While a few historians and prison critics have recently begun to discuss the circulation of Jackson's writing in France during this period, particularly in the context of Genet's support for the Black Panther Party and the subsequent interest taken in Jackson's case by the *Groupe d'information sur les prisons*, the recurrence of Jackson's name in Deleuze's work, always accompanied by a single quotation, has thus far only been noted in passing.² Yet, as this chapter argues, the conceptual affinity between Jackson and Deleuze goes far beyond haphazard quotations. In what follows, I attempt to traverse a line *between* Jackson and Deleuze in order to activate a series of questions regarding the relationship between war and politics, thought and race, literature and resistance in both writers. In pursuing these questions this chapter seeks to map the consistency of a line that *escapes* the intolerable institutional conditions in which the letters were produced and that *strikes* multiple targets, including many received narratives regarding the relationship between "poststructuralist" French philosophy and radical black thought in the U.S.

¹ The Soledad Brothers Defense Committee was formed by Fay Stender and eventually headed by Angela Y. Davis. It was Stender's idea to publish Jackson's letters before the trial to raise awareness of the case. The circumstances of the transnational publication history of *Soledad Brother* are discussed at length in Jean Genet, *The Declared Enemy*, trans. Jeff Fort. ed. Albert Dichy (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004). See especially the "Introductory Note" to Chapter 9, "Introduction to Soledad Brother," 304. See also Chapters 6 and 7 on George Jackson in *Warfare and the American Homeland: Policing and Prison in a Penal Democracy*, ed. Joy James, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

² For an extensive account of the influence of the political philosophy of the Black Panthers on Michel Foucault's thought see Brady Thomas Heiner, "Foucault and the Black Panthers" *City*, 11, no. 3 (December 2007). For a history of the *Groupe d'information sur les prisons*, see chapter 6 of Julian Bourg, *From Revolution to Ethics: May 1968 and Contemporary French Thought* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007). Nick Thoburn also makes brief mention of Jackson in connection with Deleuze's concept of "line of flight" see chapter two, "Minor Politics," in *Deleuze, Marx, and Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

Jackson wrote from prison, “don’t mistake this as a message from George to Fay. It’s a message from the hunted running blacks to those people of this society who profess to want to change the conditions that destroy life.”³ But the letters are much more than a message; as every page of *Soledad Brother* attests Jackson’s writing unleashes forces of a belligerent thought that refuses on every level to adjust to conditions of captivity. Resisting at once the structures of capitalist domination, the institutionalized racism of the American prison system, and finally (and perhaps most strikingly) the restrictions of an enemy language, Jackson’s book is itself best conceived of as a concrete weapon hurled at the conditions that destroy life. At once revolutionary philosophy and warrior poetics *Soledad Brother* arranges an absolute escape from the forms of thought and language that seek to capture life. Furious letters sent to the world, racing toward unexpected destinations. And it is in this way precisely that Jackson’s letters connect to Deleuze’s description of writing: “In the act of writing there’s an attempt to make life something more than personal, of freeing life wherever it is imprisoned.”⁴

This chapter aims to first reconstruct the deviant itinerary of George Jackson’s writing in the context of prison activism in France during the early seventies. Such a reconstruction yields a counter-history of encounters that has all too often been obscured by disciplinary boundaries, institutional barriers, and to some extent, the failures of translation.⁵ In this section I discuss first Jean Genet’s crucial role in establishing a

³ Letter to Fay Stender, July 28, 1970. George Jackson, *Soledad Brother* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 1994), 328.

⁴ Deleuze, *Negotiations*, 143.

⁵ Though he does not discuss Deleuze et al. explicitly, Brady Thomas Heiner’s discussion of the disciplinary formations that have blocked the transmission of radical black thought within the academia (and particularly the relations and influence of that thought on French post-structuralist thought), is instructive here. Tracing the connections between black power and Foucault’s work, Heiner’s work seeks to provide a “immanent critique of scholarly discourse as such” and in doing so makes an crucial and quite singular intervention around these issues. It is worth underscoring, however, that while Heiner’s discussion often seems to be driven by a desire to attribute origins, our own approach seeks not so much to reverse a uni-

connection between Jackson and French radical thought, and subsequently the place of Jackson's thought in the context of the *Groupe d'information sur les prisons* founded by Michel Foucault and Daniel Defert in early 1971. But in what follows I also seek to go beyond a simple historical account of the publication and circulation of Jackson's writings. In focusing on the striking use of Jackson's letters in Deleuze's collaboratively written philosophical texts of the 1970s this chapter also maps the contours of something quite different than a new narrative. Proceeding from Deleuze and Guattari's assertion that "a book exists only through the outside and on the outside," and that "a book itself is a little machine" this chapter seeks to take up the questions that emerge from those assertions: "what is the relation of this literary machine to a war machine, love machine, revolutionary machine?"⁶ At stake is a style of thought that proceeds in movement and in the machines constructed to transmit that movement – a practice of establishing relations that make their own outside.

Jackson's name appears four times in the two volumes of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* that Deleuze wrote with Félix Guattari (1972; 1980) and the book produced in between with Claire Parnet (*Dialogues*, 1977). Each time a single sentence from *Soledad Brother* announces a process of creation that is simultaneously an *escape* and the *invention of a weapon*.⁷ *Il se peut que je fuie, mais tout au long de ma fuite, je cherche une arme!* As

directional line of influence, but to open up a multi-dimensional map. See Heiner, "Foucault and the Black Panthers."

⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 4.

⁷ In each instance Jackson's line functions to intensify the statement that "escape is revolutionary" (*Anti-Oedipus*, 277); "to escape is not to renounce action, nothing is more active than an escape. It is the opposite of the imaginary...George Jackson wrote from prison..." ("On the Superiority of Anglo-American Literature," *Dialogues* 27); "it is always on a line of flight that we create...because we map out the real on it, we compose there a plane of consistency. *To flee, but in fleeing to seek a weapon.*" ("Many Politics," *Dialogues*, 102; importantly, a different translation of this text (slightly abridged) was also published much earlier as "Politics" in *Semiotexte* vol III, No. 2, "Schizo-Culture 1" 1978, p 157); and finally, "It is on lines of flight that new weapons are invented to be turned against the heavy arms of the state. 'I may be running, but I'm

Deleuze may have first encountered it, this sentence translates a line from one of Jackson's last letters to Fay Stender.⁸ The full passage from the original letter reads as follows:

In the inclusive sense, my politics, you'll find all of the atypical features of my character. *I may run, but all the time that I am, I'll be looking for a stick!* A defensible position! It's never occurred to me to lie down and be kicked! It's silly! When I do that I'm depending on the kicker to grow tired. The better tactic is to twist his leg a little or pull it off if you can. An intellectual argument to an attacker against the logic of his violence – or one to myself concerning the wisdom of a natural counterviolence – borders on, no, it overleaps the absurd!!⁹

It is likely that Deleuze first encountered these lines during his involvement with the Prison Information Group (a political experience and thought experiment we will turn to shortly), but in contrast to the encounter with Jackson's writing in the context of the GIP, Jackson's sentence always appears in *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* quite suddenly, radically extracted from any personal or historical context. In these books Jackson's line is not brought into an "intellectual argument," but quite literally deployed. And each time we encounter Jackson's words they are linked to a concept: the "line of escape."¹⁰

looking for a gun as I go' (George Jackson)." ("1874: Three Novellas, or "What Happened?" *A Thousand Plateaus* 204). In reference to a slightly different (but related) point, Jackson and Angela Davis are explicitly mentioned in an interview from the time ("What if, on the contrary, Angela Davis's libido was a social revolutionary libido? What if she were in love because she was a revolutionary?" Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, "Capitalism: A Very Special Delirium" in *Chaosophy*, 72) and explicit reference to the "Jackson affair" is made in later interview in which Deleuze discusses his involvement in the Prison Information Group and the work of Michel Foucault. See Gilles Deleuze, "Foucault and Prison," *Two Regimes of Madness* (New York: Semiotexte Press, 2006), 276.

⁸ George Jackson, *Les Frères de Soledad*. trans. Catherine Roux. (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1971).

⁹ Letter to Fay Stender, July 28, 1970. *Soledad Brother*, 328.

¹⁰ *Ligne de fuite* is usually translated as "line of flight," and less frequently, "line of escape," however, as Brian Massumi points out in his Notes of the Translation of *A Thousand Plateaus* "line of flight" is slightly misleading ("flight" suggesting "flying," a connotation that does not really exist in the original French). Throughout I follow the English translations in the quoted passages, but prefer "line of escape" in my own discussion. Moreover, it should be noted here that the frequent occurrence of the verb "to flee" (as in, "To leave, to escape, is to trace a line...But to flee is not to renounce action: nothing more active than flight"" (Dialogues, 27) also translates *fuite* and should always be understood to resonate with the concept of the *ligne de fuite*.

While the preceding chapters revolved around the relation between a concept and specific work of literature (“becoming-democratic” in Whitman’s *Specimen Days*, “belief in the world” in Melville’s *Confidence Man*), this chapter focuses on an analysis set forth by just this single, repeated sentence. Yet, as I will argue in what follows, Jackson’s line “I may run....,” puts in play a multiplicity of historical connections, books, and events. Pursuing this line through a reading of *Soledad Brother* in its entirety and in conjunction with *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* will thus allow us to better perceive transversal lines across the prison struggle in the U.S. and France, their specific relation to legacies of resistance to American slavery and, more generally, the way such connections contribute to and complicate Marxist thought. Finally, such a reading will enable us to see how *Soledad Brother* is hooked into a new way of conceiving revolution and philosophy’s relation to questions of race, politics, and writing.

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The first appearance of George Jackson’s name occurs in the fourth chapter of *Anti-Oedipus*, “Introduction to Schizo-Analysis.”

Good people say that we must not flee, that to escape is not good, that it isn’t effective, and that one must work for reforms. But the revolutionary knows that escape is revolutionary – withdrawal, freaks – provided one sweeps away the social cover on leaving, or causes a piece of the system to get lost in the shuffle. What matters is to break through the wall, even if one has to become-black like John Brown. George Jackson. ‘I may take flight, but all the while I am fleeing, I will be looking for a weapon.’¹¹

Before proceeding to a discussion of the circumstances that may have led to Jackson’s inclusion in *Anti-Oedipus*, or the political and conceptual implications of the notion that “escape is revolutionary” affirmed here, it is necessary to first note two curious details about the passage as we encounter in most English language versions of *Anti-Oedipus*. The first concerns the re-translation of Jackson’s sentence. As quoted above, the original

¹¹ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 277.

passage from *Soledad Brother* reads, "I may run, but all the time that I am, I will be looking for a stick!" Yet, when it appears in the English translation of *Anti-Oedipus*, the sentence has undergone a transformation, now reading, "I may take flight, but all the while I am fleeing, I will be looking for a weapon." Now while these two sentences arguably convey the same *meaning* – the idea that far from being reducible to a moralizing notion of desertion, avoidance or cowardice, any truly effective (revolutionary) escape from an "attacker" must also involve an active counter-attack – they do not operate in the same way.¹²

Jackson's original sentence, as it is written in *Soledad Brother*, carries with it further associations and resonances. As will be shown Jackson's line at once invokes a kid running from the cops and recalls the figure of a runaway slave who has no weapon but a stick he or she might find along an escape route. Sticks only become weapons, picked up by chance, in a very specific event of running. The consistency of Jackson's *I may run* emerges on a line composed in relation to and in connection with experiences of *being* on the run (for instance, running from the cops) and a *thought* that that takes shape while running, which is also to say while writing. To know running, to have run, to *have had* to run, and above all *to want to run* - all express a singular desire on the move in Jackson's thought, movement intensified by repetition. It matters that Jackson writes *run*. To "flee" suggests fleeing *from* something, a reaction, but running, as we will see, names a free and autonomous action.¹³

¹² A somewhat more egregious instance of mis-translation occurs in *A Thousand Plateaus*, where we read "I may be running, but I'm looking for a gun as I go." What unfortunately gets lost in this translation is the element of creation and movement that Jackson's "stick" carries with it. It is well worth noting here that a "gun" can just as well function as a tool "condemning the weapon itself, and the soldier to immobility." That is, guns have quite often functioned in assemblages that stop the revolutionary movement of people. In any case, it's not what Jackson wrote. See Deleuze and Guattari's fascinating analysis of "weapons" and "tools" in the "Treatise on Nomadology" See *A Thousand Plateaus*, 397.

¹³ A counter-figure of running necessarily haunts our reading of *a life on the run* as we find it in process throughout Jackson's letters. In fact, a different letter, opened in dream by the narrator of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, where we read the injunction "To Whom It May Concern. Keep This Nigger-Boy Running."

What is disturbing about the above noted instances of less than perfect translation is that, unlike those cases in which the problem posed for the translator is that of rendering a specific foreign formulation into the target language, in these passages we find a sentence *originally written in English* being marred in the process of re-translation (I have only pointed out one, but ever instance in which Jackson's sentence appears in English translations of Deleuze involves a mistranslation). The point would be simply academic were it not that these repeated failures of translation indicate a real blockage in the organization and distribution of knowledge both within American universities, and more broadly, within the philosophical reception of Deleuze in the Anglophone world. They are, I would argue, symptomatic of the disarticulation of black radical thought and French philosophy of the post-68 period.¹⁴ We have to wonder: how did it happen that an American writer, a black American writer, is so unrecognizable to Deleuze's English translators that he is repeatedly mis-translated?

This dis-articulation can also be demonstrated by a second striking detail in the first citation of Jackson in the English translation of *Anti-Oedipus*. At the end of the long passage that culminates in the quotation from Jackson's letter (given above) we find the small superscript number that usually indicates a footnote or reference. However, when

(Random House: New York, 1995) p 33. Here, a very different sense of running and the brutality of a racist power that compels life to flee – to exhaust itself in fear, work, alienation and dispossession – speaks. In this context and given the long history of a people's *having had to run*, it makes all the difference then that Jackson's writes, "I derive my force and energy from no outside quarter" (146) and that in *Soledad Brother* running is not finally animated by an external power (master, cop, boss), but expresses an autonomous counter-attack, an absolute movement that pursues its own line of escape even as it is locked in a cell, even as it "stands still" (Deleuze). Many thanks to Keith Jones for pressing me on this point and for his unfailing passion in contributing many insights to this chapter.

¹⁴ Cf. Heiner, "why is it that the enunciative force of black power is met with social, civil and biological death while that of power-knowledge [i.e. Foucault] is subject to canonization in a host of academic disciplines?" see Brady Thomas Heiner, "Foucault and the Black Panthers," 314-15.

the reader turns to the back of *Anti-Oedipus* in order to consult the reference notes, she will find to her surprise that the fifth note for chapter four is *completely empty*.¹⁵

In order to understand the singular force of Jackson's writing and its lines of connection to Deleuze's philosophy, it is necessary to first fill-out this blank note. A citation for the sentence quoted in *Anti-Oedipus* and subsequent works would send the reader either to *Soledad Brother*, which as noted above had been published in France the year before *Anti-Oedipus* appeared, or alternatively to the third issue of the GIP's pamphlet *Intolérable : L'assassinat de George Jackson*.¹⁶

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In a short text entitled "Foucault and Prisons" Deleuze recalls the importance of Jackson's case and the key role Genet played in linking the prison movement in France to the brutal conditions of American prisons, the explosion in incarceration rates, and the specific situation faced by black prisoners in the U.S. Deleuze states, "when we made connections at the time of the Jackson affair and problems in American prisons, Genet stepped forward. He was great. A movement inside the prisons was formed."¹⁷ The history of this encounter is crucial for linking Jackson's writing to Deleuze and Guattari's work.

¹⁵ There is no reference given in the original French edition of *Anti-Oedipus* (Les Editions de Minuit: Paris, 1972), but there is also no footnote suggesting there could or should be. The "blank note" can be found in both the original Viking Press version (1977) and the University of Minnesota Press reprint (1983) (see page 393 in the Minnesota edition). Here, an additional note (this one a self-disclosure) also seems relevant. I had never heard of George Jackson the first time I read *Anti-Oedipus*. Alvaro Reyes should be credited here with generously (and repeatedly) filling in the blanks not found in books regarding Jackson's writings and the Black Panthers, and for many conversations concerning the disarticulation of these movements from "post-structuralist" theory in the American university.

¹⁶ Groupe d'Information sur les Prisons, *L'assassinat de George Jackson*, « Intolérable », No. 3 (Paris : Gallimard, November 1971). A large portion of this text is also available in Philippe Artières, Larent Quéro et Michelle Zancarini-Fournel, *Le groupe d'Information sur les prisons : Archives d'une lutte : 1970-1972*. (Paris : Editions de l'IMEC, 2003). Excerpts have also been translated and published in English in *Warfare and the American Homeland*, 140-161.

¹⁷ Deleuze, *Two Regimes of Madness*, 276.

In the spring of 1970, Genet, responding to an invitation from the Black Panthers, came to the U.S. to lend his voice to the wide spread protests against the incarceration of several members of the BPP. Denied a visa by the American consulate in Paris, Genet entered the country illegally on March 1 and spent the following two months traveling with the Panthers. During this time, Genet gave numerous speeches at rallies held at American universities in defense of Bobby Seale, who was at the time being tried for an alleged murder, and more generally, spoke out against racism and the state-sponsored repression and imprisonment of the Black Panther Party leadership.¹⁸ It was also during this time that Genet met Fay Stender, George Jackson's defense attorney, and agreed to write the introduction to *Soledad Brother*.

Describing *Soledad Brother* as a "striking poem of love and combat," Genet's introduction obliterates the distinction between revolutionary action and poetic genius.¹⁹ In emphasizing the coincidence of writing and combat in Jackson's thought, Genet picks up and underscores a basic insight of all of Jackson's letters – especially pronounced in the passage quoted in above – namely, the necessity to counter the brutality of the state-sanctioned violence ("an attacker") with revolutionary combat (counter-attack). What is striking about *Soledad Brother* however, despite its being written from prison, is that in Jackson's letters *combat takes concrete shape in writing*. Combat, for Genet as for Jackson, names "a defensible position," an *active* (and therefore more effective) counter-force to

¹⁸ The details of Genet's experience with the Black Panthers, along with all the texts he wrote in their defense, can be found in Jean Genet, *Declared Enemy: Texts and Interviews*, ed. Albert Dichy, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004). See especially p 28-91. Genet's further reflections on the Black Panthers were folded into his last published work *Prisoner of Love*. Trans. Barbara Bray (New York Review Books: New York, 2003).

¹⁹ Jean Genet, "Introduction" to *Soledad Brother: The Prison Letters of George Jackson*, 331. In another equally moving text, "The Red and the Black," Genet depicts the book as a "murder of the whole white world...the murder of stupidity in action," See *Declared Enemy* 81-84. Here a distinction should be made between Genet's reading of *Soledad Brother* as a "poem of love and combat" and the so-called genre of "prison writing." For a useful discussion of the problems of "prison writing" as a genre see Dylan Rodriguez's second chapter of *Forced Passages*, 75- 93.

“the conditions that destroy life.”²⁰ Far from being reducible to a purely destructive will, combat expresses the creative capacity of a life that refuses to adjust to the everyday humiliations and cruelty of the status quo. Jackson’s letters are both a protest against the norms of a racist, capitalist society *and* a mode of writing that constitutes itself as a “better tactic” against the attacker. But it must be understood that language here is not limited to ideological struggle – this is not about a confrontation between representations – but instead Genet understands language as the terrain of a confrontation between desires. Which is to say, writing is a *primary* front of war. More than interpretation, Genet’s introduction to Jackson’s letters affirms a complicity in combat between two writers struggling against “the curse not of being black, but captive.”²¹

Genet makes this element of “combat” and the idea of a “book as a weapon” explicit by underscoring the specific conditions in which such a weapon is forged. He writes, “to understand the significance of this book as a weapon, a means of combat, the reader must not forget that George Jackson is in danger of death.”²² Jackson is quite literally writing with and for his life. In conjunction with the notion of the book as weapon, Genet’s introduction extracts the concrete elements that make up Jackson’s fighting “style.” These are defined very precisely as a *use of language* shot through with such violent hatred of the “words and syntax of his enemy,” that the writer “has only one recourse: to accept this language but to corrupt it so skillfully the whites will be caught in his trap.”²³ Such an analysis is not at all metaphoric. Similar to the “better tactic” described by Jackson in the scene of twisting an attacker’s leg, here one twists and pulls

²⁰ Jackson, *Soledad Brother*, 328.

²¹ Genet, Introduction to *Soledad Brother*, 335.

²² *Ibid.*, 333.

²³ *Ibid.*, 336. It is worth noting that Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of minor literature as a “minor use of a major language,” first elaborated in *Kafka* (1975) shares many affinities with Genet’s reading of Jackson’s letters. I discuss Jackson’s letters as a work of “minor literature” in this specific sense in the last section of this chapter.

on the joints of language itself. To write against the power, against the “grammarian’s jurisdiction,” necessitates combat and a skillful fighting style because language is first and foremost the imposition of an order.²⁴ Writing exerts the forces of life in and against the relations of power set up by a dominant, hegemonic language, and in doing so opens a lawless space of disobedient composition. Writing against the rules, Jackson literally pulls clauses from relations of dependency, releasing affects and visions of an outlaw expression. On every page Jackson puts in process the affirmation: “I’ve been a brigand all my life.”²⁵ But such expressions, however personal, cannot be limited to individual experience because it is precisely in breaking the laws of language (the laws that organize social relations) that, according to Genet, writers enter relations of complicity with all who challenge the existing social order. It is in the folds of such relations – in *complicity* against the enemy of all life – that the writer exceeds individual consciousness and invents “new concepts.”²⁶

In addition to providing an intensive reading of the letters (a reading motivated by complicity), Genet as we have noted was also crucial in seeing *Soledad Brother* published in France and in making the connection between Jackson’s case and the newly formed Prison Information Group. In November 1971, less than a year after *Les Frères de Soledad* was published in France and less than three months after Jackson was shot at San Quentin, the GIP put out the third issue of their pamphlet *Intolérable* devoted entirely to

²⁴ Cf. Deleuze and Guattari, “The elementary unit of language...is the order-word...Language is made not to be believed but to be obeyed, and to compel obedience.” *A Thousand Plateaus*, 76.

²⁵ Jackson, *Soledad Brother*, p 232.

²⁶ Genet, Introduction to *Soledad Brother*, p 337. Genet’s use of the term “complicity” could not be more apt for describing the kind of associations this chapter seeks to intensify between Deleuze and Jackson. In addition to obvious connotation of relations established “outside” and “against” the law, the term has embedded in it the idea of “folding together,” acting together in the fold, on the line. Cf. Gilles Deleuze, “learning” [i.e. the creation of concepts] always takes place in and through the unconscious, thereby establishing the bond of a profound *complicity* between nature and mind” *Difference and Repetition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994) p.165; and also *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992).

Jackson's writing and the controversial circumstances surrounding his death. As the editors of a collection of archival documents pertaining to the GIP's political activism put it, "It is above all with respect to the American situation that the work of the GIP is most important."²⁷

The GIP's interest in the American situation, however, was not only a response to the violence of Jackson's murder – which the group defined as a "political assassination" – but also an acknowledgment of Jackson's crucial role as a theorist of prison struggle.²⁸ The turn to Jackson in this moment is therefore more than an expression of solidarity between a group of intellectuals and the extreme circumstances faced by imprisoned (primarily black) Americans. It is above all an acknowledgement that Jackson's "theorizations of the relationship between military and political actions," his critique of the racist policies of the state, and his "class based analysis of prisoners" were, as they put it, *fundamental* to an international anti-capitalist, anti-racist prison movement that was in the process of taking shape in these years.²⁹ That is, the GIP was first and foremost interested in Jackson, not as a *victim* of state-sanctioned brutality, but as an

²⁷ Philippe Artières, Larent Quéro et Michelle Zancarini-Fournel, *Le groupe d'Information sur les prisons : Archives d'une lutte : 1970-1972*. (Paris : Editions de l'IMEC, 2003), 92 (my translation). Cf. "The resistance movements in the US – and particularly the black liberation movement – sustained the post May 1968 French movement and contributed to the redefinition of political action." (quoted in Heiner, 332).

Here it is crucial to recall what Dylan Rodriguez has called the post-civil rights "white reconstruction" that lead to the paradigmatic shift in state policy in the U.S. during the years of reactionary "law and order." That is, the "American situation" in the late 60s and 1970s refers to a very specific arrangement, largely in reaction to the movements of the previous decade (in this it is similar to the French and Italian situations where an increase in incarceration was directly related to the state's attempt to impose "law and order" in the face of mass social movements). Drawing on Ruth Wilson Gilmore's work, Rodriguez describes the proliferation of prisons in this period as tied to "an ascendant right wing [that] recoded domestic political insurrection – inscribed most centrally on the movements and collective bodies of radical and liberationist black and Third World people during the late 1960s – as criminality and rogue racial (read 'anti-white') vengeance." For an extended analysis of the American situation during these years see the entire first chapter of Rodriguez's extremely useful book *Forced Passages*, especially pages 16,19-21, and 24.

²⁸ GIP, Preface to *L'assassinat de George Jackson*, translated and reproduced in *Warfare in the American Homeland*, 138.

²⁹ GIP, "Jackson's Place in the Prison Movement," *Warfare*, 154-157.

intellectual. Jackson, according to the GIP, was one of the “first revolutionary *leaders* to acquire his political education entirely in prison.”³⁰

For the GIP it was precisely because of his experience as a prisoner and the brutal conditions of his political education, that Jackson’s life and writing could forcefully contest “many commonly accepted ideas in the history of the working-class movement about the populations of prisons.”³¹ Traditionally relegated to the notion of a “lumpen-proletariat,” prisoners had more often than not been understood within orthodox Marxism as a reactionary, criminal, not-yet-politically-conscious, sub-set of the revolutionary working-class. Yet, as Daniel Defert notes, “one of the accomplishments of the GIP was to erase that notion of lumpen-proletariat from political vocabulary.”³² Jackson’s letters, thus also destroy an image of prisoners that was (and perhaps still is) pervasive in many political contexts. It was for this reason that the GIP affirmed the event of Jackson’s thought and the injustice of his death as “the origin of the revolt that exploded in prisons, from Attica to Ashkelon. Prison struggle has now become a new front of revolution.”³³

The initial goal of the GIP – to create conditions that would permit prisoners to speak for themselves – was articulated in various statements made to the press

³⁰Prison Information Group, “Jackson’s Place in the Prison Movement,” *Intolerable III*. Translated and reproduced in *Warfare in the American Homeland*, 155 (my emphasis). Here another note opens up that might fill in the blanks of the GIP’s awareness of a much longer tradition of insurgent Black American thought and toward another counter-history of fugitive black intellectuals who also received their “entire political education” in conditions of captivity and outside established educational and political institutions. Before Jackson, David Walker, Henry Box Brown, Martin Delany, Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs, Malcolm X (to name just a few); and after Jackson countless “imprisoned radical intellectuals.” For more on this history and the continued practice of intellectual production by prisoners see, Dylan Rodriguez *Forced Passages: Imprisoned Radical Intellectuals and the U.S Prison Regime*.

³¹ See “Jackson’s Place in the Prison Movement” in *Warfare*, 155-156. .

³² Quoted in Julian Bourg, *From Revolution to Ethics*, 96.

³³ *Warfare*, 156-57. Here Jackson’s work is explicitly linked to other struggles both in the U.S. (Attica) but also in Palestine (Ashkelon is an Israeli prison) and to the prison movement in France, Italy, and beyond. For an extensive account of the Prison Information Group’s connections to international struggles see Julian Bourg, *From Revolution to Ethics*, Chapter 6.

(including a manifesto announcing the formation of the group) and within the pages of the group's pamphlet *Intolérable*, a name which underscored the group's objectives: "Our investigation is not designed to amass facts, but to increase our intolerance, and transform it into active intolerance."³⁴ The idea was that if prisoners were allowed to speak-out about conditions in the prisons it would lead to a transformation of social acceptance of those conditions. *L'assassinat de George Jackson*, however, was unique in that this pamphlet, unlike earlier ones that published the findings of the GIP surveys, shifted the analysis to the condition in which speech is captured.³⁵

In addition to an original preface written for the issue by Jean Genet (which includes long excerpts from *Soledad Brother*), and two interviews given by George Jackson just weeks before he was shot, much of the analysis included in the pamphlet pertains to the dis-information campaign waged in the American press after Jackson's death. It is clear from the text written by Foucault, Defert, and Bülow for the issue, "The Masked Assassination," that the group had studied *both* the circumstances surrounding Jackson's imprisonment and subsequent death, *and* Jackson's theoretical writings, which orient much of their analysis.

Given the concrete emphasis on practices of relay (between intellectual production and events), the GIP emphasizes the necessity to rethink political struggle in

³⁴ March 15 1971 *J'accuse*, quoted in Cecil Birch, 28.

³⁵While several critics of the GIP have sought to downplay the efficacy of the GIP's initial approach, pointing to inconsistencies in the group's methodology (Birch), denouncing their "delusional politics of self-representation" (Howe), or issuing warning against the dangers of emphasizing "self-representation" insofar as it leads to "an essentialist, utopian politics" (Spivak), the crucial role given by the GIP to George Jackson in their third pamphlet would remain inconceivable were it not for the group's radical reconfiguration of the role of the intellectual in political struggle, and the subsequent reformulation of the relationship between theory and practice. Cecil Birch argues, for example, that the GIP "constrained" prisoners subjectivity, yet Birch focuses almost entirely on the surveys published in the first pamphlet and has nothing to say about the significant place the GIP accorded to Jackson's own theorizations of prison struggle in the later pamphlet. See "The Groupe d'information sur les prisons: The Voice of Prisoners? Of Foucault's? *Foucault Studies*, No 5 (January 2008) p 26-47. All of this is to say that it was in the experience of the GIP's practice in process that new problems emerged and from the experience that a confrontation with intolerable conditions of prisons that new concepts were produced (concepts which are elaborated by Foucault and Deleuze's work in the late 1970s and 1980s.

terms laid out in Jackson's writings, and in particular the analysis worked out in prison of the function of racism in capitalism, a an international situation described best in terms of race war.³⁶ The authors of the text assert, "Jackson has already said it: What is happening in the prisons is war, a war having other fronts in the black ghettos, the army, and the courts."³⁷ The pamphlet quotes extensively from *Soledad Brother*, and for the purposes of this chapter it is important to note that included among these quotations is the sentence, "I may run, but all the time that I am, I'll be looking for a stick," which Deleuze and Guattari pick up and re-deploy a year later in *Anti-Oedipus*. Which is to say, Jackson's line is first invoked in the specific context of analyzing the shifting terrain of revolutionary struggle, specifically the extension of the "war front" to the "inside of prisons" and the emergence of a new type of revolutionary movement being expressed by militant black prisoners. For the GIP it is not at all a question of whether or not such prisoners are capable of "representing themselves," it is rather the problem of analyzing and creating conditions in which what militant prisoners such as Jackson have to say is blocked or enters into discourse. In Deleuze and Guattari's terms we might ask: what are the assemblages that produce effective statements for transforming intolerance to *active intolerance*? It is in this sense that the GIP understood their investigations as "political acts," concrete interventions and relays in complicity with the prisoners against a common enemy. Similar to the publication of *Soledad Brother* (both in the U.S. and in France), the GIP's intervention and publication of Jackson's thought are best conceived of as defense strategies in conditions of warfare – a war in which the power of the police, the prison authorities, the media, and above all racism, are understood as weapons of state and instruments of the capitalist capture of the forces of life.

³⁶ It is thus important to situate Foucault's lectures of the late 1970s on Bio-power and race war not as identical in conception to the GIP's but as coming out of the experience of the GIP.

³⁷ "Jackson's Place in the Prison Movement," *Warfare*, 159.

In the same interview mentioned above Deleuze remarks on the singularity of the GIP in the context of the French left in the years following May '68. According to Deleuze, two aspects defined the GIP as a "new type of group" (a new way of doing politics): first, a resolve to remain autonomous with respect to existing leftist organizations (and the party form of political organization more broadly) and second, a refusal to conceive of itself as an "enterprise," that is, to propose reforms on behalf of prisoners. Above all, Deleuze characterizes the group's originality by its "precision," which is to say, the intense focus it brought to very specific problems without attempting to forge a totalizing theory. Constructing relays between specific problems, instead of aiming to produce a general or totalizing ground for action, a group such as the GIP, according to Deleuze, introduced "a kind of thought-experiment" into political practice.³⁸

Deleuze and Foucault discussed the implications of such "thought-experiments" in the well-known text "Intellectuals and Power," a published conversation between the two that took place around the time of the GIP. Despite having been dismissed in the context of American "theory" (notably by Gayatri Spivak in her 1988 essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?"), the exchange marks a crucial transformation in defining the relationship between theory and practice, and more importantly, an important shift in conceptualizing the role intellectuals might play in political struggle.³⁹ In this context,

³⁸ Deleuze, *Two Regimes of Madness*, 272-281.

³⁹ Foucault's notion of "specific intellectual" marks an important departure from a certain (French) tradition of the intellectual as taking action in the name of superior values of truth and justice (from Voltaire to Zola to Sartre); the intellectual is not the guarantor of certain values, but becomes one point or line in a relay, an experimenter. Gayatri Spivak famously argues that Foucault and Deleuze "systematically avoid the issue of ideology," and "foreclos[e] the necessity of the difficult task of counter-hegemonic ideological production." Yet both explicitly define the place of "the intellectual" today not in a struggle on the terrain of representation (ideology), but rather in a "struggle against those forms of power that transform him into its object and instrument in the sphere of knowledge, truth, consciousness and discourse." (And it is crucial to note here the "form of power" operated by the University as precisely such an institution for transforming intellectual work into an "object and instrument" of Power. See Gilles Deleuze and Michel Foucault, "Intellectuals and Power" reprinted in *Desert Islands*). In this context, Deleuze and Guattari's repudiation of ideology critique as being inadequate to the analysis of the "organization of power" (and more specifically, their approach to language) takes on special relevance. It is hard to tell if Spivak misses the point, or just

“Intellectuals and Power,” marks a moment of concrete relay *between* the American and French situation insofar as much of what Deleuze and Foucault discuss in that conversation pertains directly to prison struggle and the implications of such struggles for political thinking. Given the crucial role Jackson played in that shift, it is even more disappointing that many of these connections have been lost in the sometimes confused reception of “French Theory” in American universities.

Deleuze, most likely thinking of Jean-Paul Sartre’s *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (1960), remarks in the course of the conversation on how earlier approaches to the question of the political role of intellectuals had been confined to an understanding of the relationship between theory and practice “in terms of a process of totalization.” Within such a framework the “theorizing intellectual” (and sometimes the Party) is thought to assume the position of a “representing or representative consciousness” (a point of sovereign, universally valid rational consciousness). Accordingly, (political) philosophy must become a discourse of *the* subject.⁴⁰ Deleuze goes on to note, however, that the relationship between thought and action is in the course of becoming something different, in large part due to the new political configurations associated with prison and “minority” struggles in both the U.S. and France (anti-colonial struggle, civil rights, women’s liberation, new workers struggles, gay and lesbian liberation movements). As a consequence of these events the role of intellectuals can now be better conceived of as a

feigns ignorance to support her own argument. To the extent that the critique of power rejects totalizing theories (including a too-totalizing Marxism) in favor of concrete analyses of discrete situations Spivak’s attempt to formulate a (totalizing) critique of D&F unfortunately repeats the very logic they are criticizing. See “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. eds. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271-313.

⁴⁰ Here Althusser’s attempt to produce a scientific discourse *without* a subject (i.e. a non-ideological discourse) marks out a significant departure within Marxist theory, but as I discuss in the following section this “structuralist” deviation runs into its own problems, not the least of which are its scientific ambitions and its almost paranoiac approach to the analysis of society.

“relay from one practice to another,” an experimental practice that necessarily remains “partial and fragmentary,” but for this reason, open to an outside, *open to new connections and events*.

What matters today is how intellectuals are hooked into movements. In our own moment it is becoming increasingly clear how the University (and perhaps the university “theorist”) has all too often functioned to block these relays, cutting-off what goes on in the institution from the world outside its walls. Deleuze makes an important point that thirty years later is still relevant, “If no one uses it, beginning with the theoretician himself (who then ceases to be a theoretician) then a *theory is useless*.” What we gain from this definition is an insight that an intellectual practice (whether it be political, artistic, or philosophical) that attempts to ground itself in the certainty of a general theory or universal subject necessarily cuts itself off from the world. Theory blocked from new experiences and the process of invention becomes a redundant discourse and, more importantly, loses precision and the intensity of *producing concepts in relay with concrete problems*. It is only in relay with other practices that thought enters into an experimental process (assuming all the dangers such a process might entail).

Experimentation – that is the production of concepts in relay with concrete problems – involves a dimension of creation, real events that “escape history.”⁴¹ It is for this reason that thought-experiments of the past cannot so easily be reduced to the historical trash-bin. The production of concepts cannot be evaluated in terms of so-called “successes” or “failures” considered against a pre-existent set of values or standards, or the truths of universal history. Accordingly, and contra Foucault’s later repudiation of

⁴¹ Cf. “What History grasps of the event is its effectuation in states of affairs or in lived experience, but the event in its becoming, in its specific consistency, in its self-positing *as concept*, escapes History,” *What is Philosophy?*, 110 (my emphasis).

the work of the GIP, Deleuze rejects the notion that the GIP was a failure, affirming it instead as a temporary “forum for experimentation.”⁴²

Deleuze’s remarks on the GIP enable us to assign a concept to the group that names the relationship between the historical constraints in a given period and experimentation. In a particularly moving passage, Deleuze remarks on the forces of thought wielded in and against the experience of the *intolerable*.

For Foucault, to think was to react to the intolerable things one experienced...If thinking did not reach the intolerable, there was no need for thinking. Thinking was always thinking at something’s limit.⁴³

Such a concept, forged out of the encounter with prison struggle, gives us a name for the “the conditions that destroy life” (Jackson). But what’s more it gives us a figure of thought as resistance to those conditions. The notion of the intolerable recurs like a refrain throughout Deleuze’s writing and names a threshold encountered in practices of thought, writing, and politics. Importantly, as a result of the work of the GIP, the term is also linked to the “Jackson affair” as an intolerable event of political assassination. But what’s important to remember is that Deleuze’s philosophy emphasizes concrete practices of *resistance to the intolerable* – it is always in the uncertain combat of a life that escapes the intolerable that something new emerges. It is only in this capacity to resist the intolerable that the complicity between philosophy and revolutionary struggle becomes virtually realized: “they have resistance in common – their resistance to death, to servitude, to the intolerable, to shame, and to the present.”⁴⁴

In describing his own involvement with the “thought-experiment” that was the GIP, Deleuze recalls, “The GIP had the beauty of one of Foucault’s books. I joined

⁴² Unless otherwise noted all quotations in the preceding two paragraphs are from Gilles Deleuze and Michel Foucault, “Intellectuals and Power,” reprinted in *Desert Islands and Other Texts (1953-1974)* Semiotexte Foreign Agents: New York, 2003. 206-214.

⁴³ Deleuze, *Two Regimes of Madness*, 274.

⁴⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 110.

wholeheartedly because I was fascinated.”⁴⁵ While such a statement makes it possible to situate Deleuze’s encounter with Jackson’s writing within the specific context of the prison movement as it existed in the early 1970s, the value of Jackson’s thought for Deleuze (recall the value of a theory is in its *use*) must be understood to also unfold in a process of becoming that transforms it, carrying out new experimentations. Connected to, but also departing in crucial ways from the use of Jackson’s writing we have discussed in relation to Genet or the GIP, *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* picks up a single line in order to carry it into a new arrangement, to continue experimentation begun in the midst of the GIP but which does not have to end there.

4.2 Writing Absolute Speed

When Deleuze asserts, “in the act of writing there’s an attempt to make life something more than personal, to free life from what imprisons it,” or he and Guattari affirm that in writing “it is always a question of freeing life wherever it is imprisoned, or of tempting it into uncertain combat,” they seem to describe something quite abstract.⁴⁶ It’s easy to pass over these statements or think of them as metaphor or hyperbole, but *Soledad Brother* changes things. In Jackson’s prison letters we encounter an act of writing in which the stakes of “freeing life from what imprisons it” are eminently more concrete. Here, for instance, is how Jackson characterizes the life coursing through his book: “There will be a special page in the book of life for the men who have crawled back from the grave. This page will tell of utter defeat, ruin, passivity, and subjection in one breath, and in the next,

⁴⁵ Gilles Deleuze, *Two Regimes of Madness*, 273. Deleuze’s involvement in the GIP is somewhat downplayed by the editors of *Warfare in the American Homeland*, whose only reference to Deleuze comes in an editors note “some also attribute authorship of this pamphlet to Gilles Deleuze, but research has not been unable to support this claim,” 157. It is not the intention of this chapter to argue that the experience with the GIP determined Deleuze and Guattari’s thinking (in fact there are important differences) but it is important to note Deleuze’s own reporting of his enthusiastic involvement with GIP insofar as it also highlights a key situation out of which the interest in language, capitalism as “semiotic domination,” and the question of the “conditions of producing statements” becomes a main focus for both Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus*.

overwhelming victory and fulfillment."⁴⁷ And later, Jackson explicitly presents his writing as an act that defies not only the conditions of captivity, but death itself.

Describing the "uncertain combat" writing entails in an image of unrelenting opposition, Jackson writes,

My credo is to seize the pig by the tusks and ride him till his neck breaks. If fortuitous outcome of circumstance allows him to prevail over me – again – then I want to have *this carefully worked-up comment* prepared. I want something to remain, to torment his ass, to haunt him, to make him know in no uncertain terms that he did incur this nigger's sore disfavor."⁴⁸

Jackson's "carefully worked up comment" remains as an expression of the above stated credo. Books are weapons that outlive the warrior, but are forever stamped with his name. To think of George Jackson's books – *Soledad Brother* and *Blood in My Eye* – as weapons, we need to first understand that they were produced in a situation of war.⁴⁹

More precisely, to describe the conditions in which these books were written as those of warfare necessitates isolating the prison itself as "key weapon in the state's fight to preserve the existing conditions of class domination, racism and poverty."⁵⁰ And further demands identifying the institutionalized racism of the prison as part of a broader strategy of confining insurgent bodies and voices that challenge the laws that underwrite these conditions of warfare, laws that entrench everything from relations of property to the production of subjectivity established by a dominant language. To think of writing as an act of "uncertain combat" and "freeing life from what imprisons it" we have to analyze how writing operates concretely, and as I will argue, to do that we have to

⁴⁶ Deleuze, *Negotiations*, 143; Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 171.

⁴⁷ Jackson, *Soledad Brother*, 86.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 311 (my italics).

believe in a very special line connecting what's written in a "book of life" to a world "outside" the book, a *line of escape* that "knows the way out."⁵¹

All of Jackson's writing makes an essential distinction between the mechanisms that operate to maintain what he terms "captive society" and the forces of resistance that map an escape from those mechanisms. We can identify those mechanisms as first and foremost law, language, and money. Jackson writes, "being captured was the first of my fears...it is the thing I've been running from all my life."⁵² Running from capture (in the broadest possible sense, as everything that establishes relations of domination), asserts a primary and superior force with respect to capture. Which is to say, *running is outside capture* and names the force that moves through all of Jackson's writing. It is more than a response to fear, and much more than a reaction to existing conditions, because what it names is a movement that is in every way autonomous with respect to capture.

Soledad Brother lays bear the mechanism of what Jackson termed "captive society" and conceptualizes this mechanism as an historical arrangements of domination organized to protect existing social relations (above all property rights) and defined by racialized state-sanctioned domestic and foreign warfare.⁵³ "Captive society," in addition to providing a framework for understanding the mechanism of capitalism, also names a

⁴⁹ Published posthumously by Stronghold Consolidated Productions *Blood In My Eye* (1972) continues and elaborates Jackson's analysis of American racism and capitalist "neo-slavery" in *Soledad Brother*. The book might best be described as a treatise on urban guerilla warfare. While this chapter is almost exclusively concerned with *Soledad Brother*, it should be noted here that Jackson explicitly described this book – its method of criticism – as a weapon. The dedication reads "To the black Communist youth – To their fathers – We will now criticize the unjust with the weapon." George Jackson, *Blood In My Eye* (Black Classic Press: Baltimore, 1990).

⁵⁰ Angela Y. Davis quoted without reference in Brady Heiner, "Foucault and the Black Panthers," 331.

⁵¹ *Soledad Brother*, 69.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 13.

⁵³ Here what I term "property rights" should be understood to include "whiteness as a property" (Gilmore) and a social arrangement in which such rights – understood in an expanded sense – underwrite a "right to make live."

situation in which racism must be understood not as a symptom but as a fundamental to the operations of dominant social arrangements.⁵⁴ It is for this reason that the refusal to adjust to this arrangement, far from naming a renunciation of political action or a flight from reality, involves the continual composition of an escape. To run in a captive society entails an absolute defiance in the face of those mechanisms that seek to “imprison life” (everything from capture in the dominant structures of language and subjectivity, to capture by the wage, and finally, captivity behind the walls of the prison).

It is above all in enacting escape, movement, running, that Jackson’s writing resists. “I do my best thinking on my feet.”⁵⁵ Writing here makes concrete the force of *thought as movement*. Throughout *Soledad Brother* Jackson’s writing charts passages that open up by dismantling language, “dropping the syntax” of dominant modes of thought, and constructing escape routes beneath and outside the laws of captive society. In unleashing the forces of movement in writing, *Soledad Brother’s* lines of escape connect to a *revolutionary war-machine* – the name Deleuze and Guattari give to those inventions of absolute speed that fundamentally challenge the mechanisms of captive society.

For Jackson, “captive society” names a social arrangement that is best understood as a “fascist system” defined by “a police state wherein the political ascendancy is tied into and protects the interests of the upper class—characterized by militarism, racism, and imperialism.”⁵⁶ In defining fascism in terms of a *police state*, Jackson draws out an important insight: the function of the state in a “captive society” is not exactly a political function but a *policing* function. The state itself is here revealed as an instrument in the

⁵⁴Michel Foucault’s analysis of the function of *racism* as legitimizing the “right to kill” (that is underwriting the rights of sovereignty) by a power that assumes itself as a “power to make live” (biopower) is quite perceptive here. See *Society Must Be Defended*.

⁵⁵ Jackson, *Soledad Brother*, 72.

⁵⁶ For a recent analysis of Jackson’s description of the U.S. prison regime as an instrument of a “fascist state,” see Dylan Rodriguez, “Radical Lineages: George Jackson, Angela Davis, and the Fascism Problematic” in *Forced Passages: Imprisoned Radical Intellectuals and the U.S. Prison Regime*.

arsenal of an “upper class,” which may very well exceed the limits of a particular state. In a “fascist system” power does not simply function through the political mechanism of the state, and it cannot be adequately understood in the traditional terms of political sovereignty. Instead it must be understood as an international socio-economic arrangement that is fundamentally organized and supported by war.⁵⁷

Jackson’s conceptualization of the function of a “police state” allows us to see why *domination* – in addition to being oppressive and exploitative – takes the form of conquest, occupation, and above all capture. More importantly, it is for this reason that resistance must first be understood as counter-attack and escape. In defining resistance to the militarism, racism, and imperialism of a “fascist system,” Jackson requires a political concept of revolutionary struggle that is not reducible to the terms of the state. In an interesting moment in one of the letters Jackson invokes a “war without terms.”⁵⁸ This concept, however, should not be understood as a glorification of war, but more as an absolute refusal to reduce the forces of resistance to any externally imposed terms or ends. Jackson’s “war without terms” names precisely a movement and mobilization of forces that would refuse “capture” even by the so-called rational ends of the state. Rather, “war without terms” describes an ongoing struggle and experimentation that

⁵⁷ Jackson, *Soledad Brother*, 18. Cf. Deleuze and Guattari, “When fascism builds itself a totalitarian State, it is not in the sense of a State army taking power, but of a war-machine taking over the state” (TP, 230). Here again reference to Foucault’s insights regarding the fundamentally “fascistic” tendencies of modern states when *racism* functions to legitimize the rights of war and murder for biopower, thus the paradigmatic example of Nazism in *Society Must Be Defended* begins to resonate with the institutionalized racism of U.S. prisons in striking ways.

⁵⁸ Jackson, *Soledad Brother*, 222. At one point, in a letter to his younger brother Jonathon, Jackson also invokes “this war of life,” a war made nearly unbearable by the conditions existing then (as now) in a racist, capitalist system. But Jackson rejects all illusions that revolution brings about the end of struggle, his vision of a “better life” does not rest on a notion of establishing a peaceful, harmonious utopia. Such an end – a life without problems – would be nothing more than a new form of capture (and it is precisely such illusions that supports the state’s fantasies of security and order). Jackson writes, “Capitalism must be destroyed, and after it is destroyed, if we find that we still have problems, we’ll work them out. That, *the nature of life, struggle, permanent revolution*; that is the situation we were born into.” Capitalism – “captive society” – must be resisted, not because it is constantly producing a situation of struggle (such would be the “nature of life”), but because it overwhelmingly attempts to *determine the terms of a war*.

invents new relations outside the terms of a police state. In this way Jackson's analysis connects to Deleuze and Guattari's concept of a revolutionary war machine that is both against the fascist war machine of capitalism and against the state (the model "apparatus of capture").

War in this sense – war as movement and the invention of relations – refers not to "picking up a gun" or pursuing an enemy to his death (though it may include these), but rather names the primacy or the autonomy of fugitive life "outside" the law and the terms it seeks to impose on life. "War without terms" names an active process of creation and expresses the forces one must compose while running from the law in order to "change the conditions that destroy life." It is above all the distinction between the reactionary police state of capitalist society organized in war-mode – a destructive machine that alternates between "extermination" and "the peace of generalized terror" (Deleuze and Guattari) – and a revolutionary movement of active resistance (also in war-mode) that animates all of Jackson's writing and gives it its militant force.

Jackson's analysis of "captive society" moves within (but is not finally reducible to) a trajectory of revolutionary Marxism. More specifically, his books can be situated within the encounter between black power and Maoism, an encounter that was crucially enabled by Frantz Fanon and the national liberation struggles of colonized people around the world in the middle of the twentieth century. Thus, while being situated in the specific context of race and class war in the United States, Jackson's writing is also hooked into the international revolutionary movements of his time.⁵⁹ Jackson explicitly

⁵⁹ With respect to the above discussion of Jackson's "war without terms," it is crucial to mention here the Maoist notion of a "people's war" and it is no doubt within this broad framework that Jackson's militancy might first be understood. Moreover, it is well-known that when Jackson became a member of the Black Panther party he received the military rank of "Field Marshal." As already noted *Blood In My Eye* can be read as a treatise on urban guerrilla warfare (a translation of the military strategies of national liberation struggles in the Third World into the American situation, "black colony," etc.). All of this is crucial background, but to some extent falls outside the scope of the present study, for more on these questions see Heiner "Foucault and the Black Panthers."

inscribes his name within this tradition in a letter to Greg Armstrong, his editor, which also serves as a prefatory “autobiography” to *Soledad Brother*. Following a description of the circumstances of his imprisonment – in 1960 at the age of eighteen he received a sentence of “one year to life” for stealing seventy dollars from a gas station – Jackson gives an account of his political education,

I met Marx, Lenin, Trotsky, Engels, and Mao when I entered prison and they redeemed me. For the first four years I studied nothing but economics and military ideas.⁶⁰

But Jackson adds a new problem to this tradition...

I met black guerrillas, George “Big Jake” Lewis, and James Carr, W.L. Nolen, Bill Christmas, Torry Gibson and many, many others. We attempted to *transform the black criminal mentality into a black revolutionary mentality*. As a result, each of us has been subjected to years of the most vicious reactionary violence by the state.⁶¹

The problem Jackson can be said to bring to the tradition of radical Marxism, in addition to being a critique of the racist dimensions of capitalist society, is that of composing the revolutionary potentials inscribed in even the most minimal acts of rebellion. Jackson and his comrades refuse to fall into the trap of thinking revolutionary consciousness from the perspective of a theory or supposedly advanced universal “scientific” standpoint, and instead begin from where revolutionary desires are first expressed: the multiplicity of acts of resistance to capture and defiance of existing laws that dominant society codes as “crime” (including, and uppermost for Jackson, the criminalization of blackness as such). Which is to say, Jackson’s analysis begins and is motivated by all those figures a more orthodox Marxism would relegate to the status of “lumpen.” On the contrary Jackson writes, “Revolution is illegal. It’s against the law. It’s prohibited. It will not be allowed. It is clear that the revolutionary is a lawless man. The outlaw and the lumpen will make

⁶⁰ Jackson, *Soledad Brother*, 16. Cf. “Mao Tse-Tung, leader of the Chinese Communist party, has written many works on politics and war” (61).

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 16. (my emphasis).

the revolution.”⁶² In addition to affirming the revolutionary as lawless this statement also refuses to subject the forces of revolution to a logic of law, including the so-called “laws of history.”

Jackson’s complicity with the “lumpen” is important to highlight because it indicates a desire to never give up on the primacy of those strategies of escape that are a matter of survival in “captive society.” However ineffective they may be in their initial attempt, Jackson takes seriously even the most minor acts of rebellion and, what’s more, intensifies the implications of those minor acts by following them through – composing them on a line of thought or escape. In an early letter to his father, Jackson expresses this idea in its nascent form, “there are those who resist and rebel but do not know what, who, why, or how exactly they should go about this. They are aware but confused. They are the least fortunate, for they end where I have ended. By using half measures and failing dismally to effect any real improvement in their condition, they fall victim to the full fury and might of the system’s repressive agencies.”⁶³

It is above all the focus on war – the specific situation of a class and race based war in American society – that enables Jackson to resist moralizing discourses that would seek to separate “criminal mentality” from “revolutionary mentality.” Such a resistance, however, does not lead to a simple glorification of crime but instead maps a line that first emerging *in crime* proceeds – following its own intrinsic consistency – to a *revolutionary insight*: “criminals and crime arise from material, economic, sociopolitical causes.”⁶⁴ Crime is first and foremost an expression of resistance to intolerable social conditions. Such an insight not only leads to a critique of the unequal distribution of punishments

⁶² Jackson, *Blood In My Eye*, 124.

⁶³ *Soledad Brother*, 56.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 18.

brought to bear against different kinds of “crimes” (most clearly indicated by disproportionate criminalization of people of color, poor, and working-class populations), but it also enables the distinction between *those who resist the laws of the state from below*, whose combat must be understood as defensive strategies against the excesses of a capitalist criminality, and *the brutality imposed on people from above* by a Power that, despite the political theatrics of representational democracy, quite literally takes the form of open war on its own people.⁶⁵ Jackson’s analysis of capitalism situates the so-called “lumpen” or “criminal” – from the kid on the street to the convict doing life in prison – on the front line of the class and race war that defines the conditions of an American experience for many people, and especially for those populations who bear the brunt of capitalist brutality. The force of Jackson’s thought emerges precisely from the fact that he begins with the experiences of those, including himself, for whom the necessity of escape is a dimension of everyday life.

Jackson’s attempt to transform crime into revolution commences with his own “struggle with this American dream.”⁶⁶ He writes, “I could play the criminal aspects of my life down some but then it wouldn’t be me. That was the pertinent part, the thing at school and home I was constantly rejecting *in process*.”⁶⁷ With these words Jackson gives dignity to what every “juvenile delinquent” intuitively knows from a very early age. But Jackson enables us to carry this intuition further by mapping a consistent line that connects an initial *process of rejection* (the “criminal aspect”) to an ongoing *process of invention* (a “black revolutionary mentality” in fact). Throughout Jackson’s writing the

⁶⁵ Capital also challenges the regulations of the state, subverts rationality, and often commits infractions against existing laws – global capitalism is also organized in “war-mode.” For a full discussion of the distinctions between states as “apparatuses of capture,” capitalist world-war machines, and revolutionary war machines, see *A Thousand Plateaus* 424-473.

⁶⁶ *Soledad Brother*, 83.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 3 (my emphasis).

criminal aspect in process names a desire – I would call it an ethic – expressing all the “atypical features of [a] character.”⁶⁸ *In process* names the life running through Jackson’s letters. In the course of the letters we see a process of desire in the act of composing itself through writing; a character who is consistent (never giving up on the “criminal aspect...in process”) but also, importantly, “atypical.” This second feature is crucial, because in emphasizing atypicality – what one might even call singularity - Jackson resists thinking character in terms of development. Instead, he affirms character as a process of differentiation and irregular (lawless) force. Such character not only mobilizes an incisive critique of “the causes at the very center of Amerikan political and economic life” (namely, the militarism, racisms, and imperialism, that characterize a “fascist” police state), but also constitutes itself as a counter-force: a weapon forged in an act of writing that maps a line of escape.

Earlier I noted that for the Prison Information Group Jackson’s name signaled a historical shift in which “prison struggle ha[d] become a *new front* of revolution.” Such a statement remains crucial for anti-racist and anti-capitalist political struggle today.⁶⁹ Yet, as we read *Soledad Brother* we find Jackson’s continually drawing out not so much a front, but a line that emerges *before* prison and maps a specific relation of forces. It’s not in prison but *in the street* that we first encounter Jackson’s line of escape. It’s in the street that a figure in movement first appears and asserts the autonomy of a life on that line.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 328.

⁶⁹ A struggle that since Jackson’s time (the 1970s) has only become more urgent, as the current “prison regime” in the United States holds more than two million American citizens in captivity, and since the so-called “war on terror” was declared can also be understood to expand well beyond national borders. The expansion of the prison population in the last thirty years in large part due to a racially coded “war on drugs” See Michelle Alexander’s recent book *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (2010). For a further discussion of the function of the “war on terror” and prison technologies (including torture) see Hishaam Aidi “Jihadis in the Hood: Race, Urban Islam, and the War on Terror,” and William F. Pinar “Cultures of Torture” both in *Warfare in the American Homeland*.

On the first page of *Soledad Brother* we encounter a decisive affirmation. Jackson writes, “All my life I pretended with my folks, it was *the thing in the street that was real*.”⁷⁰ This formulation expresses the conditions of real experience upon which the entirety of Jackson’s thought moves. Such conditions, however, must be understood not as those imposed by “captive society,” but rather as immanent to a practice of writing that produces its own conditions. What I wish to emphasize here is that when Jackson affirms that “the thing in the street...was *real*,” we must first understand a mode of writing that thinks the real as a category of construction. If Jackson’s fight is above all with the “conditions that destroy life,” we must also affirm that the first act of resistance always has to do with inventing new conditions.

In order to get at the singularity of Jackson’s invention, however, it is necessary to make a detour through what is probably the best known theory of the underlying structures of society that are said to enable the ruling class to “reproduces existing conditions of production” – Louis Althusser’s “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses.”⁷¹ At a decisive point in that text Althusser presents the reader with a structuralist *mise-en-scene* of interpellation: a subject being “hailed” by a police officer in the street. According to Althusser this scene illustrates the function of ideology in “interpellating individuals as subjects,” but, importantly, Althusser cautions us that the example should be understood as a “theoretical scene,” a “little theoretical theater” in fact, because “in reality” such interpellation, according to the structuralist interpretation, functions “always already.”⁷² While the scene of hailing as it is presented in the theater

⁷⁰Letter to Greg Armstrong June 10, 1970. Jackson, *Soledad Brother*, 3 (my emphasis).

⁷¹ Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” *Lenin and Philosophy* (Monthly Review Press: New York, 2001), 115. Many thanks go to Abe Geil for the following analysis and his insights and encouragement in pursuing this comparison of Althusser’s scene of interpellation to Jackson’s scene of escape.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 119

(i.e. as imaginary), takes place in time, we are to understand that “in reality these things happen without any succession.”⁷³ For a general theory of ideology what is important is not what actually happens in the street, but rather the analysis of the *structure* of interpellation, a structure that is, like the structures of the unconscious, said to be “without history,” or “eternal.”⁷⁴ As a consequence one cannot “break with ideology” except through the production of a *scientific discourse* (i.e. a discourse that is without a subject, and therefore, “outside” ideology).⁷⁵

In this essay, Althusser sought to describe nothing less than a general theory of ideology, which is to say, a general theory of the production of subjectivity that would adequately account for its “omni-historical” reality; i.e. its existence as a transhistorical theoretical structure.⁷⁶ What is at stake in Althusser’s “theoretical theater” is an account of the underlying structure of subjectivity as such insofar as it is only at this level that the “reproduction of the conditions of production” can be theorized: “there is no ideology except by the subject and for subjects.”⁷⁷

We will call Althusser’s *mise-en-scene* of interpellation a “structural scene” insofar as it operates to make visible the underlying structure of ideology, famously defined as “a representation of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence.”⁷⁸ Recall that Althusser introduces his scene “along the lines of the most commonplace everyday police (or other) hailing: ‘hey you there!’”

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 118

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 109. Here it should be noted that much of Althusser’s thinking draws upon Jacques Lacan’s account of the unconscious, which importantly, includes a theory of language (i.e. “the unconscious is *structured like a language*”), we will return to these points in the final section.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 117, 119

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 108

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 115

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 109

And then asserts,

Assuming that the theoretical scene I have imagined takes place in the street, the hailed individual will turn around. By this mere one-hundred-and-eighty degree physical conversion, he becomes a subject.⁷⁹

Althusser goes on to note that, “with the exception of ‘bad subjects’ who on occasion provoke the intervention of one of the detachments of the (repressive) State Apparatus,” ideology “in the vast majority of cases” functions to produce subjects who will “work by themselves” to reproduce the conditions of productions, beginning with the production of themselves as subjects. In the “structural scene” the subject quite literally captures itself.

Now picture this: a young black teenager running in the street chased by a cop,

There just wasn't any possibility of a policeman beating me in a footrace. A target that's really moving with evasive tactics is almost impossible to hit with a short barreled revolver. Through a gangway with a gate that only a few can operate with speed (it's dark even in the day) up a stairway through a door. Across roofs with seven to ten foot jumps in between (the pig is mainly working for money, bear in mind, I am running for my life).⁸⁰

Here the reader encounters a scene in the street that is not “theoretical theater,” but as noted earlier, *real*. To be clear: to affirm with Jackson that *the thing in the street is real* refers, not to the realness of just any street, but to this street machined by revolutionary desire. A machinic unconscious expressed in an act of writing gives us this street. We will call this passage from *Soledad Brother* a “machinic scene.”

By entering this street we also link Jackson to Félix Guattari, for whom structuralist accounts of the Althusserian variety could not think society or the unconscious (desire) in their machinic dimensions. Structuralism, with its “theoretical theater” sets up structure as the key to interpretation, theory as the analysis of ideology,

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 118.

⁸⁰ Jackson, *Soledad Brother*, 11

and the real as impossible. What Jackson and Guattari enable us to think, however, is *the real as a category of construction*. Jackson street, exactly as we encounter it in this passage, is real first because it expresses the street as a site of contestation (rather than an illustration of always already captured subjects), but even more so because it writes this real into the world.⁸¹ Opposed to a general theory of ideology illustrated by a “structural scene,” this “machinic scene” of the street-as-real gives us a blueprint for how resistance works.

In Jackson’s scene two characters are put in relation: “a pig” and “a target that’s really moving” run through the street. The very fact that they are running would give us no small trouble were we to attempt to abstract a fixed structure from this scene, but more importantly, in this street no subject obediently turns around in response to a hail. A life escapes in the machine scene because all of the relations are arranged to make perceptible a life that runs. This life is not “imagined,” but in fact the very agency machining this street. “A target that’s really moving” shows us that we are “always already” in motion on this street.

On Jackson’s street there’s a policeman (most likely white) who is “working for money.” A “pig” motivated by a wage, an external incentive; a man whose movement, sweat, breath, *and labor* are all already “captured” by the money he receives in exchange for his time spent policing other people. What’s more in Jackson’s “machine scene” we see that the pig’s a pig, but we also see the mechanism that makes him a “neo-slave” (“working for money”); the cop’s just as much a victim of captive society as most people.

Then there’s this other atypical character “running for my life.” Again, there’s no subject to speak of in this scene. What we encounter instead is a “target that’s really

⁸¹ Eric Alliez underscores this crucial dimension of Guattari’s thought in a recent talk “Rhizome.” Available at: <http://backdoorbroadcasting.net/2010/04/from-structure-to-rhizome/>. (accessed May 5, 2010).

moving” and a series of clauses expressing that movement: “*through* a gangway *up* a stairway *through* a door. *Across* roofs...” A series of prepositional phrases affirm a movement that takes precedence even over place. A rush of normally dependent clauses set free from their structures are made autonomous in an act of writing. It is precisely at the level of these free phrases, which assemble all the elements of the street as real and, most importantly, animate the one who runs, that a machinic, revolutionary unconscious starts functioning. *Soledad Brother* stages an event of a revolutionary footrace motored by desire operating at full speed (“I do my best thinking on my feet”).

The cop who chases someone in the street moves with *relative* speed, he’s animated and determined by two external factors (working for money and the resistance he encounters to his pursuit). But a “target that’s really moving” opens a “gate that only a few can operate with speed,” and this opening happens with *absolute speed* (life). A life operating with absolute speed opens a gate just as it breaks through the bolts of language – sets language as such running – *up* a stairway *through* a door. In unlocking *that* gate – the gate of language – writing releases *affects*, “which relate only to the moving body itself.”⁸² Were we to name the affect released in this passage we might call it joy – the joy of one’s capacity to run. But the scene also produces *percepts* by making visible exactly *how* a body runs, *how* a life resists capture. These are blocks of sensation expressed *in* and *through* writing – joy expressed *in* movement. There’s a kind of cinematic force in this passage recalling those scenes in *Killer of Sheep* – leaping across roofs. A passage in and through blackness – “it’s dark even in the day” – becomes a vision of autonomy. Jackson

⁸² Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 400.

does not simply reproduce a “scene” for the reader (this is not a memory), but instead makes speed – that which motors the scene – immanent to writing itself.⁸³

Through these passages a connection can be made, quite directly, between *Soledad Brother’s* machinic-scene and an important discussion in *A Thousand Plateaus*. In “1227: Treatise On Nomadology – the War Machine” Deleuze and Guattari make a distinction between “weapons and tools on the bases of their usage.” They propose to define the difference between the tools and weapons according to their relation to the force that animates them: a tool is always moved by an *external* force, while a weapon is moved by an *intrinsic* force. Accordingly, Deleuze and Guattari define a “weapon” as that which has “a privileged relation with projection.”⁸⁴ Like affects (defined above) a weapon is to be considered as essentially having to do with a relation of a force to itself, movement animated by “cause” that is immanent to a moving body. Weapons, as opposed to tools, name projectile forces and “appear only when a force is considered in itself.”⁸⁵ In the scene above “a target that’s really moving” paradoxically becomes a weapon in this sense. A “target” is usually defined by the one who aims at it – in this case someone with a “short-barreled revolver” – but what happens in the scene is a complete reversal of relations: the target becomes an agent, a weapon in fact. Which is to say, the movement expressed in the above scene is not animated by the cop in pursuit, but entirely arranged by a “force considered in itself.”

The distinction between tools and weapons is carried further into an analysis of the difference between two opposed assemblages: a “work-regime” (which in the scene above would be indicated by the cop in pursuit) and what Deleuze and Guattari call

⁸³ Here all thanks to my favorite “partner in crime,” Luka Arsenjuk for his enthusiasm and precision in thinking through this passage with me, and especially for noting the cinematic dimension of this scene.

⁸⁴ *A Thousand Plateaus*, 395.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 395-400.

“free action.”⁸⁶ A work regime is an arrangement in which the forces of movement are relativized, and therefore “captured.” A tool is an object put to work by a power external to itself; in the case of a tool, speed is always *relative* to the resistances it encounters. In the scene above the cop is quite literally a tool of the police state. Opposed in every way to this regime of relative speed, tools, and work, however, are those movements and inventions of free action, which are defined not by a relative speed, but by *absolute speed*. In Jackson’s “footrace” a figure of movement “operating with speed” outdistances the cop. “There just wasn’t any possibility of a policeman beating me in a footrace.” Despite the fact that the cop has a gun and despite the fact that the cop has the full power of the law on his side – the “target” *beats the cop!* Jackson’s speed expresses an absolute force propelled, not by fear, but by joy. A black life that “picks up speed” in a defiant act of writing affirms itself in this passage.

There’s a deep complicity between all the kids who boast about outrunning the cops and the act of writing this scene, but I think there’s also an crucial difference. Perhaps it’s a matter of intensity and of finding more effective concrete weapons to challenge not only the cop who chases you in the street, but also those mechanism that would capture a scene of running in the language of domination (i.e. where the one who runs would always already be understood as a criminal or “bad subject,” as in Althusser). But *Soledad Brother* gives us this scene, not from a theoretical distance, and certainly not from the perspective of the law, but *in intestices of language operated by one who runs*. Jackson’s scene assembles all the elements of running as an expression of autonomous force – writing as free action, thought in war-mode.

Jackson’s style, as Genet perceived, is enacted in *writing*. Jackson affirms “the thing in the street” as real – but as we have seen such an affirmation is enacted in a

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 397.

writing that thinks the real as a category of *escape and construction*: “to escape is to produce the real, to create life, to find a weapon.”⁸⁷ A life that escapes, that refuses to “adjust” to any externally imposed power is also a life that continually transforms itself, puts the criminal aspect *in process*. It is only in this way that the refusal of capture gains consistency and force. It is in this sense a *noble* life, a mobile obstinacy.⁸⁸

If earlier we emphasized the singular way the GIP turned to Jackson as an intellectual in his own right, an “imprisoned radical intellectual” as Dylan Rodriguez might say, here we must acknowledge that Jackson, alongside studying Marx and Mao, Du Bois and Fanon, turns to the street as a site of affective and conceptual force. It’s in the street – “right in the middle of things,” as Jackson puts it – that the process gets going.⁸⁹ It’s in running away and figuring out how to escape from the law that thought picks up speed. Jackson writes, “all my life I’ve done exactly what I wanted to.” A militant political-ethics is expressed in this passage: *a refusal to cede on a desire to run*.

Such desire produces the conditions of Jackson’s conceptual uniqueness, which emerges most strikingly in his analysis of the continuity between slavery and what he defines as the “neo-slavery” of contemporary capitalist society. Jackson defines “neo-slavery” in useful terms: “if you don’t make any more in wages than you need to live,

⁸⁷ Deleuze and Parnet, *Dialogues II*, 36.

⁸⁸ “Noble life,” as a life of becoming and transformation comes from Friedrich Nietzsche’s *Will to Power*. Jackson’s letters constantly attest to “noble life” in this sense: an ongoing process of self transformation; ethics as anti-morality. A strong example of this is expressed, for instance, in Jackson’s statement “I am deeply sorry that I ever told a lie, stole anything robbed and cheated at anything – mainly because it is so much like conforming to Western ways” (118) and can be seen with particularly force in his ongoing battle with his own misogyny. In the early letters Jackson constantly remarks on the inferiority of women, their need for direction etc. and yet in the final letters Jackson comes to repudiate these earlier views – “I understand exactly what the women’s role should be. The very same as the man’s. Intellectually, there is very little difference between male and female. The differences we see in bourgeois society are all conditioned and artificial” (298) – a transformation that is no doubt due in large part to the intensity of Jackson’s encounters with women such as Fay Stenders and above all Angela Y. Davis. In all cases it is important to notice that Jackson’s transformations have nothing to do with adjusting to moral system, but in fact are driven by an ongoing process of rejecting the values of a dominant racist, sexist, exploitative, and brutal system.

⁸⁹ Jackson, *Soledad Brother*, 5.

you are a neo-slave.”⁹⁰ It is for this reason that throughout *Soledad Brother* Jackson mercilessly attacks the “regime of work” and, consistent with his analysis of the forms of minimal rebellion in play in crime, focuses in on those desires expressed in even the most common refusals of the work-regime. He writes, “In the factories that I worked in and have observed the principal interest of most of the workers was coffee and lunch breaks or quitting time; we watched the clock, watched out for the foreman and other spies, and made as many trips to the toilet as we could possibly expect to get away with.”⁹¹ Jackson affirms, “I certainly don’t like to work.”⁹² What these observations express, however, is not a refusal of activity (not wanting to work has nothing to do with being lazy), but once again a rejection in process, a specific escape from a regime of labor organized by the logic of capture.

Against the primacy of a desire to escape from work, Jackson isolates the “profit motive” as the fundamental desire motoring capitalist capture. For capitalism there can be no desire but the desire for profit; all values – including the value of the production of values – are capture by the money-form. And driven by the desire for profit capitalism arranges a “monstrous machine...with the senseless and calloused ability to inflict these wounds programmed into its every cycle.”⁹³ The machine’s most basic instrument of capture, according to Jackson, is the wage.

In a letter to his father, Jackson goes to the heart of the matter, “Can true self-determination be found working for wages and salaries?”⁹⁴ Here we see clearly why the spark of revolution – the desire for self-determination – is always ignited by the *refusal of*

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 252.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 259.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 262.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 247.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 160

work.⁹⁵ Refusal, however, is not simply a negative gesture, it is the beginning of the composition of a different kind of struggle, a “war of life” as Jackson puts it.

The historical continuity Jackson continually emphasizes between the relations under slavery and neo-slavery can also be seen to challenge the adequacy of thinking of society primarily in terms of the mode of production. Jackson instead focuses on the similarity of various techniques of “capture” – strategies of domination that proceed, in the simplest terms, by “imprisoning life.” Jackson describes an uninterrupted strategy of domination, which however often it may change tactics, remains driven by a single motive: profit.

Jackson returns again and again to this continuity:

After the Civil War, the form of slavery changed from chattel to economic slavery, and we were thrown onto the labor market to compete at a disadvantage with poor whites. Ever since that time, our principle enemy must be isolated and identified as capitalism. The slaver was and is the factory owner, the businessman of capitalist Amerika, the man responsible for employment, wages, prices, control of the nation’s institutions and culture.⁹⁶

And later,

The new slavery, the modern variety of chattel slavery updated to disguise itself, places the victim in a factory or in the case of most blacks in support roles inside and around the factory system (service trades), working for a wage. However, if work cannot be found in or around the factory complex, today’s neoslavery does not allow even for a modicum of food and shelter. You are free – to starve. The sense and meaning of slavery comes through as a result of our ties to the wage.⁹⁷

In passages such as these Jackson advances a materialist analysis of “captive society” that links slavery, colonialism, and contemporary wage-work together as elements of a

⁹⁵ Here Jackson’s thought shares many affinities with Autonomia and thesis of the “primacy of living labor”

⁹⁶ Jackson, *Soledad Brother*, 236.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 251.

continuous historical mechanism of domination that proceeds by “capture.” In the terms of Jackson’s analysis, capitalism, in addition to being exploitative, is *essentially predatory*.⁹⁸

But Jackson’s critique of capitalism, as noted above, is driven by a fugitive method in which the analysis itself must be understood to function as just one aspect of a more general articulation of revolutionary struggle. Critique of this system is crucial to a broader strategy of resistance, but it’s not enough. Resistance necessitates the creation of something new – a counter-attack. What is finally most striking about Jackson’s thought is not that it presents the continuity of various forms of “capture,” but that it expresses a consistent commitment to processes of escape. The counter-attack to “capture” gathers forces of “rejection,” but it composes and intensifies them along the way. Resistance to neo-slavery, like slavery, or any other form of “capture” takes shape on the run.

The walls of prisons are built to isolate, capture, and prohibit autonomous movement: steel doors, cramped cells, hand-cuffs and chains all attempt to “separate a force from what it can do” (Spinoza). Such is the reactionary function of law, the first “weapon of state” (Nietzsche). But Jackson reminds us that the “revolutionary is lawless.”⁹⁹ Despite spending his entire adult life in prison, and much of that time in solitary confinement, *Soledad Brother* is not a book written from “inside.” Jackson’s is a “book of life” that propels “thought in an immediate relation with the outside, with the forces of the outside.”¹⁰⁰

4.3 A New Kind of Revolution

⁹⁸ Cf. “for there to be work, there must be a capture of activity by the State apparatus.” *A Thousand Plateaus*, 400.

⁹⁹ Jackson, *Soledad Brother*, 146.

¹⁰⁰ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 376-77.

In the first section we addressed the circumstances surrounding Jackson's reception in France: Genet's encounter with the Black Panthers, the preface he wrote for *Soledad Brother*, and the investigation into Jackson's death by the Prison Information Group (culminating in the third issue of *Intolerable*). Having passed through some of the most striking passages of *Soledad Brother* this final section moves toward outlining more fully the concrete connections forged between Jackson's fugitive thought and Deleuze's and Guattari's *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*.

Schizo-analysis, micro-politics, pragmatics, rhizomatics, are so many names for the study of lines. "What we call by different names – schizoanalysis, micropolitics, pragmatics, diagrammatism, rhizomatics, cartography – has no other object than the study of these lines in groups or as individuals."¹⁰¹ Repeatedly, in Deleuze, Guattari, and Parnet's work we are presented with a conception of society understood in terms, not of structure, but of lines: lines of rigid segmentarity (majority), lines of supple segmentarity (minority), lines of escape (becoming-minoritarian). It is in the study of these lines, their connections and breaks, that method enters into an experimental process. As method, schizo-analysis does not begin with a structure, a subject, or a party (understood as the "consciousness of the revolution"), but abandons the ground, the proper path, for as yet to come new earths, new peoples. *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* and the books written in between repeatedly return to the point that schizo-analysis does not trace influence or histories, but *maps a line*: it is itself a mode of thought on the run.

The study of lines will have nothing to do with *structures* or their *interpretation*. "The question of schizoanalysis or pragmatics, micropolitics itself, never consists in interpreting, but merely in asking what are your lines, individual or group, and what are

¹⁰¹ Deleuze and Parnet, *Dialogues II*, 94.

the dangers on each.”¹⁰² This familiar repudiation of interpretation, however, is more than provocation, it is a necessary rejection of the “thing at home and at school” (read: psychoanalysis and structural Marxism) because above all what interpretation does is “block every real possibility of experimentation.”¹⁰³ Against interpretation, schizoanalysis enables us to experiment. But experiments can only be elaborated by a thought that is itself on the line: a practical philosophy. It is in this way that study becomes a war-machine, because in “studying lines” one connects and enters into an undecidable process - both constructive and destructive – with other practices, from the everyday struggles of individuals to groups and institutions; from acts of writing and art to politics. “Politics is by no means an apodictic science. It proceeds by experimentation, groping in the dark, injection, withdrawal, advances, retreats.”¹⁰⁴

Like so many other lines that run through *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, George Jackson’s line is not exactly cited so much as it is injected. We get nowhere if we ask what Jackson’s sentence means; the question is to see how it functions, how it opens the book to new connections. “I may run, but all the time that I am, I’ll be looking for a stick,” is less a sentence than a little machine, a line running between writing, politics, philosophy. “A book itself is a little machine; what is the relation of this literary machine to a war machine, love machine, revolutionary machine?”¹⁰⁵ If anything this chapter has

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 107.

¹⁰³ Cf. Félix Guattari, “The Best Capitalist Drug”: “[the] reconciliation between Marxism and Freudianism is inseparable from their respective entry into the University...It was thus necessary that Freudianism shift once and for all from its origins to an ideology of the Oedipus, of the signifier, and that Marxism, on the other hand, *reduce itself to an exercise in textual practice* so that the welding of the two could be worked out. As for the text, nothing is left of it but a powerless residue cut off from any revolutionary opening.” (Chaosophy, 210-211, my emphasis). The quote is from Gilles Deleuze, “Four Propositions on Psychoanalysis” *Two Regimes of Madness*, 86.

¹⁰⁴ *A Thousand Plateaus*, 461. All of this implies a process that does not have need for a concept of “structural totality” – it is against structuralism that the entire project of schizoanalysis – the proliferation of concepts: multiplicity, rhizome, line of flight, must be read.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

been an attempt to map these lines and see where they lead, to open or construct yet another entry point or passageway into the “American rhizome.”

And it is along these lines that we underscore a *relay* between black revolutionary thought in the U.S. and the announcement of a “new type of revolution” in Deleuze’s writings from this period. As I noted in my introduction, the Schizo-Culture conference as an ambiguous event that would come to mark a historical limit between radical political and artistic activity in the U.S and French Theory. From a certain perspective it was an event that signaled both a moment of encounter and the failures of encounter. But here it is useful to recall the papers delivered by Deleuze and Guattari at that conference in order to highlight the relation between that event and the production of new concepts, concepts that respond to a “radical change of attitude with regard to political problems.”¹⁰⁶

In “Molecular Revolutions,” the text Guattari delivered at the conference, he raises the question of how transversal connections between political struggles across multiple lines (in schools, the family, the factory, the prisons, even the television) are both enabled and blocked. Posed in terms of analyzing those “investments that come to replace revolutionary desire,” Guattari goes on to remark,

¹⁰⁶ Félix Guattari, “Molecular Revolutions,” in *Soft Subversions* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1996), 9.

My explanation, provisionally, arises from the fact that capitalist power is not only exercised in the economic domain and through the subjugation of class, nor is it exercised only through police, foremen, teachers, and professors, but also on another front which I would call the semiotic subjugation of all individuals.¹⁰⁷

It is against these multiple forms of semiotic subjugation (capture), that Guattari affirms “a revolution of great amplitude is developing today, but at the molecular or microscopic level,” a revolution that is taking shape “in relatively unknown areas.”¹⁰⁸

For Guattari, the political problem posed by contemporary capitalism was above all how individuals and groups get out of “semiotic subjugation,” how one invents desiring-machines that “break-through” those forms of subjectivity produced by dominant codes of language, and what he will later call “machinic enslavement” to capitalist axioms.¹⁰⁹ It is on this terrain that Guattari refused the structuralist interpretation of society and the unconscious (read: Althusser and Lacan) that understand language as a transcendental, fixed system insofar as *these reproduce the very forms of capitalist subjection at the level of theory*. “I believe Lacan described the unconscious in a capitalist system,” Guattari remarks in an interview, but more importantly he notes that “denouncing it is not enough; something has to be found to replace it.”¹¹⁰

It is precisely with respect to producing something to replace the structuralist account that Deleuze delivered what may have been the first articulation of his and Guattari’s concept of the “rhizome,” which like those concepts produced around the notion of “machines” (desiring machines, machinic unconscious, war machine, for example), seeks to think the composition of society, language, and desire in terms of

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁰⁹ For much more on all these points see Janell Watson’s recent study *Guattari’s Diagrammatic Thought: Writing Lacan and Deleuze* (Continuum, 2009).

¹¹⁰ Félix Guattari, “The Best Capitalist Drug” *Chaosophy*, 216; “Desire is Power,” *Soft Subversions*, 22.

variable lines, fragmentary connections, breaks, and above all “escapes.”¹¹¹ As earlier noted, Deleuze and Guattari attack structuralism because it cannot think this dimension of escape or the multiplicity of desire (the unconscious) as a machinic process; instead it constantly produces impasses or “walls” by setting up *structure* as the key to interpretation, *theory* as the analysis of contradictions within the structure, and the *real* as “impossible.” Structuralism never succeeds in “breaking through the wall” because to do so involves thinking the real as a category of construction: a machine.¹¹² The semiotics of capitalism, for Deleuze and Guattari, must be understood in its machinic dimension – it does not ultimately persist in structures, nor does it develop through modes. “We define social formations by *machinic processes* and not by modes of production” and, consequently, what is needed is an analysis of semiotic relations conceived of as so many lines (segmentary, supple, line of escape).¹¹³ One does not break through walls by interpreting them: we have to dismantle the machines, “drop the syntax” (Jackson) and construct lines of escape. Everywhere such activity takes place we enter into a molecular revolution.

Structures, for their part, could be said to trace lines of segmentarity, but rhizomes (or desiring machines) shoot lines in multiple directions, map lines of escape. If we wish to analyze the plane of consistency on which these lines proliferate we must abstract the elements of a machine that puts them in relation and sets them moving, “a social field is always animated by all kinds of movements of decoding and deterritorialization affecting masses and operating at different speeds and paces. *These*

¹¹¹ The first published appearance of the term is *Kafka*, also 1975. Eric Alliez “Rhizome” (reference to the website where the talk can be accessed is given on page 32 of this chapter).

¹¹² Eric Alliez, “Rhizome.”

¹¹³ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 435.

are not contradictions, but escapes.”¹¹⁴ Here we see that all those seemingly haphazard citations and names invoked throughout *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* are lines plugged into a book-machine, a rhizome-machine, a war-machine, a thought-experiment in process. “We have been criticized for over quoting literary authors. 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.”¹¹⁵ *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* is itself as assemblage produced by lines, nothing but lines.

George Jackson’s *Soledad Brother* would be just one machine *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* plugs into (and plugs into concretely by the injection of Jackson’s line), but it is one that enables the relay between Deleuze and Guattari and radical black politics, prison struggle and ultimately a new way of thinking “minority” and the concept of race. It is in relation to “a new type of revolution” that the “line of escape” becomes most useful. In order to see how it works it is necessary to first address the writers of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*’s complicated relationship to Marxism.¹¹⁶

In an interview with Antonio Negri given in the 1990s and published as “Control and Becoming,” Deleuze responds to a question regarding his relationship to Marxism directly, making explicit three ways he and Guattari’s thought departs from traditional (dialectical) Marxist theory. The concision with which Deleuze states his position in this interview enable us see more clearly how the citations from Jackson’s letters work in *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, that is, how the two book-machines are connected by a line of escape. Deleuze begins by affirming “I think Félix Guattari and I have remained Marxists, in our two different ways, perhaps, but both of us,” followed by a statement

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 220

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹¹⁶ “Many Politics” in *Dialogues* p 110. Here is important to note that this text was translated in English in a slightly abridged form published in the U.S. as “Politics” in the issue of *Semiotext(e)* that came out of the Schizo-Culture Conference. *Schizo-Culture 1*, *Semiotext(e)* 3, no. 2, 1978.

that might be described as a Marxist axiom, “we think any political philosophy must turn on the analysis of capitalism and the ways it has developed,” but Deleuze goes on to articulate three distinct propositions that orient his and Guattari’s unorthodox analysis of capitalism; a deviation which bears a crucial relationship to my analysis of the repeated appearance of Jackson’s name in their work. Stated schematically, Deleuze notes *first*, “we think any society is defined not so much by its contradictions as by its lines of flight;” *second*, and as a consequence of the first, Deleuze emphasizes a “[consideration of] minorities rather than classes,” and *finally a third direction*, “which amounts to finding a characterization of ‘war machines’ that’s nothing to do with war but to do with a particular way of occupying, taking up, space-time, or inventing new space-times: revolutionary movements...but artistic movements too, are war-machines in this sense.”¹¹⁷ It is with respect to these three elements – war machine, minorities, and the line of escape – that Deleuze and Guattari contribute a new type of revolutionary thought and hook their own revolutionary machine (“this book is a machine”) into *Soledad Brother*.

4.3.1 A Revolutionary War Machine

From the point of view of what Deleuze and Guattari call “state-thought” *Soledad Brother* would always already appear delegitimized: it is not only criminal, but *unreasonable* – that is, no thought at all. As an enemy of the state, Jackson’s life can only appear from this perspective as that which must be corrected, if not destroyed; a threat to state security (“law and order”), that which finally has *no right to exist*. Yet, the letters Jackson wrote from prison – the sensations and concepts produced by *Soledad Brother*, the life affirmed in its passages – actively challenge this state-thought. It is therefore first as a

¹¹⁷ All quotes can be found in Deleuze, “Control and Becoming,” *Negotiations*, 171-172.

counter-attack against state-thought that we can conceive of Jackson's writing as inventing a "weapon" or "war machine." Jackson's writing does not contest the state at its most blatant points of contradiction, nor does it simply express a negation; instead it actively constructs a force *exterior* to the state-model of thought. Jackson's thought expresses the convergence of *speed* and *invention*. These are the two primary characteristics of a revolutionary war machine.

In "1257: Treatise On Nomadology – The War Machine," Deleuze and Guattari articulate what might be called a common problem connecting Jackson's writing to their own. They propose that to *think* thought in relation to the forces of the outside one must first "extricate thought from the state model."¹¹⁸ Deleuze and Guattari are quite precise in their description of this particular "image of thought" and the way in which it has sought to make philosophy an instrument of established Power. "Noology" is the name given to "the State-form developed in thought," insofar as it gives thought a "form of interiority" corresponding to "the rational and reasonable organization of a community."¹¹⁹ When thought seeks to ground itself in the *sovereignty of a rational subject*, philosophy borrows the form of the (rational, sovereign) state as its model. But such a model is not imposed from outside. State-thought proceeds as the development of a form of interiority, installing itself as the locus and principle of legitimate thought – a subjective point where the coincidence of law and obedience are realized. When the state-form of thought speaks (from Descartes, to Kant, to Hegel, and those forms of dogmatic Marxism that take up state-thought (Stalinism)), it says: "always obey. The more you obey, the more you will be master, for you will only be obeying pure reason, in other words yourself."¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 376

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 375.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 376

Within this model, reason names an instrument that both grounds the legitimacy of the political aims of a state (or a party) and establishes the basis for its claims to sovereign rights, specifically its right to protect a territory against internal and external enemies.

To free something from the so-called rational political objectives of state-thought is thus first to place it in relation to what (from the perspective of the state-model) threatens the coherence of its form of interiority and potentially destroys the foundation of its claims to philosophical and political legitimacy. To think what is “outside” political sovereignty, “outside” the supposedly rationally grounded claims and objectives of a state-subject, necessarily raises the *question of war*. Traditionally this relation has been understood dialectically – “war is the continuation of politics by other means” (Clausewitz) – insuring that the rights of war, the legitimate use of violence, remains “subjected to a political rationality” (i.e. state-thought as the determination of ends). On this model, war as a *strategic use of violence* (war as means) remains limited by definite political aims understood to be rationally grounded by a state or subject.¹²¹

One of the main problems posed by Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus* is how we might compose a war machine, not as an instrument bound historically to the aims and objectives of a form of sovereignty (a state-subject dialectically unfolding in history), but as a “way of inventing new-space times,” “movement” and “forces of the outside” that have “nothing to do with war.” The question thus becomes: how can we conceive these forces as primary and autonomous from any rationalizing or instrumentalizing use?

¹²¹ A thorough discussion of Clausewitz, or the range of political perspectives in which the dialectical theory of war and politics has been taken up (particularly within the Marxist tradition, from Engels to Mao) remains beyond the scope of the present chapter, but it is with this background in mind that we can begin to think how for Deleuze and Guattari Jackson’s writing would be conceived of as asserting the autonomy of a war-machine in which escape and invention converge “outside” the state-form of capture. Though he arrives at quite different questions than those of Deleuze and Guattari, Étienne Balibar’s “Politics as War, War as Politics” provides a useful overview of the Clausewitzian problematic. Closer to Deleuze and Guattari’s thinking see also Alliez and Negri, “War and Peace.”

The first axiom of the “Treatise on Nomadology” (“Axiom I: the war-machine is exterior to the state-apparatus”) raises this question of war not first as a matter of conflict between states, but as a *matter of thought*. The concept of a “war-machine” corresponds first to the problem of extricating the forces of thought (forces of movement, of life, of creation) from the state-model, and for this reason it is related to an attempt to conceptualize revolutionary movement that does not bind revolutionary activity to the problematic of the state. The exteriority of the war-machine, insofar as it bears an essential relation to “nomad thought,” affirms thought as an autonomous force that is irreducible to a state model proceeding through forms of interiorization. Deleuze and Guattari write, “to place thought in an immediate relation with the outside, with the forces of the outside, in short *to make thought a war-machine*, is a strange undertaking.”¹²² Strange, because it destroys “every possibility of subordinating thought to a model of the True, the Just, or the Right (Cartesian truth, Kantian just, Hegelian right),” still more strange because in pursuing this undertaking philosophy itself must produce a concept of a war machine that “does not necessarily have war as its object.”¹²³

Having shifted the problematic, the state can now be defined as an essentially *reactive* mechanism that attempts to capture those forces of life that always already escape its model and to subject them to its logic. Resonating with Jackson’s concept of “captive society,” Deleuze and Guattari emphasize that “state societies are defined by apparatuses of capture.”¹²⁴ It is also for this reason that capitalist society, as an object of analysis, can not be adequately understood by reference to its mode of production (that is, the contradiction between the forces and relations of production), but must first be

¹²² Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 377

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 416

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 435.

analyzed in terms of the “machinic processes” on which that mode depends, the mechanism by which the reactionary state seeks to capture life, movement, i.e. “free activity.”

Two important claims follow from this reconfiguration: “for there to be *work* there must be a capture of activity by the state apparatus” and for there to be *war* there must be a “capture of activity.” For Deleuze and Guattari, the traditional theory of war is exposed as a theory underwriting the state’s legitimacy to direct the war machine according to its political aims, its institutions. Thought of in this way, the state effectively captures activity in order to make war into an object and a means.¹²⁵ Against this “capture,” the concept of a revolutionary war machine names those arrangements of force that refuse both “work” and “war” insofar as they are captured by the state. But then why insist on calling this other assemblage a *war* machine? This is a complicated question, but put all too simply we might say it is because the concept names *a machine that militates against the formation of a state*. Deleuze and Guattari retain the term war machine to insist on the primacy of “free activity” resisting “capture” on every level and every place.¹²⁶ A war machine names the autonomous forces of movement (absolute speed conceived on the model of a weapon as intrinsic force) and capacities of thought as construction (machine). Moreover, Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of a war machine has a positive object of its own (i.e. it is not merely a “negative of the state,” nor would it be adequately expressed as a “negation of the negation” of the state¹²⁷). This element is described quite clearly in the following formulation,

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 400

¹²⁶ For Deleuze and Guattari the “state” concept is not reducible to the historical emergence of modern nation states (“the possibility of a state has “always existed.” “Immemorial *Urstaat*.”) See *A Thousand Plateaus*, 427-437.

¹²⁷ Cf. notion of the “proletarian class” as negation of negation in Marx. See Balibar, 10.

the war-machine was the invention of the nomad, because it is in its essence the constitutive element of smooth space, the occupation of this space, displacement within this space, and the corresponding composition of people: this is *its sole and veritable positive object* (nomos)...If war necessarily results, it is because the war machine collides with States and cities, as forces of striation opposing its positive object: from then on, the war machine has as its enemy the state, the city, the urban phenomenon, and adopts as its object their annihilation. The composition of a people is the positive object of the war-machine.¹²⁸

Such a definition not only subverts the category of war and its relation to the state, but also the tradition of conflating the formation people with the establishment of a state. Deleuze and Guattari counter this dominant tendency of political theory by proposing that the composition of a people, rather than being *founded* on the state, corresponds instead to the occupation of smooth space, that is, space constructed by and in *movements* of absolute speed.

A radical ambivalence of the war machine has become increasingly urgent in the second half of the twentieth century. Contemporary global capitalism could just as easily be described as a war machine exterior to the state insofar as capital is continually pressing up against the limitations and regulations of the state, continually attempting to annihilate whatever blocks the smooth space of capital, to destroy those populations it sees as threats or obstacles to its particular terms of “peace,” its aim to establish “law and order.”¹²⁹

This ambivalence allows us, to a certain extent, to think the double articulation of the racist “prison regime” as *both* a weapon of the capitalist war machine *and* a technique of the state, insofar as the state becomes subservient to the capitalist war machine. Far

¹²⁸ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 417.

¹²⁹ “a war machine that takes peace as its object directly, as the peace of Terror or Survival. The war machine reforms a smooth space that now claims to control, to surround the entire earth. Total war itself is surpassed toward a form of peace more terrifying still. The war machine has taken charge of the aim, world wide order, and the states are now no more than objects or means adapted to that machine.” Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 412.

from simply affirming the “war-machine” as such, Deleuze and Guattari’s analysis begins from the key insight that contemporary capitalism has in fact already realized a sort of *reversal* of the Clausewitzian formula – politics as the continuation of war by other means. Such is the situation in which a war machine takes charge of the aim - making *the state itself into a mere instrument of a capitalist war-machine*.¹³⁰

Such an analysis of the mechanism of power in “captive society” allows us to comprehend far more clearly the function of prisons to control deviant populations and specifically the exponential increase in the incarceration rate of black men in the U.S. in the late sixties insofar as it was at this moment that new revolutionary forces were being expressed. It was precisely during the post-60s restructuration of capital – the call for “law and order” by the state – that violence of the capitalist war-machine (in the form of the *police*) was directed against what it conceived of as “enemy populations,” that is, poor and working class communities of color, and above all black revolutionaries.

If such is the situation of contemporary capitalism it becomes all the more necessary to ask not what the conditions of seizing state-power would be (which always postpones the problem of dismantling the state), but whether it is possible to conceive of a *revolutionary war machine* here and now that would make *neither war nor the terrifying and racist peace of global “law and order”* its primary object, but proceed composing a people according to different means. Deleuze and Guattari elaborate such a concept in the final passages of “Apparatus of Capture,” where they affirm all those practices engaged in a process of constituting “a war machine capable of countering the world war machine by other means.”¹³¹ Proceeding by other means a revolutionary war

¹³⁰ Here Power becomes an object (or relation) of analysis that is no longer adequately described in the terms of sovereignty. Michel Foucault has called this contemporary form of power Biopower. See *Society Must Be Defended*.

¹³¹ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 472

machine also moves toward other ends – or really does away with the logic of ends (“war without terms”). A revolutionary war machine has a sole positive *aim* that rejects the sedimentation of forces as political rationality, and instead constitutes precisely an “aim [that] is neither the war of extermination nor the peace of a generalized terror, but *revolutionary movement*.”¹³² Such a machine describes active processes of invention and experimentation of a people composed along lines of escape.

As we have seen Jackson’s statement “I may run, but all the time that I am, I’ll be looking for a stick” crystallizes the force of running and the invention of a weapon at the level of writing itself. Jackson’s letters compose smooth space. In addition to describing a strategy, Jackson’s sentence read in the full context of the passage in which it occurs primarily functions to present *the atypical character and politics of revolutionary movement*. And as shown in the previous section, such a singular ethics (character in the deepest sense) expresses itself in a mode of writing that functions as a continuation of running. A machinic process that converts a book into a weapon.

In *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* Jackson’s statement does not function as part of a general theory of revolutionary possibility, and it should not be read as a utopian idea, but instead announces “a new type of revolution,” an immanent event of thought on the run. In no instance that it appears does it pertain to the question of “the future of the revolution,” which Deleuze and Parnet note “is a bad question because, in so far as it is asked, there are so many people who do not become revolutionaries.”¹³³ Instead, the injection of Jackson’s line is a matter of connection, articulation, and intensification of the “question of revolutionary-becoming of people, at every level, in every place.”¹³⁴

¹³² *Ibid.*, 473.

¹³³ Deleuze and Parnet, *Dialogues II*, 111

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 110.

The use of literature that goes on between Jackson and Deleuze is not simply a “reference” or “allusion,” but better thought of as a link, a connection assembled between revolutionary war machines. This activity of assembling is crucial precisely because, as Deleuze remarks repeatedly, it is only in connecting with other war machines that a “line of escape” becomes capable of maintaining a consistency and eludes destruction.¹³⁵

4.3.2 Minorities Rather Than Classes

One of the most important, though all too rarely discussed, contributions Deleuze and Guattari’s political philosophy has made to the “analysis of capitalism” is the isolation of racism as a key element in the functioning of the capitalist global war machine. Both volumes of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* launch a powerful critique of racism, but what’s perhaps most striking in these texts is Deleuze and Guattari’s attempt to build upon this critique in producing an affirmative concept of “minorities” which links anti-racist struggle to anti-capitalist struggle : “The minorities issue is that of smashing capitalism.”¹³⁶

The problematic of race first emerges in *Anti-Oedipus*, and it is in the opening pages of chapter four, “Introduction to Schizoanalysis” that a thinking of minorities rather than classes might be said to receive its first expression in their work. Importantly, it is also here that the first citation of Jackson appears. I have already quoted from this passage in part, but here it is worth quoting it again and at length,

[There are] two major types of social investment, a segregative and nomadic, just as there were two poles of delirium: first a paranoiac

¹³⁵ See “Micro-Politics”: “Why is the line of flight a war one risks coming back from defeated, destroyed, after having destroyed everything one could? This precisely is the fourth danger: the line of flight crossing the wall, getting out of the black holes, but *instead of connecting with other lines* and each time augmenting its valence, turning to destruction, abolition pure and simple, the passion of abolition” Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 229.

¹³⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 472

fascisizing type or pole that invest *the formation of a central sovereignty*; overinvests it by making it the final eternal cause for all the other social forms of history; counterinvests the enclaves or the periphery; and disinvests every free “figure” of desire – yes, I am your kind, and I belong to the superior race and class. And second, a schizorevolutionary type or pole that follows the lines of escape of desire; breaches the wall and causes flows to move; assembles its machines and its groups-in-fusion in the enclaves or at the periphery – proceeding in inverse fashion from that of the other pole: I am not your kind, I belong eternally to the inferior race, I am a beast, a black. Good people say that we must not flee, that to escape is not good, that it isn’t effective, and that one must work for reforms. But the revolutionary knows that escape is revolutionary – withdrawal, freaks – provided one sweeps away the social cover on leaving, or causes a piece of the system to get lost in the shuffle. What matters is to break through the wall, even if one has to become black like John Brown. George Jackson. “I may run, but all the time that I am, I’ll be looking for a stick!”¹³⁷

It is precisely in invoking a racist discourse (“I am your kind”) that the rights of sovereignty are reinvigorated and brought back into social formations that have historically exceeded the rational grounds of the modern nation state. As described in this passage the racist problematic turns not only on guarding against external differences that potentially threaten a social formation, but also on an internal paranoiac investment that cannot tolerate difference at any level. Wherever statements of identity are produced, they are supported by a racist social investment of desire because what social investments of the “fascizing” type demand is conformity to a standard notion of rational subjectivity defined as sovereign.

The “second, a schizorevolutionary type or pole that follows the lines of escape of desire” invoked by Deleuze and Guattari, however, “proceed[s] in inverse fashion from that of the [first] pole: I am not your kind, I belong eternally to the inferior race, I am a beast, a black.” In addition to being the first deployment of Jackson’s line, it is also important to notice that in the above quoted passage the concept of race implied by the use of the phrase “becoming-black” is attached not to Jackson (as one might expect) but

¹³⁷ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 277 (translation modified, my emphasis).

instead to John Brown (the nineteenth century abolitionist). It is here that the first attempt to conceptualize an anti-racist concept of race appears in Deleuze and Guattari, race as a matter of becoming, becoming-black as universal potentiality. It is out of this analysis that a new concept of “minority” and “becoming-minoritarian” in the later books will emerge.

Given the political and historical baggage that the term “minorities” carries with it (particularly within the U.S.) it is not surprising that Deleuze and Guattari’s intervention on these questions has only rarely been embraced within critical race theory.¹³⁸ In its commonsensical political use the term “minority” usually refers to a social group or position defined “by the smallness of their numbers” in contrast to a “majority.” Such a statistically arrived at distinction is not only fundamental to a limited conception of democracy as a representational regime, but has often operated to disarticulate “minority struggles” across various gendered, racialized, or national lines, reducing each struggle to a “single issue” or “identity politics” concerning only small groups and their supposed *particular* interests.¹³⁹

It is crucial then to underscore the originality of Deleuze and Guattari’s determination of “minorities” as a concept that refers not to a numerical set of small numbers, but precisely to “a nondenumerable set,” everything that eludes capture by statistical accounting. For Deleuze and Guattari, minority names “not a number but the relations internal to the number” – a force capable of asserting a difference with respect to the “axioms constituting a redundant majority.” Thought of in this way, the term minority always refers an incalculable “line of fluctuation” that carries with it a potential

¹³⁸ Here a productive comparison could be made to several of the texts published in *Nature and Context of Minority Discourse* Abdul R. Jan Mohamed and David Lloyd (ed.) Oxford University Press, 1991.

¹³⁹ Aside from the conservative dismissals of minority struggles, it is unfortunately within these very terms that critiques of feminist, anti-racist, anti-homophobic struggles (as “minority” issues or “identity politics”) have sometimes been made from within the anti-capitalist left.

for creative invention (becomings) against the status quo, and therefore against the “majority.”

It is for this reason that Deleuze emphasizes in the interview with Negri the necessity to rearticulate revolutionary struggle in terms of “minorities rather than classes,” because it is always in relation to the question of minorities that new lines of struggle are invented. The analysis of capitalism therefore must not only turn on the history of class struggle, but also must take up – here drawing a line to Michel Foucault’s work – the problematic of race war.¹⁴⁰ In moving away from an analysis of capitalist society limited solely to the terms of class struggle (which all too often has reconstituted itself as a “majority”) Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of “minority” in fact widens the universal dimension of revolutionary struggle.¹⁴¹ As they write in *A Thousand Plateaus*, “What is proper to a minority is to assert a power of the nondenumerable, even if that minority is composed of a single member. That is the formula for multiplicities. Minority as a *universal* figure, or becoming-everybody/everything.”¹⁴² To think minority as “universal figure” demands a conception of a figure in movement, a figure not reducible to a form or closed set, but

¹⁴⁰ Deleuze and Guattari repeatedly identify racism as a defining tendency of capitalist social formations – it is in fact the mechanism by which, in global situation where capitalism continually exceeds the limits of state, sovereignty (the right over life and death) is rearticulated. See *A Thousand Plateaus*, 472. This is quite in line with Michel Foucault’s analysis of a racism “modeled on war” in which it is precisely a racialized concept “criminality” that supports the maintenance of the “death function in the economy of biopower.” See *Society Must Be Defended* concluding lecture.

¹⁴¹ Here it should be noted we can open up “proletariat” as a category precisely in the terms of “becoming-minoritarian” – what is truly revolutionary about the workers of the world, is not their numbers (not their existence as a “class”) but their capacity to assert a force of living labor that is completely outside the “count” of capitalist society. The problem of “majority” emerges with respect to the “working class” to the extent that a union, a party, even a theory, seeks to “represent” the “class” as countable, i.e. as a majority. Cf. “The power of minority, of particularity, finds its figure or its universal consciousness in the proletariat. But as long as the working class defines itself by an acquired status, or even by a theoretically conquered State, it appears only as “capital”...it is by leaving the plane of capital, and never ceasing to leave it, that a mass becomes increasingly revolutionary and destroys the dominant equilibrium of the denumerable sets.” Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 472 (my emphasis). Thanks once again go to Luka Arsenjuk for pressing me on this point.

¹⁴² Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 470 (my emphasis).

instead mapped out on a line of escape from those states, zones, and possibilities held captive by rigid, majoritarian lines. But such lines as noted above also always run the risks of exhausting themselves: any assertion of singularity, if not linked to other lines, will quickly burn out and destroy itself. The concept of minority, therefore, necessitates thinking the processes of relation that gives consistency to a people in the process of becoming something new. The continued composition of a line in movement requires the construction of links, shared struggles, common resistance.¹⁴³ We enter and continue this process by mapping really existing struggles to one another, and to a thought that affirms escape as revolutionary practice (philosophy and art). It is with respect to making such connections between multiple movements that the citations from Jackson's letters deployed throughout *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* might best be understood – leaving us to ask how we might also open up new lines of connection, counter-attacks, and escapes today.

Minority as the name for a “universal figure” will not be found at a supposed point of sovereign subjectivity, but instead names a shared capacity to resist “what destroys life” (Jackson). In linking the philosophical concept of universality to the concept of minority, Deleuze and Guattari subvert a long history that binds thought to a figure of Power and establishes the legal basis for society.¹⁴⁴ Countering the concept of universality derived from state-thought (the sovereign subject) they write,

In erecting the figure of a universal minoritarian consciousness, one addresses powers (puissances) of becoming that belong to a different realm from that of Power (pouvoir) and Domination. Continuous variation constitutes the becoming minoritarian of everybody, as opposed

¹⁴³ Jackson also underscores the necessity to think the links between struggles and to determine a universal basis of revolutionary movement in shared struggle: “If there is any basis for a belief in the universality of man then we will find it in this struggle against the enemy of all mankind.” Jackson, *Soledad Brother*, 66.

¹⁴⁴ “Political sovereignty has two poles the fearsome magician-emperor, operating by capture, bonds, knots, and nets, and the jurist-priest-king, proceeding by treaties, pacts, contracts.” *A Thousand Plateaus*, 424.

to the majoritarian Fact of Nobody. Becoming-minoritarian as the universal figure of consciousness in called autonomy.¹⁴⁵

In this passage, a striking figure of consciousness emerges that would not be located in a subject, a party, or a state, but instead take shape in processes of experimentation – in a becoming-minoritarian of everyone.

What is at stake here is the difficult disinvestment of desire from relations of interiority, identity, and recognition because the issue for both philosophy and minorities (understood in its expansive sense) is above all to elude capture. Deleuze and Guattari refuse to make thought or political struggle into a discourse of progress, improvement, or development. Philosophy is not enlightenment, liberation is not a process of achieving majority (whether in the sense of “growing up,” gaining numerical advantage, or being recognized as sovereign). Rather the problem of composing forces at whatever level has to do with affirming minor, deviant, non-conforming tendencies, absolutely and for all time. It is only then, according to Deleuze and Guattari, that we can speak of race,

The race-tribe exists only at the level of an oppressed race, and in the name of the oppression it suffers: there is no race but inferior, minoritarian; there is no dominant race; a race is defined not by its purity but rather by the impurity conferred upon it by a system of domination. Bastard and mixed-blood are the true names of race.¹⁴⁶

When Deleuze and Guattari write, “there is no dominant race” it is intended as an counter-statement that gives us a new political orientation: it is above all an ethical or even ontological stance that is described.¹⁴⁷ It is of course the case that subjects, as well as all sorts of groups (from white supremacists to the entire legacy of racist discourse underwriting modern nation states) constantly attempt to assert themselves as dominant,

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 106

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 379. Cf. Fredric Jameson, “This everyone can subscribe to, it seems to me, as always the deeper truth of Deleuze and Guattari is to be found on this side of the opposition, in the remarkable intuition of the minor which emerges from their thought.” “Deleuze and Dualism,” *Valences of the Dialectic* (London: Verso, 2009), 203.

¹⁴⁷ Cf. “politics precedes being” Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 204.

but the strategic move here is to remove the conditions on which such assertions make claims to thought and to weaken their power by disinvesting in them. Everything turns on our capacity to disinvest in racist discourses and their stupidity and to intensify our capacities against them. We need to believe – which is to say construct – in a world in which “there is no dominant race.” Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of “nomad thought” is particularly important in this context. Nomad thought “does not ally itself with a universal thinking subject but, on the contrary, with a singular race.”¹⁴⁸ What such a concept of race might enable remains an open to experimentation in concrete practices, but it is clear that such a concept functions as a key weapon against any assertion of racial superiority, that is, as noted above, it is a rigorously anti-racist concept of race.

What is terrifying about racist discourse in capitalist “captive society” is precisely those mechanisms that continually produce paranoiac social investments in which these deviation from a norm defining majority, that is deviations from the ideal average, healthy, sane, white, good citizen model, are coded as that which must be corrected, criminalized, and in many instances destroyed. In *A Thousand Plateaus* Deleuze and Guattari describe this operation precisely in terms of racism,

Racism operates by the determination of degrees of deviance in relation to the White-Man face...from the viewpoint of racism, there is no exterior, there are no people on the outside, there are only people who should be like us and whose *crime* it is not to be.¹⁴⁹

One of the basic mechanism for maintaining this type of social formation, for tracking “degrees of deviance” is stratification, that is the statistical, numerical division of a population into *segments* defined in terms of race, class, sex, and psychological

¹⁴⁸ This insistence on an alliance between nomad thought and a singular race can be found throughout *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, and reemerges later in *What is Philosophy?* in the assertion that, “the race summoned forth by art of philosophy is not the one that claims to be pure but rather an oppressed, bastard, lower, anarchical, nomadic, irremediably minor race – the very one’s Kant excluded from the paths of the new Critique.” Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 109.

¹⁴⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 178

“normality.” Entire disciplines (sociology, criminology, social psychology, marketing, etc.) are devoted precisely to the production and analysis of “populations” precisely in these terms (i.e. along these lines of segmentarity). As every page of *Soledad Brother* attests, the consequences of this racist, paranoiac rigid segmentarity is no where more visible than in the prisons, asylums, and detention centers that seek to “adjust” deviants and supposedly “protect” society.

But minority in the sense described above always begins where new lines are invented, lines that challenge this rigid segmentarity and escape from stratification precisely by following a line of becoming - a life that cannot be standardized or regularized, but remains outside the dominant, fascizing pole of “majorities.” A capacity that is available to everyone, insofar as it does not finally refer to any identity, but a practice of dis-identification and constructed through a refusal to conform or adjust to the “majority standard.” It is in inventing practices of disinvestment from fascizing social arrangements that we enter into becomings: “Woman: we all have to become that, whether we are male or female. Non-white: we all have to become that, whether we are white, yellow, or black.”¹⁵⁰

Here we must return to the question of writing. In “On the Superiority of Anglo-American Literature” Deleuze and Parnet state, “to write is to become, but has nothing to do with becoming a writer” and go on to affirm that “writing always encounters a minority which does not write, and it does not undertake to write for this minority, in its place or at its bidding, but there is an encounter which pushes the other, draws it on to its line of flight.”¹⁵¹ Such statements, variations of which can be found throughout *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, and as we have seen in the first two chapters, are central to

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 470

¹⁵¹ Deleuze and Parnet, *Dialogues II*, 33.

Deleuze's thinking about literature even in his last essays, remain quite obscure if we do not ask how they function in a conceptual machine. As I have emphasized throughout this dissertation such an analysis always returns us to a simple question, what's the *use* of literature?

"I work on words" Jackson remarks in a letter to his younger brother Jonathan. From the early letters to his father, requesting a "portable typewriter" to "build [his] vocabulary and spelling," to the late letters where Jackson asserts a collective necessity to begin a "new start" by a "modification of language," Jackson's resistance, by necessity, composes itself in writing, in a singular fighting style. Jackson makes several causal references to this "style," which as discussed in the previous section, above all expresses the absolute speed of a warrior on the run. Even in a cramped cell, Jackson affirms, "I do my best thinking on my feet."¹⁵²

Jackson notes in one letter that his style is "completely informal," but as we have seen, informality is not the same as inconsistency. Jackson's concern is not with the development of a form, but with *informality* – the forging of a weapon against the dominant forms of thought, language, and society. As Jackson describes it and enacts it "informality" tends toward making connection between "feeling and writing," a connection that he describes very precisely: "drop the syntax." Jackson's practice of informality – his style – names a rigorous "indisciplining" of language, expressions of the "indiscipline of the warrior" in writing.

Throughout Jackson's letters there is a concern with feelings and even feeling *doubled*. Feelings are re-called as visions, composed in writing that unleashes affects. But in one of his last letters, Jackson makes an astonishing connection with respect to this process, namely that "these feelings" can only be liberated in processes that require the

¹⁵² Jackson, *Soledad Brother*, 72.

destruction of syntax. Writing must dismantle the structures of language, the rules of organization and “proper use,” if it is to invent a line of escape capable of expressing “these feelings.”

4.3.3 Line of Escape

Deleuze and Guattari repeat again and again that revolutionary thought does not consist in the interpretation of contradictions, but in the mapping of lines of escape. In “Micropolitics” they state,

what is primary in a society are the lines, the movements of flight from the social, far from being utopian or even ideological, these constitute the social field, map out its gradation and its boundaries, the whole of its becoming. A Marxist can be quickly recognized when he says that a society contradicts itself, is defined by its contradictions, and in particular by its class contradictions. We would rather say that, in society everything flees and that a society is defined by its lines of flight which affect masses of all kinds.¹⁵³

To affirm the primacy of lines of flight is to affirm the primacy of revolutionary desire, an autonomous force that would not be defined by or reducible to various operations of “capture” in which it may be caught up. Forces and relations are not names for contradictions, but must be thought of as so many lines. Some lines, as we have seen, are defined by a “rigid segmentarity” (binary systems of man/woman, human/animal, white/black). Some lines are more “supple” characterized by “becomings” and the multiplicity of struggles that depart from the first line insofar as they are anti-racist, anti-sexist, anti-homophobic, and above all anti-capitalist. On this supple line “a threshold is crossed which does not necessarily coincide with a segment of more visible lines.” On this second line transformations occur, which may lead a

¹⁵³ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 101.

struggle back to the first line (struggles for recognition), or proceed to the creation of something new: namely, a “third type of line.”

Deleuze and Parnet write, “there is a third kind of line, which is even more strange: as if something carried us away, across our segment, but also across our thresholds, toward a destination which is unknown, not foreseeable, not pre-existent. This line is simple, abstract, and yet is the most complex of all...*the line of flight*.” Put schematically, we might say a society is made up of two kinds of “segmentary lines” (rigid majorities) and (supple minorities) and while these two lines may very well converge in contradictory relations, it is only on a line of escape that we move toward *creation*. This line is both primary and names the capacity to escape society as it has been “captured” by the first two kinds of lines. “It is wrongly said (in Marxism in particular) that a society is defined by its contradictions. That is true only on the larger scale of things (molar). From the viewpoint of micropolitics a society is defined by its lines of flight, which are molecular.”¹⁵⁴ Interpretations of society that proceed through an analysis of contradiction persist in the “submission of the line to the point.”¹⁵⁵ Segmentarity (whether rigid or supple) defines lines in relation to finite points, produces a calculable grid, a structure, a plane of transcendence that then appears as the hidden intelligibility of the system and of society generally. But schizoanalysis begins with what takes place between the contradictions, between the segmentary lines: it is not interested in tracing the hidden structures of a system, but in mapping a way out. Every page of *Soledad Brother* maps a line of escape and a rebellion against the operations of language because language in a capitalist society is primarily an instrument of capture (semiotic

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 216.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 293.

subjugation)."¹⁵⁶ Language is not an invariable system or structure; instead it is in and through and against language that one maps out multiple lines on the real. "To flee is to produce the real, to create life, to find a weapon,"

There is nothing imaginary, nothing symbolic, about a line of flight. There is nothing more active than a line of flight among animals or humans. Even History is forced to take that route rather than proceeding by "signifying breaks" – what is escaping in a society at a given moment? It is on lines of flight that new weapons are invented, to be turned against the heavy arms of the state. "I may run, but all the time that I am, I'll be looking for a stick!" (George Jackson).¹⁵⁷

The problem is how to escape, to flee the prison-house. Such a conception has the singular virtue of drawing attention to the conditions that open up lines of resistance within language, resistances that construct the real.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 79

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 204 (translation modified).

5. From Controlled Substances to Societies of Control

5.1 Money is like Junk

Like all great writers, according to Deleuze, William S. Burroughs is best approached as a perceptive clinician, “not a patient, but a physician, the physician of himself and of the world.”¹ To think of Burroughs’s writing in these terms, however, it is necessary to first isolate the sickness he attempted to treat. In a preface prepared for *Naked Lunch* – appropriately titled “Deposition: Testimony Concerning a Sickness” – Burroughs gives the problem a decisive name: “The Sickness is drug addiction and I was an addict for fifteen years.”² This statement is a response to a question Burroughs had previously put to himself several years prior to completing the book.³

In one of the journals he kept while living in Tangier in the late 1950s (a period during which he was deeply involved in his own addiction to heroin) Burroughs wrote, “Running short of money. Must kick habit” and then asked himself,

What am I trying to do in writing? This novel is about transitions, larval forms, emergent telepathic faculty, attempts to control and stifle new forms. I feel there is some hideous new force loose in the world like a creeping sickness, spreading, blighting... Control, bureaucracy, regimentations, these are merely symptoms of a deeper sickness that no political or economic program can touch. What is the sickness itself?

This passage makes clear the extent to which, during the time of writing *Naked Lunch*, Burroughs was already attempting to articulate the connections he perceived between his personal experience with heroin addiction and broader questions related to various

¹ Gilles Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, 3.

² William S. Burroughs, *Naked Lunch*, (New York: Grove Press, 2001), 199.

³ To describe *Naked Lunch* as having been “complete” at the time of its initial publication (Olympia Press, 1959 and Grove Press that same year) already opens a series of questions this chapter will not be able to fully elaborate. In addition to a complicated publication history (prefaces and editions were added well into the 1960s) the first edition was itself the product of collaborative effort which included Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, and Alan Ansen. Much of this history is recounted by James Grauerholz in *Word Virus: The William S. Burroughs Reader* (New York: Grove Press, 1988), 115-121.

mechanism of social control. What first strikes one about the “Deposition,” however, is that by the time Burroughs wrote that text he had arrived at not only a set of propositions for describing how forms of addiction operate, but also a series of singular recommendations for how one might cure addiction. As Burroughs states, “Naked Lunch *treats* this health problem” and as will be shown in this chapter it is a book that is above all concerned with questions concerning a cure.⁴

On one level, Burroughs’s “Deposition” serves a very specific purpose: to advocating the use of Apomorphine as a method for treating heroin addiction.⁵ But the text also presents a lucid account of one of Burroughs’s most perceptive insights regarding a more general problem: “because there are many forms of addiction I think that they all obey basic laws.”⁶ In isolating these laws – laws which are defined in terms of a *logic of relations*, which Burroughs named the “Algebra of Need” – Burroughs sought to analyze the continuities between the relations subtending the illicit economies of the heroin trade and the social relations organized by money and maintained by new forms of social control. Burroughs underscores this important point at several moments in the text remarking, “junk is the mold of monopoly and possession” and later, “opium is profane and quantitative like money.”⁷ It is in “Deposition” that we first encounter an analogy that will become a central tenet of Burroughs thinking that reappears in nearly

⁴ Burroughs, *Naked Lunch*, 205.

⁵ The treatment was one that Burroughs had successfully undergone himself under the care of a British physician Dr. John Yerbury Dent. At the time Burroughs wrote the preface this particular cure for addiction was not being pursued in the U.S., where substituting a methadone addiction then as now, was the preferred method for treating addicts. See WV, 116.

⁶ William S. Burroughs. “Deposition: Testimony Concerning a Sickness,” *Naked Lunch*, 205. As Timothy Murphy notes this text was initially published in 1960 in the *Evergreen Review* and only included in later editions of *Naked Lunch*. See Timothy Murphy, *Wising Up the Marks* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 238.

⁷ Burroughs, *Naked Lunch*, 200-201.

all of his work. In a collection of interviews published as *The Job* (1969) Burroughs elaborates on this crucial point,

You see there is something wrong with the whole concept of money. It takes always more and more to buy less and less. *Money is like junk*. A dose that fixes you on Monday won't fix you on Friday. [...] It eats quality and shits out quantity. [...] That is why by its nature money is worth always less. People want money to buy what the machine eats to shit money out. The more the machine eats the less remains. So money buys always less. This process is now escalating geometrically. If the West does not start a nuclear war first their monetary system will fall apart through the inexorable consumption by the machine of life art flavor beauty to make more and more shit which buys less and less life art flavor beauty because there is less and less to buy. The machine is eating it all. The time must come when money will buy nothing because there will be nothing left for money to buy. Money will eliminate itself.⁸

The analogy, "money is like junk," is not a metaphor, but is instead based on three parallel operations characterizing both: (1) a tendency to lose value over time, (2) a machinic conversion of quality ("life art flavor beauty") into quantity, and (3) a process driven by an ultimately destructive aim. Above all, what Burroughs identifies in money and junk is a shared propensity for converting what first appear to be means into increasingly demanding ends in themselves. And as we will see, it is this imposition of the means as end, which involves setting up of an immanent limit within a potentially limitless process of desire, that both money and junk share with the logic of control: "you see control can never be a means to any practical end...*It can never be a means to anything but more control...Like junk.*"⁹ The analogy consist primarily in that in each case an infernal logic installs an immanent, and therefore negative, limit on a process that is essentially limitless

What we have, then, are two related propositions: control is like junk, and junk is like money. Burroughs's analogies provoke many questions the most crucial of which

⁸ William S. Burroughs and Daniel Odier *The Job: Interviews* (New York: Grove Press, 1969; 1974), 56.

⁹ Burroughs, *Naked Lunch*, 137.

can be formulated very simply: what is money like? To answer this we might turn to Marx, who in his analysis of money in the second notebook of the *Grundrisse*, provides an surprising answer to this question – a diagnosis, in fact. Marx writes,

Money is therefore not only an object, but is *the* object of greed [*Bereicherungssucht*]. It is essentially *auri sacra fames*. Greed as such, as a particular form of the drive...is possible only when general wealth, wealth as such, has become individualized in a particular thing, i.e. as soon as money is posited in its third quality. Money is therefore not only the object but also the fountainhead of greed.¹⁰

Marx's analysis of money as simultaneously "the object" and "the fountainhead" of greed describes an immanent and circular drive motoring the capitalist machine. What is at stake in this passage is not only the question of money as "general equivalent" (i.e. money as means and measure of exchange relations) but money "in its third quality" – that is, when "money appears not only as *medium*, nor as *measure*, but as end-in-itself, and hence steps outside circulation."¹¹ It is only at this point that money begins to function as the "god of commodities," installing an organized transcendence based entirely on the money-form as a limit to the very process money itself unleashes. My reason for isolating this passage from Marx's notebooks is not to enter into a full-blown discussion of Marx's theory of money. It is instead to simply draw out Marx's use of a certain term to describe this logic. As indicated by brackets in the English version of the text the word "greed" is not the most precise translation for Marx's German. The term Marx used to express this process by which money as means becomes an end in itself is *Bereicherungssucht*. A more literal translation of this term would give us the formulation: addiction to accumulating money, or to getting rich.

Moreover, in the same passage Marx's notes that while "the mania for possessions is possible without money" (land, jewelry, women, are just some of the

¹⁰ Karl Marx. *The Grundrisse* (New York: Penguin, 1973), 263.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 264.

examples given) *monetary greed* (i.e. greed as such) must be considered as “the product of a definite social development.” It is unique in that,

it must sacrifice all relationship to the objects of particular needs, must abstain, in order to satisfy the need of greed for money as such. Monetary greed, or mania for wealth, necessarily brings with it the decline and fall of the ancient communities [*Gemeinwesen*]. Hence it is the antithesis to them. It is itself the community [*Gemeinwesen*], and can tolerate none other standing above it.

Marx’s use of the term addiction to describe the relations subtending the money form is striking for several reasons, not the least of which is that, as he points out, it does not name a particular pathological condition concerning certain individuals, but instead provides an adequate name for an entire social arrangement – “it is itself the community.” Long before Burroughs, Marx suggests addiction as a term for naming a social formation motored primarily by a desire for money. In using the term *Bereicherungsucht* Marx effectively transposes the problem of addiction onto the widest possible scale. Greed names a “particular form of drive” produced in a definite social arrangement where the distinctions of object, cause, and end collapse in the money-form. Marx uses the term to diagnose a sort of monomania characterized by an endless relay between two indiscernible poles of the function of money as such: money as general means of exchange and money as an object-limit of all social activity. The addiction to money – to this new and demanding God –destroys all pre-existing relations and values. In the first chapter of *Capital* Marx emphasizes the point that capitalism does not merely produce objects for subjects, but rather subjects for object. Extending these terms, one might say that the form of subjectivity produced by capitalist societies consists in making addiction a problem for everyone.

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It may seem odd to begin a discussion of the connections between William S. Burroughs and Deleuze by way of reference to Marx. Neither Burroughs nor Deleuze

(as we have explained in the previous chapter) ever considered themselves to be Marxists in any commonsensical way. Yet in Marx's portrayal of greed we glimpse a remarkable affinity in the way each of these writers approach the analysis of the desire motoring capitalist societies. Each in their turn will deploy the terms of addiction to name the basic laws (or axioms) that determine the limits of desire, and therefore the limits of human potential, by extracting a particular object from an immanent and potentially limitless process of desire (a means) in order to have this object serve as transcendent cause and final aim (an end). What emerges from these analyses is an operation endlessly repeated on multiple levels of the social field, permeating everything from the specific problem of drug addiction, to certain uses of language and technology, and ultimately as a figure for expressing the basic mechanism of what Burroughs coined contemporary "control societies." It bears repeating that what links these three writers, despite their differences, is a strong inclination to use the terms of addiction for naming the very form of subjectivity constantly produced by and for capital.

A discussion of Burroughs in connection with the question of addiction is certainly not new.¹² And my description so far points only in the most general way to some of Burroughs's most frequent themes – themes which would be familiar to any reader of the book.¹³ What is perhaps less often noticed, and what will be the primary focus of this chapter, is the striking similarity between the mechanism of the control machine as laid bare in *Naked Lunch* and certain dynamics analyzed in *Capitalism and*

¹² See, for instance, Timothy Melley, "A Terminal Case: William Burroughs and the Logic of Addiction" in Janet Farrel Brodie and Marc Redfield (eds), *High Anxieties: Cultural Studies in Addiction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 38-60.

¹³ *Naked Lunch* relentlessly shows, often in quite grotesque images, the way language as such is the very medium in which control circulates. Burroughs ventriloquizes the discourse of power in order to isolate a "word virus," which is as Ann Douglass puts it, is "the dead heart of the control machine." See "Punching a Hole in the Big Lie," introduction to *Word Virus*, xxiii.

Schizophrenia. Like Burroughs and Marx, Deleuze and Guattari make recourse to the terms of addiction when they describe the axioms of capital, the forms of subjectivity produced within this social formation, and the arrangements of desire by which such a social formation is maintained. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, for instance, the crucial conceptual distinction made between the “limits” and “thresholds” of the capitalist assemblage is immediately followed by a discussion of alcoholism. It is crucial, however, to bear in mind that in all these cases what is at stake is not simply transposing an already existing psychological discourse onto the social field, but rather redefining the terms of addiction itself. In positing a “basic law” for many form of addiction Burroughs points the way to an analysis of addiction extracted from those explanations that begin with either addictive substances or addicted subjects. It is no longer a question of heroin or the particular problems of an individual addict. The question instead becomes one of articulating the relations that produce both. As such, the analysis must begins by thinking relations: an algebraic analysis.

A concept of addiction produced through an analysis of social relations enables us to take our distance from legal, medical, and largely moralizing approaches that saturate most thinking about addiction.¹⁴ Moreover, such a concept could function as a key tool for critiquing and opposing the draconian “war on drugs” which serves as little more than a justification for the criminalization and often incarceration of those people

¹⁴Cf. *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, published by the American Psychiatric Association, define substance abuse and dependency as “psychiatric disorders.” The most common reference for drug rehabilitation centers and substance abuse counselors for defining alcoholism comes from an Robert Morse and Daniel Flavin’s “The Definition of Alcoholism” *Journal of the American Medical Association* Vol. 68, No. 8 (1992). See also “Addiction is a primary, progressive, chronic *disease* with genetic, psychosocial, and environmental factors influencing its development and manifestations. The disease is often progressive and fatal. It is characterized by impaired control over use of the substance, preoccupation with the substance, use of the substance despite adverse consequences, and distortions in thinking.” In addition to medical and psychiatric definitions the discourse of addiction has been largely determined by ideas rooted in Alcoholics Anonymous and the twelve-step approach to addiction. The complex history of twelve-step programs in the U.S., their autonomy from professional institutions and organizations (despite the fact that they have been co-opted by for-profit treatment centers and court system), and the concrete practices within AA and NA groups falls outside the scope of this chapter.

who are made most vulnerable by the very processes of money-addiction that govern capitalist social relations.

As suggested above, Burroughs' isolation of the "Algebra of Need" as an adequate concept for describing these "basic laws" of a social economy of addiction in all its forms not only bears a striking resemblance to Marx's analysis of *Bereicherungssucht* but, as this chapter will show, also provides a diagrammatic analysis of the "abstract machine" of capitalism. What follows, therefore, seeks to explore these parallels between Burroughs extension of the Algebra of Need and Deleuze and Guattari's own diagnostics of various arrangements of desire between capitalism and schizophrenia. Of particular interest will be Deleuze and Guattari's comments on drugs and the specific dangers courted by drug users in their discussion of the drugged body without organs and the limitations of becomings set-off by drugs. What is glimpsed in their discussion is an approach to the question of drugs that avoids being anti-drug, while maintaining a strong critique of addiction in all its forms. Deleuze and Guattari's analysis the "regime of subjectification," as this chapter will show, enables us to perceive an addictive logic (in the terms outlined above) operating whenever desire becomes trapped or exhausted in a "black-hole." This analysis will further Burroughs's analogy and give us a more precise understanding of how language – as a regime of subjectification – operates as a mechanism of control.

Naked Lunch, however, does more than simply rehearse these problems. It is also a book that, as Burroughs once put it in a letter to Allen Ginsberg, provides "a scenario for future action in the real world...it is a guidebook, a map."¹⁵ *As a map for action*, Burroughs insisted that the "first step in realizing this work is to leave junk forever."¹⁶

¹⁵ Burroughs, *Word Virus*, 134.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 134.

Which is to say that despite being in many ways a book of unapologetic horrors and grotesques images of the junk world, *Naked Lunch* is finally a program for escape. Timothy Murphy has put this well in his excellent study *Wising Up the Marks*. Murphy argues that Burroughs's book provides an analysis of "the parasitic social economy of addiction in all its forms."¹⁷ In emphasizing Burroughs's analysis of a "social economy," Murphy strongly rejects those approaches that reduce *Naked Lunch* to a paranoid drug-induced conspiracy theory or a self-indulgent post-modernist exercise. In mapping the symptoms of addiction across multiple vectors of society Burroughs isolates a consistent mechanism (a virus, in fact) at work in everything from heroin dependency to the relations subtending money, language, and power. *But* it was in writing this book that Burroughs achieved a break-through that would orient his literary experiments for the rest of his life. "Leaving junk forever" in fact provides the basic coordinate for an aesthetic exploration that is concerned with mapping levels of experience that go well beyond the intensities provided by heroin.

Unlike Burroughs's early attempts at writing, which took shape as tell-all conventional autobiographies (*Junky, Queer, Yage*), *Naked Lunch* invents a practice of writing that detaches the intensities of Burroughs's personal experience with drugs and addiction in order to carry them into a new and radically impersonal artistic construction. The facts of Burroughs's biography bear witness to the difficulties he faced in achieving a liberation from heroin-addiction (it was a problem he struggled with for most of his life). But despite his repeated failures to kick junk for good, the desire to break the habits of addiction is the driving force of Burroughs's most exacting insights. I

¹⁷Murphy, *Wising Up the Marks*, 74. Murphy also argues quite convincingly that *Naked Lunch* has been poorly understood as a postmodern fantasy and he proposes a new concept of amodernism to escape "the dialectic of modernism and postmodernism...that dominates many discussions of American literature in the contemporary period." *Wising Up the Marks*, 1.

do not think *Naked Lunch* would stand up as it does were this not the case. The singular virtue of Burroughs's analysis of control is that it provides not only a blueprint of the machine, but also explores a way out. To cite Murphy once again, "Burroughs's literary career is defined by the central challenge he sets himself: to find an escape route from the linked control systems of capital, subjectivity, and language."¹⁸

What follows focuses primarily on *Naked Lunch* (1959) and the numerous prefaces, postscripts, and appendixes Burroughs added to what is without a doubt his best-known book. But this chapter, like those preceding it, also seeks to show the ways Burroughs comes to be hooked into Deleuze's thinking about the clinical uses of literature – that is, the specific ways Burroughs's diagnoses of addiction also lays claim to a means of treating that sickness in a variety of its manifestations. As with previous chapters I will be particularly attuned to the ways Burroughs's own literary experimentation is linked to Deleuze's production of concepts. The final section will deal exclusively with Deleuze's description of "control societies," a term for contemporary capitalism which he takes directly from Burroughs.

¹⁸ Murphy, *Wising Up the Marks*, 4. Here it should be noted that Burroughs's struggle to use writing as an escape begins with his own singular encounter with the intolerable. In 1951 a drunken Burroughs shot and killed his wife Joan Vollmer – a horrific event that marked Burroughs for the rest of his life. Burroughs describes the event in a frequently quoted passage from the introduction to *Queer*, "the death of Joan brought me in contact with the invader, the Ugly Spirit, and maneuvered me into a lifelong struggle, in which I have had no choice except to write my way out." This incident has become part of the mystique that surrounds Burroughs and is often cited as a turning point in Burroughs's life, the moment of decision in which writing becomes a method of escape. What is most difficult, however, is to extract from this singular experience the dimension of something impersonal. What I find extraordinary in this passage is not the "ugly spirit," Burroughs's name for a pervasive negative spirit investing the entirety of control society and constantly producing situations that destroy lives and often end in death (overdoses, suicides, mass epidemics, starvation, war), but rather the way it affirms an act of resistance expressed by a decision to write or create something entirely new in resistance to intolerable conditions.

5.2 The Burroughs Effect

5.2.1 Revelations

The earliest reference to Burroughs in Deleuze's work comes somewhat unexpectedly at the end of a discussion of F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Crack Up* in "The Twenty-Second Series – Porcelain and Volcano" section of *Logic of Sense* (1969). Following a long reflection on alcoholism as "a search for an effect which consists mainly in an extraordinary hardening of the present" – an effect that maintains a relation to the past while simultaneously holding present reality at bay – Deleuze suggests a sort of temporal doubling that occurs when this tension (between the past and the present) is "unraveled for the sake of something else."¹⁹ Deleuze defines this moment as a threshold when the series of past perfects characterizing alcoholism ("I have-loved, I have-done, I have-seen") becomes an "I have-drunk."²⁰ With this last statement, according to Deleuze, "the past perfect of the first effect is replaced by the lone 'I have-drunk' of the second."²¹ As a result of this new formulation the set of temporal relations established within the first series are fundamentally transformed – the I have-drunk bringing an "effect of the effect" to bear on the present moment.²²

Deleuze's insights, as noted, emerge out of an encounter with Fitzgerald's late essays collected and published as *The Crack Up* (1945) and the analysis in large part depends on making a distinction between Fitzgerald's personal history of alcoholism and what Fitzgerald manages to do in writing. Maintaining this difference, as well as Fitzgerald's singularity, Deleuze ventures a quite remarkable definition of alcoholism

¹⁹ Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 158.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 159.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 158-159.

²² *Ibid.*, 159.

when he states: “what gives alcoholism its exemplary value” is that it produces a situation in which alcohol “is at once object, loss of object, and the law governing this loss.”²³ It is this formulation of the identity among the object, loss, and law regulating that loss that interests me. In terms comparable to what we have already seen in Marx’s discussion of *Bereicherungsucht* and what Burroughs defined as a basic law operating in many addictions, Deleuze isolates a logic by which a particular object (in this case alcohol) comes to dominate (i.e. govern), and therefore limit the “extraordinary effects” it itself unleashes, by imposing itself as the only desirable object – an unattainable final end which cannot be reached (as there is never enough) thereby becomes the cause organizing the entire arrangement. In these pages Deleuze describes a causality that works by lack or negation. This negativity gets inserted into a positive process of desire by imposing an ever-receding limit (object and loss of object). But Deleuze adds an extraordinary insight to this analysis: namely that one can escape this logic, not exactly by giving up alcohol, but by doubling its effects.

The implications of this logic will recur at several points in Deleuze’s philosophy and receive a far more elaborate articulation in Deleuze and Guattari’s conceptual distinction between the “limits” and “thresholds” of various assemblages in *A Thousand Plateaus* (a discussion which, as already noted, bears not only on alcoholism, but on the analysis of the axioms of capitalism).²⁴ What is crucial to note here, however, is simply that it is out of a discussion of alcoholism, and Fitzgerald’s account of an alcoholic “crack up,” that Deleuze identifies a potential counter-actualization: an event that would liberate the effects of alcohol from their actualization “for other times.”²⁵ It is with

²³ *Ibid.*, 160.

²⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 438-439.

²⁵ Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, 161 (my emphasis).

reference to this unleashing of future potentiality out of past effects that Deleuze introduces Burroughs into his text. Deleuze writes,

We cannot give up the hope that the effects of drugs and alcohol (their 'revelations') will be able to be relived and recovered for their own sake at the surface of the world, *independently of the use of those substances*, provided that the techniques of social alienation which determine this use are reversed into revolutionary means of exploration. William S. Burroughs wrote some strange pages on this point which attest to his quest for the great Health – our own manner of being pious: "Imagine that everything that can be attained by chemical means is accessible by other paths..." A strafing of the surface in order to transmute the stabbing of bodies, oh psychedelia.²⁶

Quoting from a *Paris Review* interview given by Burroughs in 1965, Deleuze affirms in this final passage a limit-experience in which the most intense revelations of drugs, while still being intimately related, would not finally be reducible, to the use of drugs themselves.²⁷ Deleuze here posits an extraordinary event in which an effect first caused by the introduction of a substance becomes freed from that cause – a new revelation in which the cause as substance has been subtracted leaving only the autonomy of the effect.

If alcoholism names an arrangement of desire in which alcohol becomes at once "object, lose of object, and the law governing this object," these final passages suggest an entirely new arrangement of desire that proceeds by other means. Addiction might best be understood, then, in terms of the extreme ambiguities of a line of escape discussed in the previous chapter. A process that can be characterized as, on one hand, a creative becoming enabling new perceptions, extraordinary effects, revelations; and on the other,

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 161.

²⁷ *Paris Review* Issue 35 (Fall 1965). Deleuze deemphasizes the more extreme ambiguity of Burroughs original statement. In that interview Burroughs goes on to note, "Many policemen and narcotics agents are precisely addicted to power, to exercising a certain nasty kind of power over people who are helpless. The nasty sort of power: white junk, I call it - rightness; they're right, right right - and if they lost that power, they would suffer excruciating withdrawal symptoms." Which is to say, for Burroughs thinking about "other means" than drugs for producing certain effects was also what enabled him to think addictions to other things than drugs (control, money, language, etc.) Nevertheless, the crucial distinction to be made between "a drug" and "an addiction" seems more important.

a line of destruction, negation, death. Like alcohol, an opium molecule has the capacity to introduce extraordinary effects and previously imperceptible sensations, but also, in certain conditions, can become the very limit to these new perceptions and sensations. Deleuze and Guattari will describe an arrangement of this type as a “drug assemblage” in *A Thousand Plateaus*. On one hand, the drug assemblage constructs a “line of perceptive causality” and appears to give the conditions for an intensification of experience: “the imperceptible is perceived” and “desire directly invests the perception and the perceived.”²⁸ But on the other hand, the line of escape enabled by drugs or alcohol often fails miserably to give consistency to these new perceptions – fails insofar as rather than pursuing new connections or pursuing an exploration desire instead becomes exhausted by the pursuit of the substance itself. The capacity to construct an immanent and consistent plane for revelations enabled by drugs becomes increasingly limited by the drug itself leading desire into a negative abyss. Instead of providing a “means for exploration” the drug increasingly takes charge of desire and determines a definite (and always unattainable) aim. In this way a circuit develops in which the drug becomes a means to nothing but the pursuit of the drug.

But in the passage quoted above Deleuze suggests a strange “recovery” of effects that leads a way out of this logic. We encounter here a notion of recovery (a “great Health,” in fact) that does not give up on drugs or alcohol as “revolutionary means of exploration,” but at the same time no longer depends on those substances for the production of their effects. But this also leads Deleuze to emphasize a crucial fact: that one of the main blocks to this exploration are “techniques of social alienation which determine” the use of substances. Deleuze only does not elaborate on these techniques that confront individual drug users and drug addicts, but we might note here that in

²⁸ Burroughs, *Naked Lunch*, 282

addition to those laws that seek to regulate the use of drugs (for instance, the criminalization of certain drugs and the monopolization of others for so-called medicinal use), money would certainly be one of the main instruments by which certain people are disproportionately exposed to the acute horrors of addiction. As Burroughs put it, “get up the money or else.” The financial ability to support a habit cannot be factored out of the question of who becomes labeled an addict or an alcoholic. Moreover, in criminalizing and often pathologizing certain uses and not others, it is quite clear that the techniques of social alienation seek to contain and control not only the potentials opened up by certain drugs but also the drug users themselves.

But what is perhaps truly fascinating about these final lines of “Porcelain and Volcano” is that Deleuze seeks nothing less than a radical disruption of the social determination of the relation between causes and effects. To posit that one might refuse to give up the revelatory effects of drugs or alcohol – refuse so absolutely that one gives up those substances themselves – not in order to recover the impoverished social reality one sought to escape through the use of drugs in the first place and certainly not to accept the normalized “health we are given,” but precisely in order to counter-actualize these *effects*, for their own sake, against that social reality – to posit *that* affirms a miraculous event of repetition as difference itself. Such an event, which has less to do with accumulating new effects than with exploring already existing effects by new means, is what Deleuze and Burroughs call creation.

While it might be tempting to dismiss Deleuze’s “homage to psychedelia” as an all-too-familiar late-sixties utopianism, I think we still have much to gain from it. These singular pages contain some of the most moving lines ever written on the use of drugs and alcohol, but they are not at all unique in Deleuze’s work. This basic insight into the “crack” in time and causality (enabled in some way by an encounter with literature and

specifically here the work of Fitzgerald and Burroughs) becomes a constant refrain of Deleuze's until the end of his life. Counter-actualization will go by many names – creation, becoming, experimentation – but what it always refers to is potential of an effect that cannot be reduced to a final or finalized transcendent cause. Deleuze posits a cracked-up causality – on one edge actualized and often devastating, but on another virtual and opening up to the future – an extraordinary event immanent to and slicing through every effect.

The effects of drugs and alcohol are radically ambiguous. Whether revelatory or horrific (or both). In whatever conditions such effects are produced, once created they also assert a force in the world that is not exhausted by their actualizations. The perceptions and sensations enabled by substances have a life of their own and express potentials that, once experienced, become real. It is very difficult to extract these effects from what seem to be their material, social, or biographical causes, particularly when these causes are determined within the dominant discourses on addiction and alcoholism, that usually leads to moralizations. It is this very difficulty to think revelations as separate from causes that turns the lament for experimenters who drank themselves to death or overdosed into such a cliché: *what a shame...*

William Burroughs lived to see his eighty-third year. He pushed through the experience of heroin-addiction multiple times and never stopped writing about it. Burroughs spares his readers the aforementioned cliché for the simple reason that he managed to survive. In doing so, he also refuses them the comforts of moralism. Burroughs's writing never romanticized drugs or drug addiction, his work relentlessly pursues ways out of addiction in all its manifestations, but he also never gave up the search for "revolutionary means of exploration." It is no doubt for this reason that his name and writing appear so frequently in Deleuze's philosophy.

5.2.2. Cut-Up or Cut-In?

Burroughs's name and writing are frequently referred to in both volumes of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, but it would be wrong to assume that Deleuze and Guattari take up his project unproblematically. While my interest is primarily in exploring the potentials opened up by Deleuze's use of Burroughs it is useful to deal with their criticism of him first.

In the first chapter of *A Thousand Plateaus*, for instance, Deleuze and Guattari reject Burroughs's "cut-up" method most fully realized in *The Nova Trilogy* and *The Third Mind* (a collaborative work written with Brion Gysin).²⁹ In its simplest terms the cut-ups consist in taking scissors to a piece of text and rearranging it or, in some cases "folding" another text into the first one. Burroughs experimented with the method as a way to intervene and disrupt dominant modes of thought and narrative convention that for him were synonymous with control (i.e. the imposition of a "continuity script"). The idea being that since control operates primarily through language – a parasitic takeover of life through modes of communication (i.e. a "word virus") – one must invent strategies for dismantling this power by attacking the word directly. In order to elude control, as Burroughs would write many times: it is necessary to "rub out the word forever."³⁰

"The word" evokes many things in Burroughs – everything from the *logos* of monotheistic religions, to discursive formations that subject one to dominant (psychological, medical, sexual) codes, to the emergent communication technologies and science of cybernetics that began to dominate society during the post-war period. Burroughs believed that "the word," as mechanism of control, was both historically specific, defining the basic terms of life on the planet in the second half of the twentieth

²⁹ *The Nova Trilogy* consists of three novels: *The Soft Machine* (1961; 1966), *The Ticket That Exploded* (1962; 1967) and *Nova Express* (1964).

³⁰ Burroughs, *Word Virus*, 226.

century, and embedded in a much deeper past (Burroughs goes back, for instance, to the ancient Mayans as particularly adept at control).³¹ The word (like money, like junk) organizes a control loop. Speech and language could be said to produce the subject as a word-addict. The cut-ups were meant to intervene in this loop, as Burroughs put it, they were meant to “isolate and cut association lines of the control machine.”³² In effect, the cut-ups are guerrilla tactic for “cut[ing] the Truth out of any written or spoken words” by introducing chance operations into an otherwise predetermined script.³³ Burroughs offered explicit direction for making “cut-ups” and “fold-ins” of not only written texts, but also audio-visual materials.³⁴ Here’s a description of the cut-up method from *The Third Mind*

Cut the Word Lines with scissors or switchblade as preferred...The World Lines keep you in Time...Cut the in lines...Make out lines to Space. Take a page of your own writing if you write or a letter or a newspaper article or a page or less or more of any writer living and or dead...Cut into the sections. Down the middle. And across the sides...Rearrange the sections...Write result message...

And here’s an example of the kind of text produced,

cold blue room...distant music on the wind...tarnished mirror in the bath cubicle young face lapping water...red light..felt his pants slide...twisting thighs...street dust on bare leg hairs...open shirt...city sounds and the slate roof...played the flute with fingers fading...the street blew rain...pale smell of dawn in the door...played the flute with fingers light and cold...dark pipes left no address...sleep breath under the slate roof...³⁵

Deleuze and Guattari’s critique of the cut-up is, somewhat counter-intuitively, based on the fact that despite the efforts to fragment or dismantle the word, the cut-ups

³¹ See for instance the “Mayan Caper” section of *The Soft Machine* and “Control” from *The Job*.

³² Burroughs, *Word Virus*, 224.

³³ *Word Virus*, 270. Timothy Murphy discusses the cut-ups in terms of an “aleatory syntax,” *Wising Up the Marks*, 103-107. Burroughs and Gysin name Tristan Tzara as precursor to their cut-up method.

³⁴ See for instance “Invisible Generation” section of *The Ticket that Exploded* and the “Electronic Revolution” section from *The Job*. Both are reprinted in *Word Virus*.

³⁵ Burroughs, *Word Virus*, 273.

nevertheless maintain (if only negatively) a *totalizing idea of form*. If it is in relation to passages such as the ones I have quoted – at times producing a nearly incomprehensible text – that Burroughs name is often associated with a particular idea of literary experimentation, it is crucial to emphasize that Deleuze and Guattari question this particular image of an experimental literary text. They write,

We must ask if reflexive, spiritual reality does not compensate for this state of things by demanding an even more comprehensive secret unity, or a more extensive totality. Take William Burroughs' cut-up method: the folding of one text onto another, which constitutes multiple and even adventitious roots (like a cutting), implies a supplementary dimension to that of the texts under consideration. In this supplementary dimension of folding, unity continues its spiritual labor. That is why the most resolutely fragmented work can also be presented as the Total Work.³⁶

It is not enough, according to Deleuze and Guattari, to simply isolate a word virus as operator of control and organized transcendence and then proceed by destroying the unity it establishes. To do so implies an entirely negative procedure and never reaches the thought of multiplicity. If the “abortionists of unity” – a term Deleuze and Guattari use to refer to certain writers, which, in addition to Burroughs, includes James Joyce and (surprisingly) Friedrich Nietzsche – succeed in dismantling unity in the object, they do not sufficiently elude *the return and triumph of unity in the subject or the art work itself conceived as totality*. Even the most radical negation of totality does not get one out of dualism. For Deleuze and Guattari this method, to which a certain high modernism pays ample tribute, does not go far enough.

The critique of the cut-up experiments is part of the broader discussion concerning the concept of a book that opens *A Thousand Plateaus*. In “Rhizome: An

³⁶ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 6. This point repeats an earlier critique of Burroughs in *Dialogues II*: “This is better than the ‘cut-up’. It is rather a ‘pick-me-up’ or ‘pick-up’ – in the dictionary = collecting up, chance, restarting of the motor, getting on to the wavelength; and then the sexual connotations of the word. Burroughs cut-up is still a method of probabilities – at least linguistic ones – and not a procedure of drawing lots or single chance which combines the heterogeneous elements.” See Deleuze and Parnet, *Dialogues II*, 8.

Introduction,” Deleuze and Guattari propose three main figures of the book. The first is the root-book (or “classical book”), which they define as the “strata of the book” insofar as it imposes on the book a “noble, signifying, and subjective organic interiority.”³⁷ The classical book always implies an organicism and is the ideal product of an aesthetics of representation: the book imitates the world and both are conceived as unified totality. The second figure of the book is the “radicle-system,” or “fascicular root” book. Here the unifying principle of the first book is destroyed. But precisely because this second type of book proceeds through negation, it maintains a mimetic concept of the book. As Deleuze and Guattari put it “the world has become chaos, but the book remains the image of the world.”³⁸ The third figure of the book, however, does not imitate the world but instead “forms a rhizome with the world.”³⁹ It is only with this third type of book that an affirmation of multiplicity, which is something different than a negation of totality, becomes not only possible, but is enacted in the process of writing itself.

The discussion of these three types of books turns on Deleuze and Guattari’s effort to describe their own book as a rhizome and to demonstrate the idea that “the multiple must be made, not by always adding a higher dimension, but rather in the simplest of ways, by *dint of sobriety*, with the number of dimensions one *already has available* – always $n - 1$.”⁴⁰ In the case of the first two figures of the book the same underlying aesthetic assumptions are maintained: the relation between the world and the book remains one of representation. What the root-book and the radicle-system book share is an approach to the world as a totality to be represented, one presenting it positively, the other negatively. A rhizome, in contrast to both, introduces a concept of a

³⁷ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 5.

³⁸ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 6.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.

book not as imitative, but as existing on the same plane as the world. For Deleuze and Guattari, the rhizome-book, like the world, is conceived in terms not of organic totality but of *inorganic becoming*.

The concept of the rhizome, as discussed in the introduction, implies an act of creation and not one of negation. Making the multiple necessitates subtracting (not negating) the one in order to make something new. Deleuze and Guattari describe this in method in terms of “sobriety,” but here as elsewhere, sobriety is thought in terms of construction rather than deprivation or lack. In their description of different kinds of books we encounter a repetition of the effort to free effects from their causes discussed in the previous section. By subtracting the One as transcendent cause (i.e. as the higher dimension giving a form of organization or performing a totalizing operation) Deleuze and Guattari suggest a process of experimentation that begins “in the middle” and that, for this reason, can no more be reduced to a cause than it can be to a final aim. It is no longer a question of maintaining or destroying the One, but a practice that makes use of “the dimensions one already has available.” As for the cut-up, it’s not a matter of negating the word and its effects (just as it is not a matter of negating the effects of drugs or money), but rather of delinking these effects from their causes and inventing new relations outside the terms of transcendence.

The rejection of the organicism of both the classical book and the radicle book also leads Deleuze and Guattari to a thought of the book as a machine. As we have seen in the previous chapter, this concept of a book is the condition for posing the question of literature in practical terms: “what is the relation of this literary machine to a war machine, love machine, revolutionary machine?”⁴¹ To say in one breath that a book is a rhizome *and* a machine affirms an inorganic life that confounds the aesthetics of

⁴¹ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 4.

organicism and the structures of organized transcendence. Such a concept enables a thinking of the relationship between life and art that transforms our commonsensical sense of both.

According to Deleuze and Guattari, it is because the cut-ups cannot reach the multiple as inorganic life that they fail to construct a rhizome. Why? Because as we have seen the novel as cut-up remains tied to a “radicle-system” image or figure of the book which always drags in organicism (even in the mode of its negation). As a Total Work, even if fragmented beyond comprehension, or precisely because of its total fragmentation (chaos), such books remain detached from other book-machines. The book becomes a hermetically sealed object apart from the world. Rather than producing a rhizome that would construct connections in the world, the cut-ups end up producing only dis-connection and present chaos (the negation of the world) as form. It is for this reason that they fail to construct an immanent consistency. In proceeding entirely by a gesture of negation (negating The word), the cut-up method fails to “make the multiple” and in a way remains caught up in the very logic it attempts to subvert. There is always a secret or phantom unity (a mythology, a doctrine, a program) behind a radicle-book. A simple destruction of the One that fails to construct the immanent conditions for something else to pass will inevitably fall back into transcendence – the One returns all the more strongly as they only solution to chaos.

For Deleuze and Guattari the classical book is not subverted by simply doing destroying unity through a process of fragmentation, because what is necessary is to find a new consistency of composition that no longer discovers its coordinates in

relation to an abandoned or expected unity, a “past or yet to come.”⁴² But it is still necessary to find new coordinates and consistency.

Deleuze and Guattari’s critique of the “radicle-system” book has far reaching implications insofar as it presents a strong rejection of what is sometimes understood by the term “experimentation” as an aesthetic category (i.e. a sort of indeterminate anything-goes approach). The critique of a certain image of literary experimentation as simply the representation of the world as chaos presents a challenge to many received notions of modernism and postmodernism alike, not mention it seriously contests the attribution of just such an image of Deleuze and Guattari’s book itself. *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* reads to some as a haphazard amalgamation that simply reproduces or participates in a kind of celebration of the chaos and discontinuities of post-modern capitalism. Yet, as Deleuze and Guattari themselves insist: “crazy talk is not enough.”⁴³ A new figure of the book is necessary because without it – and the immanent consistency it can produce – the conditions of creation are effectively destroyed.

In addition to the postmodernism of the cut-ups (a term Deleuze and Guattari never use, but quite consistent with the critique they present), “Introduction: Rhizome” suggest that much of high modernist experimentation (their example is Joyce) despite appearing subversive ends up re-investing in unity and the notion of the “total work” precisely in the mode of negation. We might even say that from this perspective a certain type of high modernist experimentation and postmodernism are about the same. This assertion becomes crucial for criticism too. Because in presenting the world as chaos, as Deleuze and Guattari will repeatedly say, such works also have a tendency to call into being readers whose main function is to rediscover the underlying form,

⁴² Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 5.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 138.

structure, significance of the work. Their rejection of interpretation is thus deeply implicated in their effort to detach the book from the logic of representation. It is only in thinking the book as multiplicity (as rhizome) that criticism begins to take up an experimentation in connecting book-machines to other machines.

Despite Deleuze and Guattari's rejection of the cut-ups as inadvertently dragging in a totality and restoring a sort of esoteric unity (the "strange mystification" of the radicle-book⁴⁴) there are still many things about Burroughs writing that they do affirm. For my part, I would argue that *Naked Lunch* is more frequently mentioned than Burroughs's other works) in both volumes of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* precisely because it in fact proceeds by different methods. Rather than a cut-up, *Naked Lunch* is explicitly presented to the reader a book to cut into:

You can cut into *Naked Lunch* at any intersection point...I have written many prefaces...*Naked Lunch* is a blueprint, a How-To Book...How-To extend levels of experience by opening the door at the end of a long hall...Doors that only open in Silence...*Naked Lunch* demands Silence from the Reader.⁴⁵

There are many things to notice about this passage from the "Atrophied Preface" to *Naked Lunch* (atrophied because it in fact appears as the penultimate section of the entire book), but the first and most important is that it suggests that the Reader might put the book to use by making connections (cutting into intersection points). Moreover, it presents the writer, not as a cut-up artists – scissors in hand ready to cut the lines of the control machine – but as a recording instrument. Silence becomes the condition for the experimentation of both reader and writer (a point I will come back to at length in a later section). The silence demanded by *Naked Lunch* gives a subtractive, rather than a destructive, method as the condition for transmitting intensities "beneath a signifier

⁴⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 6

⁴⁵ Burroughs, *Naked Lunch*, 187.

reduced to silence.”⁴⁶ As Burroughs writes, “This book spill off the page in all directions.”⁴⁷ *Spill* not spills a though uncontained flows of life would only circulate in an encounter not contained by the book but passing between the reader and this recording instrument. It is for this reason that *Naked Lunch* spills into *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* in a ways the *Nova Trilogy* does not.

5.2.3 The Burroughs Experiment

It is with respect to the central distinction between “schizophrenia as a process” and “the way schizophrenics are produced” in capitalist society that Burroughs’s name is positively invoked in *Anti-Oedipus*. Here we recall our earlier discussion of schizoanalysis as an effort to separate two types of social investment: on one side a “paranoid fascizing” type; and on the other, a “schizorevolutionary type that follows the lines of escape of desire.”⁴⁸ What schizophrenia as a process (or, line of escape) shares with artistic and literary experimentation, according to Deleuze and Guattari, is an extraordinary capacity to give consistency to desire that is not directed toward an aim, but instead expresses a “process without goal, but that attains completion as such.”⁴⁹ Desiring-production is understood in machinic, rather than structural, terms because it does not depend on an external cause or desired object (even an object as lacking). This machinic desire, understood as an immanent process of life, is referred to as an “escape” because it is essentially autonomous with respect to all those mechanism that seek to limit, segment, or organize it. In the context of the terms we have set out thus far, it can

⁴⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 370.

⁴⁷ Burroughs, *Naked Lunch*, 191.

⁴⁸ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 277. This distinction was discussed at length with respect to the concept of race in Chapter Four of this dissertation.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 370

be said that desire names a process that, in the first instance, defies the “basic laws” of addiction (i.e. object, loss of object, law governing this loss).

Deleuze and Guattari begin with schizophrenia as a process because schizophrenia expresses a multiplicity of desire (a life) that cannot be reduced to either a subject or an object. In a similar way to Deleuze’s discussion of the “crack,” this schizo-process of desire is understood to have its own positive capacities as opposed to being conceived as a gap or split in the subject. The problem for schizo-analysis is how to construct machines for transmitting desire – channels through which it can pass – and practices to prevent this primary process from breaking-down. *Anti-Oedipus*, and particularly the final chapter “Introduction to Schizoanalysis,” discusses this question in terms of “breaking-throughs.” Break-throughs can be constructed on multiple levels, from the intensely personal (kicking a habit, for instance) to political inventions (revolutionary movements, for instance).

Remarking on the uses of literature in *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze makes clear the importance of certain writers for thinking through the process of a break-through. He states, “People may criticize our book 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?”⁵⁰ As the reference to these writers makes clear, knowing something about schizophrenia should not be confused with being a schizophrenic. The latter refers to those individuals for whom the process is arrested and who end up being locked-in institutions or drugged into a catatonic state. A “schizophrenic” is what you

⁵⁰ Deleuze, *Negotiations*, 23.

get when the paths of desire are blocked. It is the devastating *product* churned out by psychiatric institutions. It is certainly not a process.⁵¹

What Deleuze and Guattari seek to investigate in turning to schizophrenia as a process is a concept of desire not limited by the terms of object, lack or a totalizing aim.⁵² The positive task of schizoanalysis requires a rejection of the logic that can be seen to operate in money, alcoholism, and addiction more generally: namely, the extraction of a particular object (as cause and aim of desire), which then coincides with its lack, and therefore necessitates positing a law to explain and maintain this relation as the very form of totality (i.e. the relation between this object and a subject). Schizoanalysis, in contrast to this way of conceiving desire, begins with a notion of desire that cannot be understood with respect to an object, but rather as an immanent process of constructing non-preexistent relations – desire as a *machine* and not a structure.

We encounter the “Burroughs experiment” in *Anti-Oedipus* precisely in connection with an approach to art as schizorevolutionary process.

[T]he value of art is no longer measured except in terms of the decoded and deterritorialized flows that it causes to circulate *beneath a signifier reduced to silence*, beneath the conditions of identity of the parameters, across a structure reduced to impotence; a writing with pneumatic, electronic or gaseous indifferent supports, and that appears all the more difficult and intellectual to intellectuals as it is accessible to the infirm, the

⁵¹ Félix Guattari’s experience as a practicing psychoanalyst (the designation is misleading) at La Borde Clinic no doubt made him particularly attuned to this problem.

⁵² In addition to rejecting conventional psychoanalytic theories, the approach to desire explored in *Anti-Oedipus* also contests the Lacanian conception of desire (desire-as-lack) and the proposition that the unconscious as *structured* like a language. For Lacan, desire (desire-as-lack: *objet petit a*) is conceived of as the proper scientific *object* of psychoanalysis (see the first section of *Seminar XI: Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*). An important characteristic of this desire, however, is the fact that it is ultimately constituted through the discourse of the Other – “the unconscious is the discourse of the Other” – and thus structured like a language. The division of the subject (i.e. the split-subject) is situated precisely along the crack of “being” and “knowing” insofar as subjectivity is necessarily caught up in a dialectic with the Other, “when the subject appears somewhere as meaning, he is manifested elsewhere as fading.” (*Seminar XI*, 206) As disappearance, the Lacanian split-subject is caught in a double bind: the subject resides in this gap between the “want-to-be” and the “lack-of-meaning.” It is this gap that defines the unconscious and the proper place of the subject: “insofar as his desire is unknown, in this point of lack, that the desire of the subject is constituted.” (*Seminar XI*, 219). In his later seminars, Lacan will emphasize this gap as the impossible place of the real.

illiterate, and the schizos, embracing all that flows and counterflows, *the gushings of mercy and pity knowing nothing of meanings and aims* (the Artaud experiment, the Burroughs experiment). It is here that art accedes to its authentic modernity, which simply consists in liberating what was present in art from its beginnings, but was hidden *underneath aims and objects*, even if aesthetic, and underneath recodings or axiomatics: the pure process that fulfills itself, and that never ceases to reach fulfillment as it proceeds – art as “experimentation.”⁵³

What Deleuze and Guattari describe as “a pure process that fulfills itself” names that which breaks out of the logic I have discussed in the previous section under the terms of addiction. An experimentation that knows “nothing of meanings and aims,” proceeds “underneath aims and objects,” and “underneath recodings and axiomatics” comes into view in this excerpt as a process of break-through and specifically a practice of art. *Art as experimentation* – not a representation or image of the world, but an active resistance to those mechanisms that seek to arrest or capture desire by limiting it in an object or explaining it by an external cause. Schizophrenia as a process names a plan of attack, a method of escape – *a cure in fact*.

The problem of schizophrenization as a cure consists in this: how can schizophrenia be disengaged as a power of humanity and of nature without a schizophrenic thereby being produced? A problem analogous to that of Burroughs (how to incarnate the power of drugs without being an addict?) or of Miller (how to get drunk on pure water?)⁵⁴

As in *Logic of Sense*, the practical difficulties presented by addiction or schizophrenia are given primacy. It is not a matter of naively celebrating the anguishing experience of mental break-down or drug-addiction. Considering that those who undergo these experiences usually find themselves at the mercy of some the most brutal institutions of subjectification (jails and psychiatric hospitals) we might say Deleuze and Guattari are seeking a different cure – a great Health as opposed to the stifling health we are given.

⁵³ *Anti-Oedipus*, 370-71 [my italics]. In a footnote attached to this passage John Cage is also mentioned.

⁵⁴ Deleuze and Guattari “L synthèse disjonctive” *L’arc* 43, special issue on Klossowski (Quoted in Daniel Smith’s Introduction to *Essays Critical and Clinical*, xxi).

The crucial difference to be marked in Deleuze and Guattari's entire project of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* with respect to these problems is their effort to begin approaching the question of schizophrenia and drugs as first and foremost attempts at *escape from unlivable social arrangements*. Such escapes pose real problems. As Burroughs remarks in *Naked Lunch*: "it is only a few crazies who have from the crazy place outbroken."⁵⁵

Naked Lunch suggests in several passages that there is something about schizophrenia that resists the "basic laws" of addiction and control. This thought concerning the difference in nature between junkies and schizophrenics is first presented by Dr. Benway, parody of the physician-scientist as technocrat of the control machine. Benway remarks, "I have never seen a schizophrenic junky... Want to cure anybody of anything, find out who doesn't have it. Junkies don't got it."⁵⁶ The sinister recommendation here is that you cure schizophrenia by introducing the very logic of the control machine – you cure a schizophrenic by making him or her into a junky (basically giving us the reverse formula to the one above). Benway's twisted therapeutics could be said to express the very logic of axioms of capital: how do you arrest the schizorevolutionary process of desires brought about by capitalism? Get everyone hooked on something! But the opposite also holds true (at least according to Deleuze, Guattari, and Burroughs): how do you resist control or cure a junky? By unleashing a creative process without object or aim.

5.2.4 The Drugged Body

Timothy Murphy writes, quoting a letter he received from Deleuze while writing his book *Wising Up the Marks*, "Deleuze himself insists that the comparison of his work with that of Burroughs 'can bear on three points (the idea of a body without organs;

⁵⁵ Burroughs, *Naked Lunch*, 38.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 29.

control as the future of societies; the confrontation of tribes or populations in abandoned spaces)."⁵⁷ Since throughout this entire dissertation we have tried to maintain the closest possible relation to what Deleuze actually said about certain American writers this quotation from Murphy is particularly useful to our study. As the final section of this chapter will deal exclusively with a somewhat broader question of resistance to control societies, what I am after in this section is an articulation of how some of Deleuze's statements about Burroughs, drugs, and the "idea of a body without organs" would be relevant for *resistance to addiction* in all its forms (drugs, control, money, etc).

The "body without organs" (or, BwO) is at once one of the most familiar and most bewildering terms associated with *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. The term comes from Antonin Artaud's radio play *To Have Done With the Judgment of God* (1947). While the term itself is not one that Burroughs (to my knowledge) ever used, it is the BwO that directs us to a common problem both the "Artaud experiment" and the "Burroughs experiment" seek to confront: namely, the imposition of organized systems of domination, transcendence, and morality on the process of desire. What Artaud and Burroughs share, according to *Anti-Oedipus*, is that both have a need to invent a "writing...knowing nothing of meanings or aims."⁵⁸ Which is to say, both use writing as a means to free desire from organized transcendence and construct a life-experiment that eludes the notion of a body as organism. Imposing a totalizing form of organization on the processes of life – which is to say, the process of desire – always implies a morality (a system of judgment) because such operations (whether they be theological, philosophical, aesthetic, political, psychological or biological) always drag in a notion of the good, the healthy, the sane, etc. as opposed to evil, disorder, disease, or abnormality.

⁵⁷ Murphy quotes directly from a correspondence with Deleuze. See Murphy, *Wising Up the Marks*, 7.

⁵⁸ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 370-71

When Deleuze, for instance, affirms a “Great health” or “inorganic life” it is precisely to express a force or capacity that cannot be evaluated in terms of transcendent categories of good/evil or normal/pathological. Health as a term extracted from these categories can only be defined in terms of an immanent process of desire and the degree to which it is capable of composing a plane of consistency for itself – a habit or habitation (territory) as opposed to a system of organization. Moreover, such an approach must reject certain notions of causality (meanings and aims) in favor of an empiricism that “begins in the middle,” because habits are not explained by organisms, causes, or finalized aims. “Desire is not a form, but a procedure, a process.”⁵⁹ This does not get us out of the problem of bad habits (habits can be restrictive and unlivable), but it does change the basic questions. The question becomes not one conforming to an already established system of organization, morality, or health, but of radicalizing habits – every habit or territory has its line of escape – and intensifying their own immanent processes or becomings.⁶⁰

According to Deleuze and Guattari, the force of Artaud’s experiment was to have “declared war on the organs.” Deleuze and Guattari elaborate on the specific adversary (i.e. the judgment of god) Artaud battled against in the following way,

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

⁵⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka*, 8.

⁶⁰ Deleuze’s interest in habits comes from Hume. Here I am interested in suggesting a relationship between the discussion of habits (for instance, in *Difference and Repetition* with respect to the first synthesis of time) and the later notion of a territory. I am particularly interested in drawing out the resonances with the idea of a drug habit. Deleuze provides a wonderful explanation of ethics, as opposed to morality, in *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*.

sedimentation that, *in order to extract useful labor from the BwO*, imposes upon it forms, functions, bonds, dominant and hierarchized organizations, organized transcendence.⁶¹

What better reason for pursuing the experimentations of the “drugged body” than to be flee the Judgment of God? The “drugged body” as habit promises liberation from the excruciating imposition of morality, alienated labor, and the incessant demands of all forms of organized transcendence. A new body or habitation for life seems to be incarnated with the introduction of certain drugs. One perceives, if only for a moment, a furtive passage to the limit where the old body (organism) dissolves and where a life of previously impossible sensations could emerge – as though one could ride these tracks beneath the stratum.

The primary effect of heroin, as Burroughs writes in *Naked Lunch*, is also precisely to get rid of the organized body: “flesh that fades at the first silent touch of junk.”⁶² No useful labor can be extracted from this body because in fading it vanishes from the very “forms, bonds, dominant organizations” that would seek to capture it. But this vanishing act brings with it a new problem immanent to the drugged body. It consistently fails to deliver on its promise. A life needs a body, a habit, a territory. If the money doesn’t run out first, however, the habit itself starts to organize an even more demanding transcendence within the very body produced by the drug itself. The habit becomes a trap. A search for the next fix (which remains external to the body) inserts itself on the plane of immanence and “botches” the BwO.

The BwO “causes intensities to pass,” but the intensities of certain drugs (heroin in this instance) tend toward zero, “intensities of cold, refrigerator waves.”⁶³ Junk

⁶¹ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 159.

⁶² Burroughs, *Naked Lunch*, 9.

⁶³ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 152.

imposes an aim making the body nothing but a means to more junk. It is for this reason that Burroughs also writes. “NOTHING *Ever Happens* in the junk world.”⁶⁴ Desire is emptied from a body which becomes increasingly a simplified “instrument to absorb the medium” in which the addict lives.⁶⁵ The problem with the drugged body is that while it escapes the forms of dominant organization it runs the risk of failing to give consistency to that desire. *Desire requires a new inorganic body.*

We will return to each of these points more concretely in what follows. For the moment it is enough to simply stress that while on one hand the BwO names any practice that enables desire to resist the terms of organized transcendence this does not mean that all BwOs are the same: “you can fail.”⁶⁶ A “drug assemblage” always names both sides of a problem: potentials and dangers. As such an assemblage, the drugged body presents both a real practice of the BwO (enabling an escape from the strata) and carries with it the immanent danger of emptying the BwO (by pursuing a negative or destructive line of desire).

Deleuze and Guattari open the chapter “How Do You Make Yourself A Body Without Organs?” with three crucial propositions: (1) desire requires a body without organs (“you can’t desire without making one”); (2) the body without organs is “not a concept it’s a practice”; and, most important in this context, (3) “you can botch it.”⁶⁷ Following these three propositions they launch into a description of various types of practices that construct a body without organs. Among these we first encounter, “the hypochondriac body...the paranoid body...the schizo body...the drugged body...[and

⁶⁴ Burroughs, *Naked Lunch*, 207.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁶⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 152.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 149-150.

finally] the masochist body.”⁶⁸ Each of these is understood as a real attempt to give consistency to desire while resisting the dominant organization of the body as organism. Yet as the list makes clear, these are all also practices that in some sense tend toward destructive outcomes. Why is it that the most risky attempts are listed first? What does this tell us about those practices that stake everything on escape only to inevitably fail to give the BwO a consistency and strength?

The list with which Deleuze and Guattari begin their discussion is important because it refuses to simply pathologize these practices. Instead of referring these practices back to an organized body that has simply gone astray – a gesture that would reintroduce organized transcendence as the norm and explain these practices in terms of deviancy – Deleuze and Guattari instead take up the problem each of these practice seeks to confront. Which is to say, they take seriously these practices as real inventions that must be evaluated on their own terms. Doing so affirms the primacy of desire as essentially an escape from transcendence even in those cases where it “botches” the BwO.

Deleuze and Guattari first quote Burroughs by way of the famous “Talking Asshole” routine from *Naked Lunch*. “The human body is scandalously inefficient. Instead of a mouth and an anus to get out of order why not have one all-purpose hole to eat and eliminate? We could seal up nose and mouth, fill in the stomach, make an air hole direct into the lungs where it should have been in the first place.”⁶⁹ The point in quoting Burroughs in this context is not so much to suggest that “one all purpose hole” provides a figure for a BwO sufficiently complex to enable a constructive experimentation, but instead gives us the figure of the extraordinarily simplistic BwO

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 150.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 150.

dreamed up by capital – a fantasy of endless consumption by “ordinary men and women.”⁷⁰ It is after all Dr. Benway who proposes such a body as an ideal form.⁷¹

But not all BwOs are the same. As Deleuze and Guattari explain by way of Spinoza’s *Ethics*, which they describe as “the great book of the BwO,” there are a range of specific practices that might be thought of as “attributes of genuses BwOs.”⁷² The question is not only that of making a BwO, but also of establish a “plane of consistency” of that body so that intensities can pass and things can happen. For every BwO a plane of immanence must be constructed to resist the re-introduction of transcendence. As the above list suggest, there are many BwOs but not all of them are equal in their capacity to construct this “plane of consistency.”⁷³ Some plunge into madness, intolerable pain, or death. But the pressing problem these failures should lead us to address is not how to return to organization, order, or normalcy, but how to go further. This problem is both intensely practical and micropolitical because in failing to reach a plane of consistency these bodies make themselves all the more vulnerable to precisely those social mechanisms of control they sought to escape.

Burroughs comes in to the discussion once again, and as mentioned above, it is the description of heroin addiction as a search for the “production of specific intensities based on absolute COLD = 0” that Deleuze and Guattari seem most tuned into in their reading of *Naked Lunch*. They quote an important passage from “Postscript...Wouldn’t You” where Burroughs provides us with a depiction of the specific arrangement of desire produced by junk – the “junk con.”

⁷⁰ Burroughs, *Naked Lunch*, 110-111.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁷² Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 153.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 154.

Junkies always beef about The Cold as they call it, turning up their black coat collars and clutching their withered necks...pure junk con. A junky does not want to be warm, he wants to be cool-cooler-COLD. But he wants The Cold like he wants his junk – NOT OUTSIDE where it does him no good but INSIDE so he can sit around with a spine like a frozen hydraulic jack... his metabolism approaching Absolute ZERO.⁷⁴

Deleuze and Guattari go on to state that this attempt to “approach Absolute ZERO” names the process by which heroin addicts “empty their BwOs instead of filling them.” Whatever potentials initially introduced by the use of the drug, the drugged BwO’s *addiction to the drug* unleashes a destructive process in at least two ways: one, the BwO becomes organized around what it lacks and two, junk itself makes it impossible to desire to map a plane of consistency for intensities other than Cold-reduction-to-zero would pass. Again, this enables us to read Burroughs word of caution that “nothing ever happens in the junk world.” The drugged body or drug assemblage tends to push the addict into an impossible position where the very practice that had promised escape becomes instead a kind of trap along which desire is emptied from the body: “if all pleasure is a relief from tension, junk afford relief from the whole life process.”⁷⁵

But again it is not a matter of simply denouncing drugs or pathologizing the user. Reading *Naked Lunch* alongside *A Thousand Plateaus* enables an analysis the specific arrangement of desire in the “drugged body.” In both books we encounter a simple question: how does desire operate in these habits? What kind of assemblage or territory does the drugged body try to construct? These questions gets us out of the pervasive tendencies saturating the dominant discourses on drug addiction – namely, explanations that begin with an “addicted subject” as cause of addiction and in doing so avoid thinking specific social arrangements of desire that produce these subjects. Such approaches, as Deleuze and Guattari say, usually begin with “generalities on pleasure

⁷⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 154.

⁷⁵ Burroughs, *Naked Lunch*, 30.

and misfortune” and end up saying very little about the specific social arrangements that push desire to seek a “drugged body.” Dominant forms of organization also empty the body of desire (in fact extracting desire as useful labor). These hierarchized forms of social organization could just as well be described in terms of addiction – the imposition of “organized transcendence” (money and subjectivity for instance) functions as simply more socially acceptable form of addiction. This is why Burroughs investigation of the “junk virus” lead to an extension of the basic laws of addiction as they operate in terms of money, language, and subjectivity.

There are two main reasons to emphasize the severe limitation of the drugged body. The first has to do with the problem of the drug itself because “drug addicts continually fall back into what they wanted to escape: a segmentarity all the more rigid for being marginal, a territorialization all the more artificial for being based on chemical substances, hallucinatory forms, and phantasy subjectification.”⁷⁶ We should avoid the tendency to romanticize drug-addiction that is sometimes expressed by fans of Burroughs and Deleuze alike and runs rampant in much of the existing cultural criticism dealing with literature and drugs.⁷⁷ But a second, and I think more important reason, is that a fascination with drugs often blocks our thinking about a completely different set of dangers the “drugged body” courts if and when it seeks treatment. It is very difficult to construct a materialist and completely practical “cure” for addiction that refuses to moralize or accept the “health we are given” by existing discourses of treatment and recovery. When it is said that drug addicts suffer a “disease” or that drugs are sought to

⁷⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 285.

⁷⁷ See for instance the essays in *High Anxieties: Cultural Studies in Addiction*. In their editors introduction, Anna Alexandar and Mark Robert’s propose that “addiction...involves an experimental field that is both dependent and independent of the world, the substance, the plant, the chemical, and the prosthesis. It is this field we have named addiction.” This seems to me to be precisely the wrong way to approach the questions. While *drugs* can certainly produce an “experimental field,” *addiction* might better be thought of as the evacuation of that field. See *High Culture: Reflection on Addiction and Modernity*.

avoid personal traumas the addict tends to be explained by “causes that always come from someplace else.”⁷⁸ This approach not only effectively avoids thinking the unlivable social arrangements addicts seek to escape but it can provide no consistent path out of addiction that does not lead straight back into the dominant form of organization and subjectification. One shouldn’t be addicted to drugs (particularly illegal ones), but the existing discourse on drugs tends to suggest that *one should be addicted* to work, to transcendence (a “higher power”), to a standard or model of normalized health – basically to one’s own subjection to control. A better approach might begin by thinking how drug addiction is in some way an assertion of a will *to chose one’s own addiction* against those that are constantly imposed by capitalism.⁷⁹ But this assertion does not get us out of the problem drug addicts face when an addiction reproduces the very logic one sought to escape. Rather than providing a means of making a better body without organs, “recovery” usually insist that addicts can only be cured by submitting themselves to the very regimes of morality and subjectification they initially sought to escape.

Deleuze and Guattari ask an important question: “why such a dreary parade of sucked-dry, catatonicized, vitrified, sewn-up bodies when the BwO is also full of gaiety, ecstasy, and dance? Why these examples? *Why must we start here?*”⁸⁰ We must start here because the conditions of capitalist subjectification are such that these “botched” experiments with the BwO that are constantly being produced in order to drain us of our capacity to resist and invent better bodies. Instead of settling for the “health we are given,” we might ask what micropolitical experiments can we invent to refuse both our

⁷⁸ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 283.

⁷⁹ See Eve Sedgwick “Epidemics of the Will” in *Tendencies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993).

⁸⁰ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 150.

addiction to drugs and our addiction to normalized subjectivity?⁸¹ In this context the “Burroughs experiment” becomes interesting not only for what it tells us about the “drugged body” but what it tells us about the kicking a bad habit.

5.2.5 The Kick

Burroughs writes in *Naked Lunch*, “Cure is always: *Let Go! Jump!*” This statement gives us the basic formula for a life-experimentation that does not lead an addict back to the dominant organization of the body or the regime of subjectifications that the use of drugs sought to flee. In this sense, it can be taken as friendly advice from a “master addict to dangerous drugs” offered to anyone who cares to listen. There’s an extraordinary moment in *Naked Lunch* where Agent Lee – Burroughs pseudonym and first person narrator of the book – finds himself in the midst of an excruciating withdrawal from a considerable heroin habit. Burroughs writes, “the critical point of withdrawal is not the early phase of acute sickness, but the final step free from the medium of junk...There is a nightmare interlude of cellular panic, life suspended between two ways of being.”⁸² In a letter to Allen Ginsberg, written during the same period Burroughs was writing *Naked Lunch*, Burroughs uses almost the exact same language to describe the way a depressed psychotic confronts “a final all-out attack” in approaching the threshold of recovery (and in this same letter Burroughs is quick to emphasize: “You might say the human race is now at this point”).⁸³ Reading Burroughs’s notes to Ginsberg it is clear *Naked Lunch* was written to make an intervention in a set of urgent problems confronting the world as Burroughs experienced it from his vantage point as an addict living in Tangier in the late 1950s. He

⁸¹ Franco Berardi’s recent book *The Soul at Work: From Alienation to Autonomy* pursues this idea with respect to our contemporary situation.

⁸² Burroughs, *Naked Lunch*, 49.

⁸³ Burroughs, *Word Virus*, 133.

saw a connection between his experience as a heroin addict and the increasing permeation of life by various control machines that seek to eradicate the “crime of separate life.”⁸⁴ What is this lawless, separate life that Burroughs glimpsed in the passage between a state of dependency and something else while living in a North African port city? Burroughs writes to Ginsberg “I am trying, like Klee, to create something that will have a life of its own,” and he goes on to describe his own process of writing as a very specific sort of cartography: “a scenario for future action in the real world...In a sense a guidebook, a map.”

What I am interested in noting about these letters to Ginsberg is Burroughs’s emphasizes on the necessity to escape the logic of addiction. Even if he did not always achieve it, Burroughs underscores a belief that motivates much of his own “life-experiment” when he writes the “first step in realizing this work is to leave junk forever.”⁸⁵ Burroughs figures this necessity to escape addiction in imagery that is decidedly American. He tells Ginsberg, “I say, ‘throw down all your arms and armor, walk straight to the Frontier.’”⁸⁶ But Burroughs’s Frontier is not always what one would expect. This Frontier appears in *Naked Lunch* when Agent Lee flees a hospital where he had gone to “take the cure.” Having just kicked his heroin addiction Lee immediately heads for the frontiers. Burroughs writes (repeating some of material from the earlier letter to Ginsberg word for word):

When I get to the frontier the Guard rushes out of his *casita*...This has never happened before, that anyone reached the frontier. The Guard has injured his larynx taking off the mirror from..He lost his voice [...] The Guard holds up his hand. His whole body jerks in convulsive negation. I go over and unhook the chain across the road. It falls with a clank of

⁸⁴ Burroughs, *Naked Lunch*, 187.

⁸⁵ Burroughs, *Word Virus*, 134.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 135.

metal on stone. I walk through. The Guard stands there in the mist looking after me.⁸⁷

Who is this Guard that stands at the threshold between “two ways of being”? Why is it necessary to head straight to the Frontier *after* the kick?

Naked Lunch provides many incisive glimpses into those “department[s]...ready to offer effective aid” to addicts and in doing so makes visible how certain cures and notions of health function as mechanisms of control often installed at the very moment of extreme vulnerability.⁸⁸ *Naked Lunch* intervenes precisely on this point in thinking the process of the kick as also one of extreme capacity. Agent Lee inserts an important warning with respect to those departments of aid that peddle sanity and acceptance of the health we are given. He points out, that these departments health – their anxious concern to aid the sick, the insane, the addicted – are driven by an equally powerful control-addiction. And what’s more, that the “threat implicit in this enveloping benevolence *stifles the concept of rebellion...*”⁸⁹ The control addicts are waiting in the hospital, the consulting room, on the couch, and at the examination table. There’s always a Dr. Benway ready to “cure” us of our failed BwOs. In such a situation it becomes much clearer why it was necessary to “walk straight to the frontier,” across the road, and past the guard.

The frontier Burroughs tries to think is not a metaphor. Neither does he pick up the language of the frontier, so important to the ideology of westward expansion in the American context, without radically transforming it.⁹⁰ Reaching the frontier figures an absolute threshold where the scenerio changes and a new territory is not so much

⁸⁷ Burroughs, *Naked Lunch*, 49. Cf. “Kill the Guards and walk” (*The Place of Dead Roads*).

⁸⁸ *Ibid.* 155-156.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.* 155 (my emphasis).

⁹⁰ On Burroughs’s specific variation of the genre of the western see Leslie Fiedler *Return of the Vanishing American*.

discovered as it is produced. Burroughs is less interested in the frontiers of a nation than in the frontiers of space-time where one encounters the thresholds of new experience. Crossing these frontiers implies constructing a habit, a body, a life. It's not until Burroughs writes his "Post Script...Wouldn't You?" that we encounter a vision of the kind of habitation Burroughs invents for a life beyond the frontier.

Burroughs writes, "Only excuse for this tired death route is THE KICK."⁹¹ Heroin, as Burroughs repeats at several points, sets down the tracks for a one-way ride to absolute zero. The tired death route of addiction expresses quite precisely the dangers desire encounters on a line of escape that does not, or cannot, compose even the most humble of territories – a BwO stranded in a land for which it has no map. But in defining the kick as "the only excuse" for having pursued this route, Burroughs affirms something quite extraordinary: *the kick itself is the line of escape of the drugged body*.

The kick is immanent to the drug assemblage, but also names its threshold where a new route must be mapped out once the drugged body becomes uninhabitable. It is for this reason that it cannot be sold or imposed or found at the rehabilitation center and it cannot be provided by those eagerly waiting to help. It belongs entirely to the drugged body. At the end of the tired death route Burroughs affirms the kick as *password* as if to advise: this is how you keep moving, cling to the kick, stay on the road. "Only excuse for this tired death route is THE KICK." What does a drugged body want more than another kick? Kick names *the consistency of the same process of desire* pushed to the threshold where a body lets the drug go. It is "the immanence of drugs [that] allows one to forgo them."⁹² Burroughs knew forgoing drugs was no easy matter: "takes a lot

⁹¹ Burroughs, *Naked Lunch*, 207.

⁹² Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*, 286.

of guts to kick a habit, kid.”⁹³ As a perceptive physician of the Great Health, however, Burroughs wrote many more *postscripts* than he did prescriptions. All these appendixes, atrophied prefaces, and after thoughts for what to do post-kick. When Deleuze and Guattari refer to Burroughs’s idea that a junky “wants to be cool-cooler-COLD” they don’t really address this dimension of Burroughs’s writing and I think they miss some things about *Naked Lunch*.

In order to think the kick, which Deleuze and Guattari don’t mention in their discussion of the “drugged body,” we have to think it as immanent to a set of relations mapped by *Naked Lunch*. Specifically, we have to think it at the level of the assemblage that the book constructs. *Naked Lunch* functions primarily as a thermodynamic assemblage; it is necessary to think in these terms to perceive how the assemblage changes.

The *desire-to-become-cold* tells us very little about junkies if we do not relate it to the set of relations the book diagrams. Recall the first line of the book: “I can feel the heat closing in, feel them out there making their moves, setting up their devil stool pigeons, crooning over my spoon and dropper...”⁹⁴ *Naked Lunch* begins with very concrete problem of needing to *escape the heat*. On the one hand this line expresses Agent Lee’s problem of continuing to elude the cops and agents of control. But it is also the problem faced by every user of illegal drugs. Escaping the heat is an additional hassle confronted by the drugged body and should be kept distinct from the problems that are immanent to the drugged body itself. But *Naked Lunch* also makes clear that there is a necessity to escape a heat which is specific to writing itself. Escaping the heat in this sense also names the problem of subverting the laws governing the novel as a

⁹³ Burroughs, *Naked Lunch*, 194.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 1. Importantly, the first section of *Naked Lunch* is entitled “and start west”

specific genre (a specific form for organizing experience). This second Heat Agent Lee seeks to elude pertains to the very notion of character as a particular type or identity. On the first page of *Naked Lunch* Lee makes a crucial remark about the narcotics dick who he is attempting to flee: "I am evidently his idea of a character."⁹⁵ With this line Burroughs signals not only that the book itself will continuously be subverting the expectations of the reader, but also that Agent Lee's deals go down in the real.

Throughout *Naked Lunch* the Heat consistently refers a those organizations of law, order, and control – everything from undercover cops to doctors to the conventions of reading itself and the basic rules of narration – and for this reason wanting to be Cold acquires a new valence. Cold names a specific relation to heat. But as both Burroughs and Deleuze and Guattari indicate the Absolute Cold of the junky body cannot be sustained. In escaping the heat, the Cold body encounters another problem. Pursuing the Cold is not a very good tactic in seeking to elude the Heat because, as we have seen our discussion of the emptied BwO, it tends toward absolute zero. *Naked Lunch* will move through a series of variations on this essentially *thermodynamic* arrangement of relations. At the extremes of Cold and Heat we find basically *conditions that do not support life*. Junk is a death route and establishing complete control would lead to the impasse in which there is nothing left to control.⁹⁶ But Burroughs "Post Script" finds a passage between these extremes.

After describing the freezing temperatures of "that old thermodynamic junk Slow-DOWN" (the passages that appear in *A Thousand Plateaus*) Burroughs continues and inscribes this space of *warmth* for "us non-junkies,"

WE have this tent and this lamp and this tent and this lamp and this tent
and nice and warm in here nice and warm nice and IN HERE and nice

⁹⁵ Burroughs, *Naked Lunch*, 1.

⁹⁶ See "Limits to Control" reprinted in Burroughs, *Word Virus*, 339.

and OUTSIDE IT'S COLD...IT'S COLD OUTSIDE where the dross eaters and the needle boys won't last two years not six months hardly won't last stumble bum around and there is no class in them...But WE SIT HERE and never increase the DOSE...Excuse please while I take a trip to The Source of Living Drops they all have in pocket.⁹⁷

Junk, having brought the COLD INSIDE, produced an unlivable arrangement. But "this tent and this lamp" construct a new arrangement between cold and heat ("warm in here"). But this passage also transforms the relations between the inside and outside ("in here nice and warm...and OUTSIDE IT'S COLD"). To live passed the frontier, to make it passed the guards, and to escape both the Cold and the Heat you need "this tent." This tent – the tent Burroughs produces in this passage – functions as a mobile territory or nomadic habitat and produces an immanent consistency for *Naked Lunch*. "This tent" enables us to re-read the book in new terms. *This* tent and *this* book produce a passage for a life that is no longer controlled by junk. "This tent and this lamp and nice and warm" maps a space between COLD and HEAT. Burroughs wrote, "I am after fifteen years in that tent. In and out in and out in and OUT. Over and Out."⁹⁸ These last words are perhaps the most compelling, because they suggests that being inside this tent is also the condition for further movement ("in and OUT. Over and Out."). *Naked Lunch* has a strange topology, like a moebius strip, "the way OUT is the way IN."⁹⁹

Burroughs's Post Script concludes with a "word to the wise guy." Ending with a sort of updated communist manifesto, "Paregoric Babies of the World Unite. We have nothing to lose but Our Pushers. And THEY are NOT NECESSARY" Burroughs advises "Look down LOOK DOWN along that junk road before you travel there and get in with the Wrong Mob." *Naked Lunch* takes the reader quite a distance down that road but it

⁹⁷ Burroughs, *Naked Lunch*, 209.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 209.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 191

does not abandon the reader there. Burroughs gives us *this tent* and invites the reader inside, “treat you right kid.”¹⁰⁰

5.2.6 Waiting for the Man - The Meet Café

Naked Lunch functions as a map of a “worldwide network of junkies.”¹⁰¹ Guided by Agent Lee on a run that moves us from New York (the action begins in Washington Square Station) across the U.S. drag (“there is no drag like the U.S. drag. You can’t see it, you don’t know where it comes from”), to Mexico City, and finally, after a brief detour in Freeland (“clean and dull and my God,” where Lee first meets Dr Benway), we land in Interzone.¹⁰² As we move across this geography we are presented with an overwhelming ensemble of so-called “characters,” who don’t have proper names. They enter different parts of the book (often quite unexpectedly) announced only by monikers or nicknames (The Gimp, The Rube, The Vigilante, Bradley the Buyer, The Rock and Roll Hoodlum, etc). In this procedure of having characters reduced to their singular functions *Naked Lunch* shares much with *Confidence Man* (The Herb Doctor, The Cosmopolitan, etc). By this reduction both seek, to some extent, to unmask the operations of character development (subjective organic interiority) as just another con-game. *Naked Lunch* does this through a first person narrative, enabling Burroughs to mock the “idea of character” embedded in the function of “I.” As noted above it is only from the perspective of the heat (i.e. with respect to the “narcotics dick” that he ditches in the subway) that Agent Lee appears as a character.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 209.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 7. On Burroughs as the first novelist of globalization See Mary McCarthy’s early intervention “Burroughs’ *Naked Lunch*” in William S. Burroughs at the Front (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991), 33-39.

¹⁰² The geographical and social space of *Naked Lunch* retraces Burroughs own lived trajectory. Excerpts from “Lee’s [i.e. Burroughs’s] Journals” shows the extent to which significant passages of *Naked Lunch* come out of the notes he kept while living in Tangiers, some of which are extremely lucid. His insights into the subtle manipulations, expectations, desires of the “types” he encountered at the Socco Chico in Tangiers (which is the source for much of the Meet Café). See Burroughs, *Word Virus*, 121-131.

The proliferation of nicknames throughout the book serves an important function. It enables Burroughs to extract a logic of relations between types – that is the arrangements in which certain types are produced. One is not Bradley the Buyer through some organic unfolding or development of character, but becomes Bradley the Buyer in a very specific set of social and historical relations. The procedure of Nicknaming also lays bare the “basic laws” of the Algebra of Need with respect to subjectivity. Addiction, for instance, does not pertain to a particular subject’s relation to a particular objects (junk or money), but to is a necessarily social arrangements of desire that can be seen to function with regard multiple elements (such as junk, money, control, or, as we’ve see, *the word*).

This approach leads to an investigation of the variable relations between the “Marks” (dupe) and the “Man” (con). Such relations that are in nearly ever case defined by dependency. Control, addiction, submission, dependency all name assemblages that operate by the same repetitive rules. It is the assemblage that establishes the relations between a Mark and a Man, primarily through the control of time (“I don’t want your money I want your time”). When desire gets up in an arrangement of expectation a sort of destructive dialectical engine starts churning. Waiting for the Man – the dealer, the boss, the doctor, the answer, the cure – subjects the Mark to time and transcendence. As we will see, even Christ can be figured in this way. Nothing new can come out of this arrangement because its function is to trap desire in a situation of infinite longing for an external and lacking object. Such arrangements always introduce an extrinsic aim or goal that limits (and controls) the positive productions of desire.¹⁰³

¹⁰³ Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*, 133-134. This resembles Deleuze and Guattari discussion of “regimes of signs,” particularly by which the introduction of segmentarity (the reduction of a *line of desire* to a *point* – subjectification) leads desire into a “black-hole.”

Earlier we analyzed this process with respect to the problem of how the becomings opened up by drugs are in turn limited by the drug itself – the drug as external cause of certain desired effects becomes an end and limits those effects as means. On the one hand, drugs open up an “immanent perceptive causality” and promise a new intensified BwO, but on the other they also limit the very thing they open up because they demand a relation of dependency that maintains the effect as dependent on an external (and therefore transcendent) cause. Drug users end up chasing the drug and “botch” the BwO, because the drug increasingly takes charge of the aim. Rather than constructing “a plane of consistency” that would enable the body to select and intensify its own immanent construction, the desire for the drug re-introduces a fixed relation of transcendence in the BwO. As Deleuze and Guattari put it “The causal line, or line of flight, of drugs is constantly being segmentarized under the most rigid of forms, that of dependency, the hit and the dose, *the dealer*.”¹⁰⁴ Waiting for the man is a problem because it forces one into a segmentation that confuses the desire for something to come with desire itself.

Things get complicated, however, because these relations are not reducible to previously established identities. Burroughs notes, “Hustlers of the world, there is one Mark you cannot beat: The Mark Inside.” There’s a “Mark Inside” and, in a few instances, a “Man Inside.” There is much to say about the variations on these relations, but one of the most interesting explorations occurs during “The Prophet’s Hour,” which takes place at the Meet Café.¹⁰⁵ Here we stumble upon a discussion of Christ and Buddha, which can be read as an analysis of the distinctions to be made between

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 284.

¹⁰⁵ Burroughs, *Naked Lunch*, 91. Importantly, this section of the novel, as we are informed in a parenthetical note, was written “in a state of yage intoxication” the effect of which is “space-time travel.” Several visions are revealed at the Meet Café, a place “where the unknown past and the emergent future meet in a vibrating soundless hum.”

“waiting for the Man” and a “Man inside” – a distinction between a plane that functions by transcendence and one that functions by immanence.

Christ is first presented as gathering together the Marks and offering them a cure:

Step right up, Marquesses and Mrks, and bring the little Marks too. Good for young and old, man and beast...the one and only legit Son of Man will cure a young boy's clap with one hand – by contact alone, folks – create marijuana with the other, whilst walking on water and squirting wine out his ass ... Now keep your distance, folks, you is subject to be irradiated by the sheer charge of his *character*.¹⁰⁶

In this comical scene Christ is portrayed as an impresario. The sort of magnetic master of ceremonies one might encounter at a vaudeville show. Basically an entertainer or confidence man who operates by charisma drawing his audience to him by the intensity of his character.

Following Christ's appearance we are then presented with Buddha: “A notorious *metabolic* junky...Makes his own you dig.”¹⁰⁷ Buddha, like the schizophrenics who are introduced as having “a *metabolic* connection, a Man Within you might say,” this prophet is portrayed as having learned a technique (an “angle”) that enables him to escape the endless waiting on the man. It is said that a group of junkies were “sitting around in the lotus posture spitting on the ground and waiting on The Man” when Buddha suddenly decided he was sick of waiting and jumps up and says, “I don't hafta take this sound. I'll by God metabolize my own junk...I'm a fucking Holy Man as of right now.”¹⁰⁸

Deleuze and Guattari wrote some strange pages on the question of drugs. In “Becoming-Intense. Becoming Animal...” they describe a process that resonates with

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 95

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 95.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 95.

what we discussed earlier as Deleuze's refusal to give up the effects of drugs and their capacities for revolutionary exploration. They write "drug users believed that drugs would grant them the plane, *when in fact the plane must distill its own drugs.*"¹⁰⁹ A concept of "drug" emerges here that is extracted from the "drug assemblage" of addiction while at the same time affirming the experimentation that grants a perception of the imperceptible, an opening to a new plane of creation.

Fleeing transcendence – everything from a certain uses of drugs to money to power to waiting for the man – require a delinking of desire (and desired effects) from external causes. Faith, for instance, is described as a drug when it composes a "plane that works by immanence." Love can be a drug when it invents a practice of non-possession and actively invents relations of non-dependency. Nothing is lost. We "recover and relive" the "revelations" we thought would grant the plane by creating the plane itself. On this plane we experience all those effects of effects that have been seized from organized transcendence. Nowhere is this recovery effort more intense than literature, art, and music. It is by repeating the effect, by doing it again and doubling the sensation as affect, that art both makes a plane and the drugs distilled on it.

5.2.7 Recording Instrument

As we have seen, when hooked into an addictive assemblage, the drugged body inevitably crashes against the limits set up by the drug itself as external cause of intensified experience. Instead of constructing a plane of consistency for the experimentation of a body without organs, the drugged body gets trapped in a dead-end search for the drug. *Naked Lunch* introduces a specific and singular process of writing into this circuit. A literature-assemblage, unlike a drug-assemblage, must

¹⁰⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 286.

produce the conditions of real experience immanently. Writing maps out a plane of consistency where the effects of drugs would no longer depend on the consumption of the drug. This autonomy of the doubled effect (or, affect) opens a dimension best described as aesthetic.¹¹⁰ Intensified experience becomes a matter of construction and connection, rather than of consumption. It is above all as aesthetic practice that one produces “revolutionary means of exploration” because art must construct a plane of consistency – that is, a plane of immanence – that does not depend on any external cause. The use of drugs is no longer necessary to the process that enables the release of their effects. The plane precipitates its own living drops.

At several moments in the book Burroughs describes a process of writing that proceeds by making an inorganic body (or, a living machine) that we could say constructs its own immanent plane as a means to exploration. Burroughs asserts, for instance,

There is only one thing a writer can write about: what is in front of his senses at the moment of writing...*I am a recording instrument*...I do not presume to impose “story” “plot” “continuity” ... Insofar as I succeed in *Direct* recording of certain areas of psychic process I may have limited function...I am not an entertainer...¹¹¹

There are several important distinctions to note about this passage. First, in refusing to align writing with a narrative function Burroughs rejects an organic conception of aesthetics. This rejection is more than a matter of taste; it also serves an important and specific subversive function insofar as it is the demand for an organizing “continuity” that Burroughs aligns with control. Much like Artaud, Burroughs clearly identifies the imposition of organic form (for instance, the Judgment of God) as the primary method

¹¹⁰ Stephen Zepke’s *Art as Abstract Machine: Ontology and Aesthetics in Deleuze and Guattari* (New York: Routledge, 2005) has contributed significantly to my understanding of Deleuze’s approach to art, and particularly, his radicalization of Kantian aesthetics (i.e. art as the production of the conditions of *real* experience).

¹¹¹ Burroughs, *Naked Lunch*, 184.

by which mechanism of control are installed. Rather than being reducible or dependent on already existing conditions of possible experience in which writing imitates or attempts to impose a totalizing form on a fictional world through a narrative function (by means of story, plot, and continuity), Burroughs is interested in producing real conditions for, as noted earlier, action in this world. To do that requires a tool that operates not by narration but by *direct recording*. Writing as a means to convey sensations and perceptions (“what is in front of his senses at the moment of writing”). When the novel functions to imposing organized forms the function of art is reduced to entertainment, distraction, narcosis. Writing must go beyond this limit and produce an escape from – not a rehearsal of – an imposed organicism.

The second thing to notice about Burroughs description of writing is that the refusal of “story, plot, continuity,” as noted above, requires a new *inorganic* body. “I am a recording instrument.” The book is a “little machine” through which the writer passes “what is in front of his senses at the moment of writing” to the reader – an instrument for relaying of experience. It is no doubt for this reason that we are also given very specific directions for how to use this machine. Burroughs provides us with a sort of instruction manual to go along with the book.

All of Burroughs’s statements imply a reader seeking a *connection* that would not be determined by the form of the novel as a genre.¹¹² The book itself seeks to create this reader. Instead of presenting an already determined aim (for instance, entertainment or the communication of meaning) Burroughs explicitly describes the book as “a blueprint, a How-To Book.” As blueprint *Naked Lunch* serves a *diagrammatic* function giving the coordinates of an “abstract machine” that maps a way out of lived experience in order to

¹¹² Burroughs explicitly rejects thinking of *Naked Lunch* in terms of the novel. In a letter to Irving Rosenthal he writes, “THIS IS NOT A NOVEL” see Burroughs, *Naked Lunch*, Appendixes, 249.

set free intensities that are future oriented but not necessarily predetermined. It is an experimentation all the more thrilling precisely because it might go *anywhere*.

It is important to say that on one level *Naked Lunch* works like a drug insofar as it maps this passage and provides a manual for “extend[ing] the levels of experience by opening the door at the end of a long hall.” But once again it is a matter of freeing these intensities and experiences so that they have a “life of their own” no longer determined, for instance, by the use of junk. Burroughs is also quick to assert, that this extension of experience requires specific reading practices. An exploration of what can be experienced in passing through the door or across certain thresholds necessitates a break in communication. These are “Doors that only open in Silence” and as such “*Naked Lunch* demands Silence from the Reader.”¹¹³ Why this demand for silence from the reader? Why are the doors only opened by an act of becoming speechless?

Silence names the condition of a receptivity to new experience for both the reader and the writer. Burroughs expresses this thought quite directly, “This is Revelation and Prophecy of what I can pick up without FM on my 1920 crystal set.”¹¹⁴ Direct recording also happens in silence. The intensest revelations do not give themselves to speech and are not communicated through words but in what passes between words. A real encounter always leaves one speechless: *I was amazed...I could not speak...words fail me.* Such astonishment should not to be confused with submission or docility. Becoming-receptive requires an act that is all the more paradoxical because there is no subject of this act. “As if I was usually there but subject to goof now and again...*Wrong! I am never here...*”¹¹⁵ Silence as an act of reading and writing requires constructing a receiving

¹¹³ Burroughs, *Naked Lunch*, 187.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 191

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 185.

instrument capable of tuning in to the lowest of frequencies – a sort of ungrounded radio that can move – a finely tuned instrument that will be capable of withstanding the most extreme relays. To do this it must be capable of transformation. Silence does not mean static but *active passivity*.

It is important here to stress that the writer has no control over the reader. What is at stake is transmission, and not communication, and it is beside the point whether or not the reader comes to agree or accept the message. No consensus is required between the writer and the reader. The reader can go her own way, or choose to produce the white-noise of interpretation where nothing happens and no transmission can take place. But becoming-silent also opens a passage for the reader to enter into experimentation and cross a threshold in time-space. An exploration that demands all the more caution because, as previously mentioned, it is not clear where it may lead. Burroughs was aware of these risks of reading and for this reason became a very cautious writer. “Why all this waste paper getting the People from one place to another? Perhaps to spare *The Reader* stress of sudden spaceshifts and keep him Gentle?”¹¹⁶ Which is to say it requires enormous effort on the part of both the writer and the reader to stay gentle through these relays.

Why is it necessary for this extension through space and time to take place *without words* as though a great secret could only slip through an otherwise locked and guarded door in silence? Why does this constant refrain return to us in literature: “Unscrew the locks from the doors! Unscrew the doors themselves from their hinges”? Why must one become speechless for a life to imperceptibly pass through the gate and by the guards?

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 182.

5.3 Conclusion: Creation Against Control

In the final paragraph of “Deposition: Testimony Concerning A Sickness” Burroughs indicated the direction his future work would take based on a “mathematical extension of the Algebra of Need beyond the junk virus.”¹¹⁷ As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, the possibility of an extended analysis beyond heroin addiction derived from Burroughs’s belief that all addictions obey the same fundamental laws and, as result, one could think of the relations organized by money or in language as operating in a similar fashion to the relations circulating in the world of junk. Burroughs would increasingly express these relations in terms of *control* and the attempt to eradicate “other level experience.”¹¹⁸ Thus, Burroughs would expand his investigation of controlled substances toward a thinking about societies of control.

In the 1970s Burroughs wrote two texts explicitly addressing this theme: “Control” (1970) and “The Limits of Control” (1975). It is worth mentioning in this context that the second of these texts appeared alongside Deleuze’s short text on “Politics” in the issue of *Semiotext(e)* that came out of the conference they both attended. In the Introduction to this dissertation I discussed at length the Schizo-Culture conference that took place in 1975, in conclusion I would like to return to some of the specific convergences between Burroughs and Deleuze thought around this notion of control and also their way of conceiving the limits of control.

All the key elements of Burroughs thinking about control, as the previous sections have aimed to show, are already present in *Naked Lunch*. It is with respect to a particularly figure, however, that of Dr. Benway, and a particularly “ignorant” and

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 205.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 187.

“self-righteous” party of Interzone known as The Senders, that Burroughs lays bare specific coordinates of the control machine.

Dr. Benway is first introduced in *Naked Lunch* as “a manipulator and coordinator of symbol systems, an expert on all phases of interrogation, brainwashing and control.”¹¹⁹ He is presented as a historically specific type whose “first act was to abolish concentration camps, mass arrest and, except under certain limited and special circumstances, the use of torture,” suggesting a new form of power emerging in the wake of totalitarian regimes after the second world war. On a certain level Benway can be read as a cold war figure par excellence. Importantly, Dr Benway rejects brutality as a mechanism for enforcing power relations – but not on ethical or political grounds – rather it is simply because such measures are “not efficient.”¹²⁰ Aided by a sort of pseudo-scientific discourse, Dr Benway has no problem speaking directly about his “experiments” and explains in plain terms exactly what he is doing. Off-handedly remarking in one instance that the “naked need of the control addicts [among whom he would be included] must be decently covered by an arbitrary and intricate bureaucracy so that the subject cannot contact his enemy direct.”¹²¹ Benway functions as a medium through which the basic assumptions of a new “bio-control” are expressed – a satiric composite of the dominant post-war discourses of medicine, psychology, and cybernetics.

Benway is likely a Sender, though it is never really clear who he is working for or to which party he belongs. Senders, importantly, are characterized by the necessity to constantly communicate information (the content of which is largely irrelevant) and to

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 19

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 19.

do it in such a way that “one way telepathic control” is always maintained.¹²² In addition to suggesting a historically specific mechanisms of domination made possible by new communication technologies: radios, television, computers, and so on, the Senders also appear as a sort of logical outgrowth of ancient control mechanisms premised on the control of time. Burroughs recurrent reference to the Mayans first appears in this context: “The Mayans were limited by isolation...Now one Sender could control the planet.”¹²³ The Senders, however, are not finally identifiable as persons. They are “defined by negatives” and in fact are not “human individuals” but rather, “The Human Virus,” which like all viruses leads “ a parasitic existence.”¹²⁴ This last point is important because it underscores the fact that control defines a particular arrangement of relations that is both historical and, for Burroughs, attends relations as broadly defined as life, language, and time. The Mayan example underscores how technology (in this case, a calendar) can function as both a tool for enhancing the creative potentials of life, but also as an instrument of control. In addition to technologies as old as calendars and those as recent as computers, the primary technology of control Burroughs will repeatedly return to is that of language. The “word virus” naming precisely language as parasitical, inorganic, instrument that capturing life and seeks to dominate it.

What these passages on Sending in *Naked Lunch* repeatedly underscore is the problem for life is not the control of communication, but *communication as such* as function of control. Communication – and above all language understood as primarily communicative – requires a reduction of life to identity, because it effectively blocks the

¹²² Agent Lee belongs to The Factualists, who are “above all Anti-Sender.” *Naked Lunch*, 140. Factualist do not oppose telepathic research as such, but they emphatically oppose the use of *one-way* telepathic mechanism.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 137.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 141.

thought of creating something new. Instead of enabling an exploration or construction of new potentials it demands the circulation of already existing thought, experience, knowledge, and relations. It is for this reason that Sending is also described in terms of addiction: it is the “naked need” of motoring the control machine and “can never be a means to anything but more sending, like junk.”¹²⁵ New technologies, from this perspective, only serve to exponentially increase the effectivity of this virus (control virus, human virus, word virus). Considered from the perspective of the analysis of the Algebra of Need, machines would appear to be enemies of life.

Techniques of communication (i.e. sending) always implies the reproduction of the *same relations* (the same ideas, inanities, commonsense) and, as noted above, are based on a logic of identity. In a text exploring the possibilities of intervening into the “control machine” through particular uses of language (specifically through the substraction of certain grammatical and syntactic elements), Burroughs isolates what he calls “the IS of Identity” as one of the primary components of control. He writes, “the IS of identity always...carries the assignment of *permanent condition*.”¹²⁶ In these fascinating pages, Burroughs describes the verb *to be* – which organizes and underwrites all Western languages – as an unnecessary, and again *parasitical*, imposition of order on an otherwise “multi-level structure of experience.”¹²⁷ In addition to the function of the verb *to be* – its function to reduce a body to an identity – Burroughs also isolates two other “virus mechanism” in language. What he calls the “categorical THE” (i.e. the One) and the “*whole concept of EITHER/OR*” (i.e. right or wrong, *either true or false*: systems of

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 141.

¹²⁶ Burroughs, *Word Virus*, 311.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 312.

morality).¹²⁸ In every case the logic works the same: to fix the conditions of experience to a “rigid and permanent status.”¹²⁹ Burroughs defines these operations, not as fundamental (and therefore neutral) structures of grammar (which from the perspective of linguistics is how they would be understood), but as first and foremost “weapons and tactics in the war game.”¹³⁰

The point of Burroughs’s text, however, is not simply to point out in paranoiac fashion a system that cannot be changed. It is rather to propose a series of counter-tactics that might effectively “call the war game into question.”¹³¹ Burroughs makes three crucial suggestions: subtract the verb *to be* from language, replace definite article “THE” with indefinite article “A,” and finally, substitute “AND” for “EITHER/OR.”

It is in part from Burroughs, I suspect, that Deleuze and Parnet take the idea of deploying AND against IS in, “On the Superiority of Anglo-American Literature,” but in that essay this subversive logic of the conjunction is related, not only to literary procedures, but to an empiricist philosophical orientation. What Burroughs sees operating, for instance, in Chinese – a language he defines as specifically arranged to deal with the multi-layered texture of experience that the verb *to be* flattens out – Deleuze, interestingly, associates with English. The point here is not to compare Chinese and English, however, but to underscore the problem at stake for both Deleuze and Burroughs: how to get out of the subordination of all relations to identity imposed by a transcendent One. For Deleuze, the philosophical determination of “Being, One, or the Whole” name mechanisms of imprisoning multiplicity (life) and stifling the conditions of creation. To think relations in their externality and to experiment with

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 311.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 311.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 313.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 313.

AND rather than IS has always been the “secret” of empiricism. He affirms that “English and Americans who have freed conjunctions and reflected on relations.”¹³² But Deleuze defines empiricism in a very singular way: “syntax and experimentation, syntactics and pragmatics.”¹³³ What’s important to notice here is that both he and Burroughs suggest propose an experimentation with AND as a way to resist mechanisms of subordination, identity, and control. Such an affirmation – to invent new relations – requires a creative act. While Deleuze and Parnet do not reference Burroughs in “On the Superiority of Anglo-American Literature,” there are clearly multiple resonances between their thinking, and, as highlighted above, the crucial dimension of this similarity is a sense of the necessity to introduce a creative process of experimentation (specifically, a creative corruption and dismantling of syntax) into the logic of control.

In the same interview with Antonio Negri that was discussed at some length in the previous chapter, Deleuze directly references Burroughs as “the first to address” the fact that “we’re moving toward control societies that no longer operate by confining people but through continuous control and instant communication.”¹³⁴ This does not mean, as Deleuze points out, that outmoded forms of power no longer operate. As the discussion of George Jackson in the previous chapter showed, prisons as “model sites” of disciplinary power have not disappeared in societies of control, but rather exist alongside new systems of domination (and the same could be said for torture and execution, the hegemonic techniques of power developed by sovereign societies). The point for both Deleuze and Burroughs is not that control societies supersede or do away

¹³² Deleuze and Parnet, *Dialogues II*, 42.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 43.

¹³⁴ Deleuze, *Negotiations*, 175.

with earlier forms of power, but only that these forms “come back into play, adapted as necessary” as parts of a new hegemonic system of control.¹³⁵

In “Control and Becoming” Deleuze, like Burroughs, strongly rejects any kind of technological determinism and is careful to avoid conflating new technological machines with the conditions of creation. While he acknowledges the fact that each society seems to correspond to a particular type of machine he stresses an crucial point: “machines don’t explain anything, you have to analyze the collective arrangements of which the machines are just one part.”¹³⁶ Deleuze brings up Burroughs notion of control societies in response to a pointed and important question put to him by Antonio Negri. Negri asks if Deleuze thinks communism is still a “viable option” for us today insofar as, following Marx, Negri proposes to understand communism as a “form of a transversal organization of free individuals *built on a technology that makes it possible.*”¹³⁷

In this conversation, it is clear that both Negri and Deleuze seek to affirm immanent emancipatory potentials within control societies, but in this conversation we see how each approaches the question of revolutionary politics from very different angles. This difference has everything to do with how they address the question of conditions. It is here, I think, that Deleuze suggests an important distinction between his political philosophy and that of Antonio Negri and it is interesting to note that while Negri’s point of reference is a philosopher (Marx), Deleuze’s point of reference is an artists (Burroughs).

Negri’s question implies – in two ways – that the condition of the “transversal organization of free individuals” (i.e. communism) already exists. First, by his way of

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 182.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 175.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 174.

formulating the question. Negri formulates Deleuze's analysis of power in his book on Foucault as pertaining to three kinds of power: sovereign power, disciplinary power, and the "control of 'communication.'"¹³⁸ But a slippage occurs here whereby "communication" itself is understood by Negri as enabling insofar as new technologies (for instance, the internet) make it possible for "any man, any minority, any singularity...to speak out and thereby recover a greater degree of freedom."¹³⁹ Secondly, as quoted above, Negri's reference to communism as a form of social organization "built on a technology that *makes such organization possible*" suggests that it is technology that produces the conditions of new forms of social organization.¹⁴⁰ Deleuze's response to Negri's question is very interesting. He suggests that in going to quickly to the question of the *conditions of communism* Negri misses an important step: namely, the question of the *conditions of creation*.

Creation should not be confused here with production, or as Deleuze makes clear in his Postscript, "metaproduction." Control societies constantly produce new services, activities, and forms of subjectivity. But as this dissertation has attempted to show, creation names something else entirely, namely an *aesthetic* procedure that enables the construction of non-preexisting relations. The active construction of new relations can not be reduced to already existing conditions nor can it be referred to a question of technological, because in doing so one refers the question of creation to a set of causes already set in place. For Deleuze, it would not be enough to seize the technological means of communication because, in doing so, one runs the risk of mistaking those means for ends. Insofar as existing conditions (the social and technological apparatuses

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 174.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 174.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 174.

of communication in capitalist control societies) already impose themselves as the horizon of possible action, it becomes necessary to invent new conditions. And it is for this reason, I think, that Deleuze invokes Burroughs and insists on the *necessity of art*. Art has the capacity to produce conditions of real experience without having recourse to any cause outside its own immanent capacities.

This aesthetic dimension is precisely what is often lacking in the celebration of new technology media as progressive or even “revolutionary.” But when the exhilaration about new technologies does not take into account strategies for acting against existing social relations it becomes indistinguishable from the language of power. Technology, similar to drugs as I have discussed in the preceding sections, can just as easily function as an instrument of control as it can be transformed into a means of revolutionary exploration.¹⁴¹ And, more importantly for the questions of this dissertation, because acts of creation do not depend on technological conditions, events of revolutionary exploration are frequently encountered in so-called old media. Deleuze emphasizes this point in a short text entitled “If Literature Dies, It Will Be Murder,”

¹⁴¹ Félix Guattari explores this dimension of our relationship to technology in “Machinic Junkies” in *Soft Subversions*.

People who haven't properly read or understood McLuhan may think it's only natural for audiovisual media to replace books, since they actually contain all the creative possibilities of the literature or other modes of expression they supersede. It's not true. For if audiovisual media ever replace literature, it won't be as competing means of expression, but as a monopoly of structures that also stifle the creative possibilities in those media themselves. If literature dies, it will be a violent death, a political assassination...It's not a matter of comparing different sorts of medium. The choice isn't between written literature and audiovisual media. It's between *creative forces* (in audiovisual media and well as literature) and *domesticating forces*. It's highly unlikely that audiovisual media will find the conditions for creation once they've been lost in literature.¹⁴²

This statement strikes me as speaking directly to our own present situation. In recent years many humanities scholars – from a variety of political and theoretical standpoints – have declared, lamented, or in some cases, celebrated the “death of literature.” The implications of the loss of literature’s historical social and institutional function has been endlessly debated (the crisis of the humanities), but I think Deleuze contributes an important insight that is not usually brought into these debates by simply pointing to the importance of literature as a space for thinking the conditions of creation and for studying escape routes from control. The struggle between creative forces and the forces of domestication, as the above quote makes clear, suggest that literature intervenes precisely on the question of power and the dominant organization of knowledge and experience. It is for this reason that Deleuze insists that the death of literature should not be confused with a peaceful, natural death coming at the end of a long life, but instead should be understood as nothing less than a “political assassination.”¹⁴³

For Deleuze, communication always refers to “domesticating forces.” An extensive analysis of the conditions of control, and of language as above all a mechanism

¹⁴² Deleuze, *Negotiations*, 131 (my emphasis).

¹⁴³ There is a wonderful moment in *Naked Lunch* where the necessity to affirm the the difference between the “forces of creation” and “domesticating forces” is described precisely in terms of the crucial distinction to be made between Art and Sending. A bulletin warns that “Artists will confuse sending with creation. They will camp around screeching “A new medium!” until their ratings drop off...” see Burroughs, *Naked Lunch*, 141.

for enforcing a power relation, follows from this refusal to understand communication as a neutral term. What this refusal enables, however, is a thinking of strategies that can be invented (and that have been invented) for disrupting the domesticating function of language: experimental uses of language against language, disrupted syntax, agrammaticality, and so on. In *A Thousand Plateaus* "November 20, 1923 – Postulates of Linguistics" Deleuze and Guattari explore these dimensions of resistance by first explicitly rejecting the postulate "Language is Informational and Communicational" for (at least) two reasons. First, because such a postulate evades the social and political dimension of language. Education is used as their primary example of this first point. They argue that language always functions to establish a hierarchical relation between those who know (those who are right) and those who must be taught. Deleuze and Guattari write, "The compulsory education machine does not communicate information; it imposes on the child semiotic coordinates."¹⁴⁴ What follows from this proposition is that language, rather than being a neutral or shared capacity, above all functions to enforce a power relation: "the elementary unit of language – the statement – is the order word."¹⁴⁵ Language does not simply communicate information – even if entire disciplines exist to argue that it does – but always organizes a relation of domination.

The second reason Deleuze and Guattari give for rejecting the notion of language as communication has to do with the relation between language and life. Here, Deleuze and Guattari contribute an important insight that pushes the importance Burroughs had placed on silence even further. They write, "language is not life; it gives life orders. Life does not speak it listens and waits."¹⁴⁶ The effort to dismantle the control machine

¹⁴⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 76.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 76.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 76.

always expresses the defiance of separate life against existing conditions and dominant organization. If we understand language as a somehow neutral, or generalize the structures of language as a universal system (as though these “structural invariants” organized some some fundamental aspect of human existence) we miss both the dimension of control and this dimension of life as separate from seeks to order it.

Burroughs is the only writer discussed in this dissertation that Deleuze would have met at the Schizo-Culture conference. One can only speculate what that encounter might have looked like, but the affinity between these two thinkers couldn't be more striking than when Deleuze states, again in the interview with Negri, “Maybe speech and communication have been corrupted. They're thoroughly permeated by money – and not by accident but by their very nature. We've got to hijack speech. Creating has always been something different from communication.”¹⁴⁷ In his emphasis on creation against communication – and in particular by his reference to “hijacking speech” – Deleuze not only strongly cautions against conflating increased technological means of communication with increased freedom, but also disrupts the notion of politics as a matter of “speaking out.” Contrary to the way such repudiations of speech are sometimes characterized, however, this does not mean one is trapped in a sort of total grid of power or that there is no way to resist. Writing (not speech), visual arts, and also all sorts of undisciplined uses of language (i.e. minor uses) all contribute to the dismantling and contestation of domesticating forces, subjectifications, and control. Deleuze, like Burroughs, locates resistances to control in whatever introduces the forces of creation into communication.

In Deleuze and Guattari, one encounters the same problem with language (understood as communication) as Burroughs described with respect to money and

¹⁴⁷ Deleuze, *Negotiations*, 175.

junk. What communication, junk, and money share is an intolerance for the “crime of separate life.”¹⁴⁸ Control has specific aims: to capture life (and put it to work, for instance) and prevent the forces of creation from challenging its power to determine and subordinate what it cannot control. Above all, control names a situation in which the forces of life are trapped in existing conditions.

In *What is Philosophy?* Deleuze and Guattari underscore the political dimensions of an important problem. They write,

We do not lack communication. On the contrary, we have too much of it. We lack creation. We lack resistance to the present. The creation of concepts in itself calls for a future *form*, for a new earth and people that do not yet exist.¹⁴⁹

Creation, for Deleuze and Guattari, is above all a political problem that bears on the composition of a people and a new earth that do not yet exist. As they state many times, art and philosophy “invoke this people” but they cannot, by themselves, produce it. What this suggests is that the question of creation always forces us to orient thinking toward a future that cannot be determined by an already existing form of thought, social organization, subjectivity, or language. New lines are necessary to map a future form. This dissertation has attempted to mark out a few new lines, but these lines themselves do not finally lead one to a conclusion. Instead they open up new questions and suggest an open process of experimentation that always begins in the middle. The relation between a “new earth and new people” and those routes of an American rhizome explored in the course of this study turns on a thinking of lateral lines composed beneath the ground of subjects, states, and dominant historical narratives. The notion of a rhizome orients a constructivist approach to these relations, in which the study of lines

¹⁴⁸ Deleuze, *Naked Lunch*, 187

¹⁴⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 108

necessarily engages us in creating new connections. Affirming a practice of criticism as an active contribution to the composition of this new earth and new people – as each of the preceding chapters has shown – shifts the focus from reading and interpretation to writing and experimentation where new relations and potentials open up and previously unthinkable encounters become actualized. Following routes suggested by Deleuze and his collaborators has enabled this study to take those lines further and to pursue questions and problems pertaining to our own present and, more importantly, the future potentials of an American rhizome.

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Hegel, who is often thought of as Deleuze's primary philosophical adversary, made some strange and compelling remarks about America. In *The Philosophy of History* he wrote "America is therefore the land of the future, where, in the ages that lie before us, the burden of the World's History shall reveal itself... It is for America to abandon the ground on which hitherto the History of the World has developed itself."¹⁵⁰ Deleuze's figure of an American rhizome suggest a very different relation to the ground of history: not so much one of abandonment, where flight beomes a matter of transcendence, but of a burrowing in the earth that makes escapes by going under. Deleuze's idea of an American rhizome gives us a way to think subterranean movements aligning literature with a minor people that actively resists foundations and the capture of creation for grounding narratives of a dominant tradition of national belonging. Subverting many longstanding notions of America in the history of philosophy this dissertation has sought to show how Deleuze's thought opens a thinking of experimentation and construction that affirms a belief in an ongoing process of becomings in American literature where future forms have yet to be invented.

¹⁵⁰ G.W.F. Hegel, "The Geographical Basis of History," *The Philosophy of History* (Cosimo: New York, 2007),87.

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Biography

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