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**“In Any Event”: Chance, Choice, and Change in the Postmodern Fictional
Text**

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Thesis submitted to the
Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
In partial fulfillment of the requirements
For the PhD degree in English

Department of English
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Abstract

This dissertation attempts to stage a creative encounter between a Deleuzian theory of the event and postmodern fictional narratives. More specifically, it situates subjectivities represented in postmodern texts in relation with concepts of chance, choice, and change. I aim to demonstrate how works by Don DeLillo, Paul Auster, Edmund White, and Nicholson Baker approach the subject as an “encountering” at the surface between self and other, inside and outside, and before and after. The postmodern imperative of interconnectivity dramatizes a potentialization of subjectivity through what Brian Massumi calls the event’s “openness to being otherwise” (“Like a Thought” xxxiv). Accounting for such openness, particularly in novels rife with repetition, requires a critical appraisal of the present as a changeful operation, where subjectivities are properly expressive of their singular becomings along the lines of their capacities to affect and be affected. It is ultimately my project’s contention that chance and choice themselves need to be rigorously theorized in order that we better understand the mechanisms of containment and resistance, but most importantly the conditions for emancipatory change within the postmodernism of a new millenium, and beyond.

Chapter One

Chance, Choice, and Change in Eventful Subjectivities

Midnight never falls at midnight. Midnight falls when the dice are cast, but they cannot be cast till midnight.

—Maurice Blanchot

A throw you made had failed. But what of that, you dice-throwers! You have not learned to play and mock as a man ought to play and mock!

—Friedrich Nietzsche

Out for a walk one day, seized by no small anxiety over how exactly I would begin a conference paper entitled “The Semiotics of Chance,” I had the good fortune, I daresay “luck,” to notice a pair of yellow dice hanging from the rearview mirror of a parked car whose make I cannot recall. These were what has entered common parlance as “fuzzy dice,” a curious appellation, but more on that in a moment. I wondered what these “fuzzy” dice might signify: I thought they may have been emblems of a kind of “bravado of the road,” the markers of a devil-may-care driver who fancies him or herself a risk-taker behind the wheel. But, of course, these were plush toys after all, the kind you might find at the midway as a prize for having successfully tossed a plastic ring over a bottle-top or having swished a regulation-size basketball through a less-than-regulation-size hoop. That is, these dice might be the signs of having lived propitiously through a game of skill and chance: the dice themselves might be the signs of being lucky. And still further, I thought, how can I see these dice without acknowledging their sly irony, the way they inspire a sense of silliness, seeming to mock the grim severity of gambling? To return to their name, then: *fuzzy dice*. A form of postmodern poetry, perhaps, to consider the dice as representations of chance, and to understand chance as indeterminacy, the aleatoric, a blurring of distinctions and clarity, a fuzziness at the edges of things, and then to apply “real”

fuzziness to the signs of fuzziness themselves, to make the dice fuzzy. And the signs of chance, that pair of dice dangling from the mirror, are no longer clear, but have become enmeshed within the very chance they may gesture toward. Fuzzy dice, indeed.

All of which, in a periphrastic way, leads me to some central questions this chapter, and my dissertation as a whole, will address: how must we conceive of chance, how might it function in the world, and how might we engage with it if it is, among other things, positively understood as a force, a potential, or an event which resists and forever frustrates determination? I want ultimately to show how subjectivities represented in postmodern fiction are affirmative in their resistance to codifying impulses, to closure and overdetermination, through their relations with chance, choice, and change. In trying to work toward answering these questions, this chapter will introduce a philosophical foundation for critical practice by entering into a dialogue between two paragons of postmodernism, Jean Baudrillard and Gilles Deleuze, whose theoretical enterprises are ostensibly inimical to each other since each has, among other things, very different notions of what chance is.

In *Seduction*, Baudrillard uses the game as a model in order to investigate what he calls “the problem of chance” (143). He suggests that “What is at stake [in a game] is the particle of value thrown in the face of chance considered as a transcendent instance, not in order to win its favours, but to dismiss its transcendence, its abstraction, and turn it into a partner, an adversary” (143). He maintains that “The stake is a summons, the game a duel: chance is summoned to respond, obliged by the player’s wager to declare itself either favourable or hostile,” concluding that “Chance is never neutral, the game transforms it into a player and agonistic figure. Which is another way of saying that the basic assumption behind the game is that *chance does not exist*” (143). Essentially, Baudrillard contends, chance is itself an effect of the rules and challenges

involved in gaming. He rails against “the idea that the world of things is subjected to a molecular and *objective disorder*,” calling such a vision of chance “insane” and “demented” (146), as though, apparently, chance itself must be beholden to the statutes of reason and right-mindedness. (I might, parenthetically and with an anticipatory wink of an eye, note that what for Baudrillard constitute epithets indicating his dismissiveness [“insane” and “demented”], are, in the Deleuzian vocabulary, words embraced for their revolutionary potential: one need only recall Deleuze’s insistent provocations to enact a “becoming-mad.”)

At any rate, I’d like to tease out some of the implications Baudrillard’s notion of chance has for subjectivities involved *in relation with* chance. What strikes me immediately about Baudrillard’s thesis is that chance’s coming into being takes the form of an either/or proposition: it is summoned to “declare itself either favourable or hostile” to the subject playing the game (143). Chance, if it exists at all, becomes real in the world the moment a player wins or loses. As such, it is important for Baudrillard to have what he calls “a particle of value” involved as a wager—he needs something to structure a system of losses and gains for the subject. What form this value takes is irrelevant: it could be money, or pride, or even life itself. What is important to recognize is that here, implicitly, is a subject with specific desires, one whose very constitution rests on being determinable as a winner or loser. Before the roll of the dice, the results of the game have been delimited in accordance with what the subject may want, or, indeed, with the total series of potential outcomes that the subject can imagine. Moreover, the game proceeds along a mechanical causality. It anticipates all imaginable contingencies and determines what will happen if something else happens, drawing a fixed and inextirpable connection between separate events along the lines of the rules. Ultimately, Baudrillard tells us that every game has its consequences, that every moment of chance imposes limits upon a subject fixed to its

identification with value. We have a subject that plays and is played with but is not itself playful.

Thus, it would appear that, for Baudrillard, “a set of rules always preexists the playing of the game” (*Logic of Sense* 58). One plays according to the rules in the interest of knowing victory or defeat. Or so it would seem. For there still exists the possibility of cheating, breaking, or better yet, bending the rules. But Baudrillard’s game simply cannot countenance cheating, as rules allow for no transgression. As he states, “In truth, the cheater cannot transgress the rules since the game, not being a system of interdictions, does not have lines one can cross. One does not ‘transgress’ a rule, one fails to observe it. And non-observance does not lead to a state of transgression; it brings one back under the jurisdiction of the law” (140). Either you’re in the game or you’re out of the game, either you play by the rules or you don’t play at all. Such are the options for a player in the Baudrillardian casino, where chance is manifest only at particular points of the game, where the rules themselves know nothing of the dice throw, and where the dice tumble within the strict confines of convention.

Deleuze, on the other hand, proposes an altogether different type of game, the game of difference itself. In *The Logic of Sense*, Deleuze imagines the principles inherent in what he calls the “Ideal Game,” the game that has become “pure” (59). In the ideal game, “there are no preexisting rules, each move invents its own rules; it bears upon its own rule” (59). We are not familiar with games like this in our everyday experience, games that have no rules anterior to their being played, because here every move that is made, every moment of playing, is a further elaboration and creation of the game itself, of its contours and definitions. The playing of the game effectively ramifies the game itself such that it must be understood as an open and vitalistic process or force, a changeful invention that is continually taking shape: the ideal game is, it

appears, an account of the world itself. Furthermore, as Deleuze writes, “Far from dividing and apportioning chance in a really distinct number of throws, all throws affirm chance and endlessly ramify it with each throw.... The throws therefore are not really or numerically distinct. They are qualitatively distinct, but are the qualitative forms of single cast which is ontologically one” (59). Here, perhaps more saliently than anywhere else, I see the burgeoning of an insuperable rift between Deleuze and Baudrillard. We cannot speak of a single throw, a single move, a single moment, or even a single subject, without acknowledging that what we refer to as singular is always constituted as multiple, as a series that has as its operational truth the happening of divergence. All things must be conceived not as clearly determined objects but as open-ended processes involving relations of force. What does this mean for chance? That it lies at the very heart of becoming. For we leave behind the language of number and quantity to enter the vertiginous continuum of quality, each move, or, to borrow from Deleuze, each *event* seen as a distinct quality, a singularity, which, when communicating with other events, form the unique Event. And the unique Event, the unique cast of the dice that is the world’s becoming, “is a chaos, each throw of which is a fragment” (60).

Deleuze’s ideal game is difficult to fathom—indeed, it may be by definition unfathomable, because it extends chance across its entire surface; there are no rules, no winning, and no losing—only playing, as an active verb. As Deleuze notes, “The ideal game... cannot be played by either man or God. It can only be thought as nonsense. But precisely for this reason, it is the reality of thought itself and the unconscious of pure thought.... This game is reserved for thought and art” (60). What can it possibly mean to say that this game can only be thought as nonsense, and that nonsense is, consequently, the reality of thought itself? At the most fundamental level, it appears to mean that we must embrace the form of paradox or aporia, that

thought itself, in its immanent becoming, so to speak, in its very activity, is unlocatable and other to representation, and thus can only be thought *of* as other to itself. When we try to think thinking, for example, we are involved in a process of perpetual dislocation and dispersement. Thought can never be made into its own clearly defined object. I believe Maurice Blanchot is after much the same thing when he speaks of “the impossibility of thinking that is thought” (qtd. in *Difference and Repetition* 199). The player in Deleuze’s game becomes radicalized: he or she becomes immanently creative and transformative, not as a “new” being as such, but as a kind of displaced or deflected being who is forever making itself contingent. I might say that the subject is always elsewhere to itself, but I hope to propose also, perhaps more suggestively, that the subject is always *elsewhen* to itself, chance and time being entirely coterminous. Before elaborating on the possible correlations between chance and time, however, and even more importantly, on the impact such correlations may have for the construction of subjectivity, some preliminary work, theorizing about chance more generally, is in order.

The categories of quantity and quality are at the heart of my understanding of chance. They also appear to be implicated in a particularly contentious passage in Deleuze which Baudrillard discredits. The passage considers a game with which we are very familiar: roulette. As Deleuze describes it, roulette fixes chance to particular points, to those moments when

independent causal series encounter one another (for example, the rotation of the roulette and the rolling ball). Once the encounter is made, the mixed series follow a single track, protected from any new interference. If a player suddenly bent over and blew with all his might in order to speed up or to thwart the rolling ball, he would be stopped, thrown out, and the move would be annulled. What would have been accomplished, however, other than breathe a little more chance into the game? (*Logic of Sense* 60)

This I find to be an unfortunate passage in Deleuze's work, as it seems to forsake much of what he has to say about chance as a concept foreign to quantity. And in this light, Baudrillard is right to insist that chance cannot be conceived as "a kind of *daimôn*... breathing a little uncertainty, an additional incidence into the world's orderly economy.... Becoming is not a matter of more or less" (145). Nevertheless, it appears to me that it is precisely Deleuze's critique of "ordinary" chance, that is, the fixed chance we see at the roulette table, that abolishes any reference to notions of less and more. Only within the rules of a game that fixes chance at determinate points and moments could the very category of quantity make any sense whatsoever, since the more and the less would have to be assessed in relation to some point of reference. The roulette player who blows on the ball only breathes more chance into the game from the perspective of a system of rules whose main function it is to establish modes of conduct and interdictions upon the play, and thus the notion of "more chance" is in itself an effect of the conditions under which the game is played. Finally, who is to say that "more" chance would not be breathed into the game by *not* blowing on the ball, but rather by remaining resolutely still, since this stillness must also be said to impinge on the game's result? Nevertheless, one may rightly ask, is there any chance at all in a game of roulette, or are all possible contingencies directed precisely by a different system of rules, namely the rules of physics? Are we to consider the emergence of chance as merely a failing on the part of the human intellect to objectively determine all possible variables, including, say, the force and spin with which the ball is thrown, the speed of the roulette and the rate at which it slows, the friction between ball and wheel, the height and resistance of each metal wire partitioning the roulette's numbered slots, the force of gravity itself, and even, dare I say, the subject's "decision" to play in the first place?

Such an understanding of chance would define it as the convergence of innumerable variables in the production of an effect unforeseeable only insofar as the sum total of all initial variables of an event remain undetermined, given that all action must obey strict laws of causality. It also happens to be staunchly materialistic. Chance thus conceived reflects a view of “the universe as an arrangement and rearrangement of parts which simply shift from one place to another,... leading to a determinism and a mechanism in which by positing a definite number of stable elements all possible combinations can be deduced without regard for the reality of duration” (Pearson 155). This, I argue, is precisely *not* what should be understood as chance. We would do well, if such were the case, to find another word to describe this phenomenon, for what the above definition presumes is that all things, all events, are in principle determinable, that, again, all rules are fixed and absolute before the unfolding of an event, that all events are in effect closed from the outset. Our concept of chance would then stand eviscerated of all active force, and Baudrillard would be vindicated: the most basic of all our assumptions would be that chance does not exist.

The Deleuzian project, however, insists that “to abolish chance is to fragment it according to the laws of probability over several throws, in such a way that the problem is already dismembered into hypotheses of win and loss.... By contrast, the throw of the dice affirms chance every time; each throw of the dice affirms the whole of chance each time” (*Difference and Repetition* 198). We might ask here, how can we speak of *each* throw of the dice if chance itself is not fragmented? What, in other words, constitutes a throw? In short, does not the isolation of distinct throws imply a chance that is cut up, apportioned, segmented? Yes, if we remain thinking quantitatively. Certainly, we think of and experience events in the world as following a natural sequence, observing patterns of causality with one condition preceding and

giving over to a subsequent condition in a linear temporal movement. It is thus possible to speak of their quantitative separation. But such events are only “successive in relation to one another” (*Logic of Sense* 59). One event follows the next; our notions of past, present, and future are, in this light, effects of relationality and are foremost the result of pinpointing at least two determinate moments.

The relation we perceive between two events constitutes our grasp of temporality: the difference between two moments, the change that can be observed between them, at once creates and confirms our common sense notions of time. Julian Barbour has argued along these lines in an attempt to describe time, calling it “the measure of the difference between two configurations” of the universe (102). And in so doing, it would seem Barbour makes a philosophical move that Henri Bergson repeatedly warns against, namely, to spatialize time, to reduce it to a measure of the structural change amongst the component parts of the world, and in effect, to summarily erase all reference to the actual agency of duration or process. A vexing and important problem arises, one that informs a great deal of the present work: not only should we wonder about the qualitative and quantitative difference between two events in time, but we need to ask what is the relation of an event to *difference itself*, the difference that all events share among themselves irrespective of their relation to one another. For, while we might follow Barbour in thinking about the world in terms of “configurations,” we must confront seriously the fact that “even if there are only two terms, there is an *AND* between the two, which is neither the one nor the other, nor the one which becomes the other, but which constitutes the multiplicity” (*Dialogues II*, 34-5). We must wonder about the difference that everywhere insinuates itself among, within, and between events.

This difference asks us to admit of two ways of thinking, to think alongside quantity and quality, and ultimately to occupy a zone of indetermination between these modes. Again, the throws of the dice are qualitatively, but not quantitatively, distinct. The best way to approach this pivotal distinction between quality and quantity is, I think, to consider the non-representational ontology of the event. Contra determinism, or even predictive science that attempts to tame chance by incorporating indeterminacy in laws of probability, the event, or the qualitatively distinct throw, is not reducible to the actualization of a pre-existing possibility since “the possible is only posited from the vantage point of the real or when something has become actual” (Pearson 156). It should be evident by now that I believe the problem is, in large part, a temporal one, one that needs to be theorized rigorously. Deleuze challenges us, in a vitalistic strain, to acknowledge the very subsistence of the real and the empirical weight this subsistence brings to our reflections upon events. For insofar as an event inheres in the world, and by virtue of its persistent becoming, it creates constantly its own conditions of possibility. This last statement has serious, and I believe tremendously profound implications for our understanding of time, since it appears that the present, the undefinable and infinitely mobile instant, is always our problematic vantage point, paradoxically and simultaneously creating and being created by the conditions of its existence, the past itself. The event cannot be represented since it always belongs to the becoming of the world as an open whole, forever in the active process of divergence and differentiation from itself. And, precisely because it cannot be represented, it constitutes the real.

Contrariwise, we can see just how much determinism and probability theory owe to representational thinking if we note that, in an operation of profound generalization, these schemata always conceive the world as an articulation of algorithms, the real being described by

laws and principles that the real can do nothing more than actualize: the real comes to represent a law that presides for all time, or a law comes to represent the real. It makes little difference which term is associated with the act of representing since there is a one-to-one relation between the terms, the referent and the representation becoming synonymous through abstraction. Determinism functions like a translation where nothing substantive is changed, lost, or gained between the two texts in question, and is thus a production of the same, whereas for Deleuze, even a “single” text is always in the process of a kind of self-translation, the production of difference and becoming-multiple that is immanent to the event.

Through all of these assertions about difference and the multiple, we might find it curious, to say the least, that within the work on chance we also find so many references to “wholeness,” the “unique Event,” or, as in an aforementioned passage, the “ontologically one” (*Logic of Sense* 59). Clearly, unicity finds its way into the discourse of what Deleuze calls, echoing Nietzsche, the “sky-chance” (*Difference and Repetition* 199):

What does it mean, therefore, to affirm the whole of chance, every time, in a single time?

This affirmation takes place to the degree that the disparates which emanate from a throw begin to resonate, thereby forming a problem. The whole of chance is then indeed in each throw, even though this be partial, and it is there in a single time even though the combination produced is the object of a progressive determination. (198)

In order to accept what is argued here, we need to clarify a few things. We should remind ourselves, firstly, that the active, productive chance we wish to confront and engage with is decidedly not that which is fragmented over a series of throws, decidedly not that which is implied and introduced by laws of probability. It is, instead, complete in each event, each throw,

even as it extends across the totality of all events, and, knowing only plenitude, is thus not diminished in its activity.

Secondly, we must admit of real duration in order to understand how some form of “resonance” between and among events might be conceived. Briefly stated, a recognition of the fundamental temporality of events involves a paradoxical understanding about how events subsist and emerge in the world. When an event occurs in the present, for example, in the now that is ceaselessly passing, it is in some sense “fixed” in its time with regard to the past that preceded its actualization. It quite literally could not have been without the unfolding of the totality of the past. This is tantamount to saying that any event is a unique part of a temporal manifold, and that the world is nothing other than the correspondence or co-presence of an infinity of events. However, the events “resonate” at another level: each event must also be conceived of having little to do with the past, belonging only to its extreme and immanent becoming in the present, and through this abstracted present, what Deleuze would call difference itself, events find their singular resonance. Difference in itself is thus another figure of time even while (or perhaps because) it knows nothing of history or temporality as such: it is pure becoming. Becoming is, more accurately, of an order other to time itself. And it is precisely this pure becoming which should be taken to be ontologically one, the one that is synonymous with the power or force of active differentiation in the world. A whole, then, that is multiple, open. As Deleuze puts it, “Ontology is the dice throw, the chaosmos from which the cosmos emerges” (*Difference and Repetition* 199).

With a view to theorizing about chance, it would seem, the phenomenon of time becomes indispensable. (Incidentally, I might note, much of the contemporary literature on time from the standpoint of the physical sciences makes just the same correlation between time and chance.

David Z. Albert's work, aptly titled *Time and Chance*, is a fine example.) As I indicated earlier, the most basic and fundamental move in Deleuze's game, and throughout the entirety of his philosophical project, must always be understood as a multiplicity or series. The most basic moment of chance can be considered in a like fashion. In trying to know the moment of chance, one is always displaced from it: "The agonizing aspect of the pure event," that is, the aleatory-as-event, "is that it is always and at the same time something which has just happened and something about to happen" (*Logic of Sense* 63). The event of chance appears to belong to a bifurcated time, a dual configuration of the present. On the one hand, there is a type of "living present," a fluid and immanent becoming that "brings about the event" in the state of affairs of the world, in the depth of bodies (63). On the other hand, because every moment is infinitely divisible, and because any division constitutes a qualitative change in a state of affairs, the present is always displaced from itself and can only be apprehended as an incorporeal surface between the past and the future, the moment heading in both directions at once: "Insofar as it eludes the present, becoming does not tolerate the separation of before and after, or of past and future. It pertains to the essence of becoming to move and to pull in both directions at once" (1). When we think of time as something that can be clearly divided, as opposed to being infinitely divisible and properly changeful in its division, and thereby of an order other than quantity, we fail to observe its alterity, its absolute opposition to the very concept of number. It would not be accurate to think of time in mundane terms of "moments" or "instants" because the instant, in our common usage of the word, only configures time in a determinate point. Better to speak, then, of the aleatoric point, a confluence of time and chance that remains incalculably fuzzy, that can never be said to be present.

How then to understand the aleatoric point? Deleuze asks us, again, to embrace a paradoxical form without being beholden to the law of non-contradiction, that law obtaining only within the purview of sense and having little to do with *nonsense*. He writes:

Past, present, and future [are] not at all three parts of a single temporality, but... they rather [form] two readings of time, each one of which is complete and excludes the other: on one hand, the always limited present, which measures the action of bodies as causes and the state of their mixtures in depth [the Chronos]; on the other, the essentially unlimited past and future, which gather incorporeal events, at the surface, as effects [the Aion]. (*Logic of Sense* 61)

Now, all of this will take some unpacking, but I feel it is well worth the effort, and hopefully, when all is said and done, I might arrive at some articulation of how chance behaves.

The Chronos, or the living present measuring the actions of bodies, must be in some way limited, even in the case of a Divine Chronos that is potentially infinite, the living present of “all time” in which events belong to a present extended over the entirety of the past and the future. According to this reading of time, only the present exists: “whatever is future or past in relation to a certain present (a certain extension or duration) belongs to a more vast present which has greater extension and duration. There is always a more vast present which absorbs the past and the future” (162). Indeed, the very notions of past and future only manifest themselves *in relation with* a very limited present, and, consequently, they imply the relativity of multiple presents (163). Thus, as Deleuze suggests, “God experiences as present that which for me is future or past, since I live inside more limited presents” (162). In this reading, the extreme limit of time as a lived present, the Divine Chronos, would be tantamount to the simultaneity of all

time, a present so infinitely extended that it could only be understood as “one,” and thus limited. Limited infinitude. Such is the first reading of time.

The second reading of time, that in accordance with the Aion, insists that “only the past and future inhere or subsist in time. Instead of a present that absorbs the past and future, a future and past divide the present at every instant and subdivide it *ad infinitum* into past and future, in both directions at once” (164). This is the time of the incorporeal instant, a kind of time that can only be thought of as pure and empty, as the power of becoming. “It is the pure moment of abstraction” (166). It is the pure moment without content, without substance, the “instant” of zero duration which is real but never present, which infinitely divides all duration into past and future, such that every event, along the surface of the Aion, is always already past and always about to happen. Every instant is infused with this mobility. As Deleuze maintains, “the Aion is the eternal truth of time” (165). All events, therefore, according to this incorporeal instant, the aleatoric point, cannot be seized upon by either hand or mind, because they are forever slipping into the past and into the future *at the same time*. And because every instant must be infinitely divisible into both the past and the future at the same time, we see that the Aion is nothing other than the obverse of the Chronos. *Unlimited finitude*. The aleatoric point is thus conceived as the extreme contraction of time that pervades bodies even as it knows nothing of bodies themselves.

Both the Chronos and the Aion are needed so long as we wish to account for becoming, for a subject involved in a present that, in some fashion, always is by virtue of its passing away, that has as its operational truth a tendency to efface itself in its very expression. If subjectivity is conceived as traversing this dual reading of time, we witness its embodiment in a state of affairs, the depth of objects rendered as physical causes in a lived but limited present, and also its side-stepping of each lived present, its becoming which is incorporeal, not *of* the present but rather as

a rupture within the relation between the past and future. Chance, at least insofar as its temporal implications are concerned, occurs within the oscillation between both of these readings, both of which must be viewed as positive constructions, that is, as qualitative categories that are mutually exclusive and yet exist in a kind of co-presence, that are complementary to one another. To account for a subjectivity in time, we must admit of some productive zone of indeterminacy, here assuming the guise of mutually exclusive perspectives that operate together while not forming negative images of each other.

I've tried thus far to draw some connections between time, chance, and becoming, and implicated within all of these is the problem of subjectivity. One of my main aims is to examine how subjectivity might be constituted when we witness its lived engagement with chance. The problem is to arrive at an understanding of subjectivity that acknowledges emergence as a continual process, and thus account for subjectivity with an eye towards these readings of time. To do this, we must grapple with the problem of emergence itself, of how and through what mechanisms individuation is actualized. Such an approach, I hope, will assist us in reappraising our understanding of what it means to be a subject.

It remains unclear, however, just how subjectivity might be conceived in light of an insistence on duration and existence as event. What we are confronted with is a subjectivity that emerges on two different planes. On the one hand, we have a structural organization of the human form as a body: genetic and beholden to the structures within which it is shaped, it unfolds in accordance with those structures that determine its form. All individuation is explained causally through the interactions of bodies upon bodies. On the other hand, we have a process of individuation "which is not that of an object, nor of a person, but rather of an event" (*Dialogues II* 155). This second plane involves "haecceities," events or "dynamic individuations

without subjects” (*Dialogues II* 93). Deleuze contends, in accordance with this second plane, the plane of the event, that “no individuation takes place in the manner of a subject or even a thing” (*Dialogues II* 92). Instead, individuation becomes decidedly non-human: things are no longer seen as brute facts but as expressions of various forces that combine and conflict, taking up matter in a dance of intensities that evolves and elaborates a relationship with force.

Individuation as a pure process does not concern predetermined forms but rather the potentialities inherent within and between things, always at least two, for all individuation occurs not from within things but between them. The relation between things, a relation that is not “within” either term involved, but, on the contrary, is external to both terms, properly concerns emergence itself, the unfolding of individuation.

A relation should not be confused with a “thing.” It is rather a shifting field of potential that has nothing whatsoever to do with things themselves. And yet, paradoxically, it has everything to do with things, with their powers or capacities for expression. This field of potential accounts for the responses and transformations of things, for as they enter into mutual relation, they exhibit a kind of sympathetic resonance that mobilizes their potentialities into actualization. They become more than what they are, excessive to themselves, because this external relation to other things is incorporated or engendered in their bodily becoming. Not only, then, are things in relation to other things, but they are fundamentally in relation to themselves, since their very potential for affecting and being affected is labile, heterogeneous, open to the outside, and founded on a shifting set of external relations, the particular connections things can make. With Spinoza and Deleuze, we can say we do not know the full extent of what bodies can do, what they can become and feel, since these becomings are always effects of the various relationships that bodies may encounter. *Affects* do not arise within things but between

them even as these things express an affective experience. Thus the paradoxical understanding endemic to Deleuzian philosophy: things involve a not-external outside (the field of relations that “brings out” the body’s affects) and a not-internal inside (the surface effects synonymous with the expressions of the body). Always, the subject expresses a rift at the limit between interiority and exteriority, a traversal of the surface between the two, or what we might call a living encounter.

We can find a helpful example of this dynamic individuation in Roger T. Ames’s reading of the Taoist classic *Zhuangzi*, named after its author. The title character, a notorious lover of paradox, reflects upon the passing of his “favourite interlocutor,” Huizi, a philosopher of analytical bent, acknowledging that “his own repartee—his ability to wield his wit like the wind—has been dependent upon his relationship with Huizi, who could stand his always logical ground without batting an eye” (68). Here we can see what Deleuze would refer to as an “a-parallel evolution” (*Dialogues II* 7). Zhuangzi’s capacity for thinking his own thoughts, his “ability to wield his wit,” is effectively actualized not from within, but from without, in relation to the target of his critique. More explicitly, it is not Huizi that mobilizes Zhuangzi’s thoughts, but the relationship *itself* that exists *between* the two subjects: Zhuangzi does not encounter Huizi so much as he encounters a dynamic relation to Huizi. Even as Huizi “stands his always logical ground,” he moves because of this in-relation-to that moves him as much as it does Zhuangzi: *perpetuum mobile*. A conversation takes place, and through such dialogical in-betweeness, they become who they are. Instead of preceding the event of their meeting, their thoughts emerge and shift within the event, within a specific context of relations that effectuates those thoughts. In what we might call, then, the Zhuangzi-Huizi event, both subjects become other to themselves by

dint of their meeting, which I think should not be understood as a harmonious collaboration, but a kind of resonance between disparates, a self-generative scene.

Again, the process we're concerned with occurs between the two. A symbiosis is at work. The subjects are actualized not merely in an encounter with the other, but in an encounter with encountering itself, that is, with the way in which each responds uniquely because of each one's complex relation or correspondence to the other. The way they resonate together exists in excess to either subject even while the subjects express the effects of this resonance. It is a matter of seeing that force or thought or affect are not "things" which emanate from within the subject, but are rather autonomous processes animated through subjects, impersonal events that "take up" the person as an expressive agent. That the Zhuangzi-Huizi event involves a kind of intersubjective trajectory makes "a-parallel evolution" an apt term to use: each individual does not incorporate some element of the other so much as each expresses a relation with the event itself, and thus both ramify it in their own ways to the extent that something happens between them, and both become expressions of a process. Accordingly, we can see why Deleuze argues that "the proper name does not designate a subject, but something which happens, at least between two terms which are not subjects, but agents, elements" (*Dialogues II* 51). We have subjectivities in operation without subjects, or as Paul Bains puts it, "subjectless subjectivities," primarily because the subject is never fully determined, but remains an expression of relations.

Still, could it not be argued that all of Zhuangzi's thoughts, feelings, and reactions lie ready-formed, awaiting only their release in the Huizi-context? In other words, in what way is the Zhuangzi-Huizi event not predetermined with respect to its potentiality? Where is chance to be found in all of this? Are all of Zhuangzi's possibilities always already encoded within him, or are all of the world's possibilities already encoded within itself? These questions strike at the

heart of the problem of subjectivity and its professed openness to the outside, for they ask just how open subjectivity might be in the first place. Answering them will require an analysis of potentiality and the event and how they operate in the unfolding of the real.

We might begin by noting that in all of the questions in the preceding paragraph, there lurks a classical determinism not unlike that which marked our investigation of the roulette wheel and the universe as a “configuration,” only this time we are considering interactions between human beings and not inanimate bodies. What’s more, and of fundamental concern in this context, is that these questions presuppose that there exists no difference at all between a pure potential and the actual unfolding of an event, as if from a potential to its emergent actualization in a state of affairs there is a strict one-to-one relation, a mirror image without difference. In a word, they invoke the category of representation. The difficulty in thinking the event is to never fall into this representational trap. Representational thinking always structures an effect as a homologous instantiation of its cause. An event, to the contrary, does not represent a field of potential that would somehow precede it. Rather, the field of potential can properly become what it is, the conditions necessary for the unfolding of the event, only upon the event’s culmination in the actual: the event plays out its own potential in time. In other words, the event is the actualization, not the representation or resemblance, of its own conditions of possibility. We leave the linear temporality of cause and effect to enter the dynamic zone of pure effects and expression, as the event effectively expresses its own conditions of existence and nothing else. No chance is to be found here: only processes immanent to and in and of themselves. An event can be said, then, to happen through necessity, but it’s a necessity which is not attributed to a cause external to the event itself: “It is an autonomous doing” (Massumi, “Like a Thought”

xxiv), there being no one-to-one relation between cause and effect, between a before and after, but an open yet infinitely impacted space of change understood as the in-between itself.

And yet, impossibly, the event *does* express more than the conditions of its own existence precisely because of this in-between. Or better yet, the event always includes a potentiality in excess of its own determination: it is always leaving itself behind even as it comes into being, caught up and spilling over in a flux of transformation, always shifting into some other relation and connection. It is not identical with its conditions of existence but is rather an autonomous and self-organizing *expression* of them. In its processual unfolding in the real, and because it actualizes its own conditions of possibility instead of being *determined* by them, it constitutes an occurrence completely unique to itself, a *singular* event, knowable only by approximation to other events under which a system of representation would attempt to classify or capture it. This is why an event, and by implication, subjectivity, is alien to knowledge and finds its true home as a figure of expression. It is its own event without correspondence to anything outside itself, its own expression that necessarily involves difference. An irreducible wildness inheres in the event or the subject, constitutive of its foreign character: the positive operation of anomaly in the world, synonymous with the perpetual unfolding and enfolding of the new. It appears that in order to invoke the notion of singularity, we must already belong to non-representational affection, the immanence of thought and sensation. For in order to assert the uniqueness of a bodily phenomenality, we must in some way “register” it, bring it into the mix, so to speak, of our bodily sensation, if only to witness then how it doesn’t quite fit our ready-made or pre-formed determinations of self. Sensation remains anterior to assertion, and experience thus becomes a matter of exposure.

The subject is therefore fundamentally an “open” zone of affectivity, open to and expressive of the play of pre-verbal intensities. An absolutely autonomous field of relations, irrespective of the particular bodies that comprise that field, serves as a ground for all sensation and bodily becoming. Consequently, a subjective-event is singular and unique only insofar as it comes into relation with other singular and unique events, none of which creates a ground for the others. Relationality itself creates a kind of floating or shifting ground out of which individual subjects become determined. They are determined in the process of actualization, but only ever provisionally as themselves since they remain indeterminate with respect to their open limits or borders. And it is precisely the resonant communication of these separate and singular subject-events, the simultaneous unfolding and enfolding of unique self-emergence, that constitutes the world’s becoming.

To return to the issue of chance examined earlier, then, we can see it as coincident with the potentiality that overflows every event, keeping it mobile, transformative, and able to connect in multiple ways with emerging processes, but also as that which accords with the singular nature of the haecceity, the thisness of every event that makes it irreducible to all others. Both of these readings of chance have a common derivation, in fact, since an event is only singular insofar as its particular potentialities remain indissolubly unique: an event’s potentiality *is* its singularity, enmeshed as it is in the physical world. The problems for subjectivities become, then, how they actively engage and ally themselves with this qualitative excess if they play forever at the surface of the actual where events occur with all the force of fate, where only processes, and not subjects themselves, are autonomous. What “strategies” are available to the subject in order to straddle both planes, to identify with and mobilize the potentiality inherent in process even while identifying with the surface effects of that process? How, ultimately, does one become a figure

of neither pure chance nor pure determinism, but a “something-else,” and what role, if any, does choice or will have to play in one’s occupying this zone?

Difficult questions, to be sure. Answering them means considering the subject to be a figure of the event, assuming the same paradoxical status as that exemplified by the aleatoric point. In Deleuze’s words, “the question is less that of attaining the immediate than of determining the site where the immediate is ‘immediately’ as not-to-be-attained” (*Logic of Sense* 137). For if the subject is best understood as a kind of zone of intensity where forces communicate and play with themselves, then the subject cannot in any way possess this zone with which it “identifies.” To do so would mean, for one thing, to deny the “sheering ontogenetic force” of thought (Massumi, “Like a Thought” xxxi), seeing it not so much as an immanent force constitutive of subjectivity in its own right, but as a mere attribute assignable to (and thus detachable from) a subject that presides over all its determinations. The event thus compels us to appreciate a subjectivity coincident with its processual determinations and its shifting environment, ceasing to be a ground for action, but becoming instead a point of inflection, a zone of affective transmutation along a stream of activity, thereby releasing events by giving them a body. To say, for example, that we breathe air, that we depend upon it, does not ring faithfully enough to our event-like nature, insisting as it does on a clear demarcation between subject and object; in the event, we become something that air *can do*, one of the expressions with which air is capable of being involved, as air becomes something we process and modify simply by living. In any event, the human is caught within the matrix of air’s potentiality, and vice versa. Taken together and connected with each other, they are the expressions of this local region of the real, neither one serving as cause because they are the effects of a self-causing process. It is always a matter of witnessing subjectivity’s expression of

that which is decidedly *unhuman*, an aggregate of the *ways* in which things may connect: effects as the interactions of potentials. What we are expressive *of* becomes roughly analogous to the performance of this prefix, the *un*: unhuman, untimely, undercutting all possible determinations, leaving us with only the force of emergent process.

The same problems continue to rear their heads: what does it mean to say that events can be “given” a body? Does this not presume that we have rather disingenuously left reality to invoke a realm beyond the actual, beyond the corporeal? Are we not always involved in the most personal of events, caught up in a particular mixture of bodies that constitutes the real? We must answer these questions directly by saying that the real is not made up of only corporeal entities. This is not to introduce a realm of spirit or anything beyond the real, but only to understand the real as a play of potentiality caught up within itself. It is to understand potential as very real, even if it is not identical with bodies as such, that is, even if it is not actual. In potential we have a capacity to act or ways of expressing that are completely independent of our actual determinations in the depth of bodies. It is as if potential were the purely abstract pliability that subsists in the actual without being confused with any corporeal form: it is “its openness to being otherwise” (Massumi, “Like a Thought” xxxiv). Further, any actualization of a potentiality is by nature a becoming-different in potentiality itself. It is its differing from itself, and thus the crossing of the threshold into actual existence that amounts to the operation of indeterminacy. We can say summarily that chance inheres in that part of the event which is in excess of its own determination and that happens by and through necessity. In short, chance is everywhere implicated in processes of self-differentiation, in that which is different from itself. It must belong to the effects within active differentiation, within a divergence at the heart of

difference, in immanent and pure becoming, or to invoke Nietzsche through Deleuze, the eternal return of difference itself.

What remains insofar as subjectivity is concerned, is living so as to embody this kind of potential, to give it a body, and thus to make difference itself, or pure becoming, coincident with one's very "identity," to effectively "represent" it. The problem any theory of the event confronts can now be phrased: "How could the event be grasped and willed without its being referred to the corporeal cause from which it results and, through this cause, to the unity of causes as *Physics*?" (*Logic of Sense* 143). We need first to assert that the event is never only that which occurs, which would keep it as something causally determined at the level of the actual. The event is of potential, or becoming, and as such remains inside what occurs, as "something yet to come which would be consistent with what occurs" (*Logic of Sense* 149). It is the opening up of the actual to its own potential to be otherwise, an "inside what occurs" that stands as a purely changeful operation. To will the event as such is not merely to choose, performing some particular act, per se, but to enact an openness within what actually and effectively occurs, to align one's very will with the affirmation of difference at the heart of what occurs. It is at once both to submit to and to elicit the difference in whatever happens, to will the actualization of an event that is always displaced, never fully "there." The event thus signals a freedom different than but interactive with that which might be assigned to subjective choice since it involves a resonance or communication among *potentials* themselves. "Something forces us to think," Deleuze writes, and "This something is an object not of recognition but of a fundamental *encounter*" (*Difference and Repetition* 139). Essentially, the event implies that all that happens is not different from what does not happen, or what almost happens, or what could have happened, but is different in itself, inclusive of difference by virtue of its singularity.

In the remaining chapters of this dissertation, I will be examining how postmodern fictional narratives configure the subject along these eventful lines, how they problematize subjectivity in general through their attention to chance, choice, and change. In Chapter Two, I will be considering Don DeLillo's latest novel, *Cosmopolis*. It provides a fitting starting point for my more detailed exploration of the whole issue of the subject's eventfulness, paying particular attention to subjective encounters at and of the limit, or "threshold" experiences. I aim to show how the postmodern condition of a seemingly fixed and totalized system of interconnections actually accomplishes the happening of chance, the "misweave" (DeLillo 200), because connections themselves have multiple dimensions, creating in-between spaces for subject (re)construction that are multiple and protean. Chapter Three will continue this exploration by looking at Paul Auster's *The Music of Chance*, a novel sharing many of the concerns raised in *Cosmopolis*. It, too, pays especial attention to the dynamics of interconnection insofar as they relate to processes of individuation. Of particular interest will be how the text worries the relation between representation and an immanent chance that works to ramify the subject, keeping it always under negotiation.

I will then take up the problem of invention or the possibility of emergent subjectivities with respect to Edmund White's *Forgetting Elena* in Chapter Four. In White's novel, a performativity is always implicated in invention or emergence; its protagonist appears to relinquish a faith in the substance of his identity. I want to interrogate how the strategies of the actor, or those of the mime, set subjectivity adrift at the level of surface effects through what Deleuze calls a "counter-actualization" (*Logic of Sense* 150). Chapter Five will then continue and elaborate my interests in invention by attending to Nicholson Baker's *The Mezzanine*. Baker's novel plays out like an odyssey through the everyday and commonplace. The form of

the text itself, replete with footnotes and digressions, with shifts between diegetic times, will provide the backdrop for my analysis. Baker's novel, perhaps more than any other text in my study, treats explicitly the problem of a middle-space or surface as a properly multiplicitous event.

Finally, I will return to DeLillo's *Cosmopolis* and Auster's *The Music of Chance* in my last chapter, Chapter Six, to situate their representations of death, or dying, in the context of a Deleuzian theory of the event. As an ultimate confrontation with the limit, the event of death will provide a terminal locus for my theorizing about how postmodern fictional texts problematize the myriad vicissitudes that eventful subjectivities express.

By way of conclusion, then, I would like to return to my serendipitous discovery of the fuzzy dice, those fuzzy dice that hung from the rearview mirror of a parked car whose make I cannot recall. Curious that they hung from the mirror. They hung from the two-dimensional, flattened surface in which we look to see ourselves as others. They hung from that surface just ahead of ourselves, on the futural horizon, the same surface revealing all that we have already been and passed through. They hung where we look forward to see what lies behind us, where we look behind us to keep moving forward. Those fuzzy dice hung somewhere with us, suspended, tumbling in the air, in-between the front and rear, the before and after, the already and the not yet.

Chapter Two

“Forces of Encounter”: Affect, Temporality, and Will in Don DeLillo’s *Cosmopolis*

You look at the faces on the screen and you see the mutilated yearning, the inner divisions of people and systems, and how forces will clash and fasten, compelling the swerve from evenness that marks a thing lastingly.

—Don DeLillo

There is room enough for everything to exist. Everything is worth exchanging, nothing is privileged, nothing is refused. Exchange? Everything is exchanged, yet there are no transactions.

—Luce Irigaray

Among the countless writers and thinkers who, at one time or another, whether with curiosity, hubris, or even a sense of obligation, have reflected upon their motivation for writing, Deleuze lends his voice. The question may even seem dull to us now, trite from its repetition and overuse: *Why write?* But for Deleuze, this question becomes a kind of centrepiece to his entire philosophical project, as though writing itself were an exemplar of all that his thinking could hope to relate. He answers the question “why does one write?” in a characteristically oblique way: “Because it is not a case of writing.... In reality *writing does not have its end in itself, precisely because life is not something personal*. Or rather, the aim of writing is to carry life to the state of a non-personal power. In doing this it renounces claim to any territory, any end which would reside in itself” (*Dialogues II* 50). Writing refuses to be confined to anything less than a life process; at some level, writing ceases to be self-identical because it becomes a way of living. Why write? Because writing is not a case of writing. To answer the question, then, we must open up our terms such that writing may not be thought of as an act separate from thinking itself, from acting itself, from life. The struggle here is, in fact, as it is with answering any question, a matter of always paying witness to the total processual operation of the real. I

say it's a struggle precisely because we cannot possibly articulate this operation in its entirety. Our thinking and writing occur *within* and perhaps *through* the real, not from outside it, as if that were possible. But it is life's peculiar, *non-personal* quality that complicates things. Deleuze asks us to understand writing as a way of expressing not only all of the quirks or idiosyncrasies that go into making a particular individual, that make him or her "unique," but of expressing some *power* that has nothing to do with an individual, *per se*. In writing, Deleuze insists, instead of becoming expressions of ourselves as coherent, personalized subjects, we become expressive of "it" in the same sense we mean when we say "it is raining" (*Dialogues II* 64). We take part in the expressivity of the real itself, and we ramify it in our own ways, or better yet, we give expression to the possibilities of the real. In a word, we become catalysts of mutation.

Now consider novelist Don DeLillo's response to the same question, "why do you write?": "I write to find out how much I know. The act of writing for me is a concentrated form of thought" (*Guardian*). Just as with Spinoza's assertion that we do not know what a body can do, that it is always a matter of testing one's self through experimentation, DeLillo's laconic response suggests that writing is first and foremost a kind of threshold experience. He writes not to *demonstrate* how much he knows, as though he were merely representing the knowledge he always carries within him, but rather to pursue his own limits, to search out these things he "knows." Here is the crux of the problem: in what way does one know something if it must be found out through thinking? The concept of writing that DeLillo endorses is one of active discovery. But because this discovery is taken up within a particular type of thinking, a "concentrated form," it remains decidedly creative even while the experience may be revelatory. It is a being open to one's own possibilities. "Finding out" what one knows is primarily and essentially a process.

Both Deleuze and DeLillo, then, share a view of their work as something intimately bound up with their very potential as thinkers. Both, I would argue, regard writing as vitalistic, since vitalism is, fundamentally, through and through, the assertion that the very subsistence, the insistence of the real is a *force in itself*, a positive power or energy, so to speak. It is the power of the real in its unfolding, its self-creation through time. Bergson refers to it as the *élan vital*. And DeLillo's thirteenth novel, *Cosmopolis*, may be read as an investigation of this vitalism insofar as it relates to an exploration of and experimentation with subjectivity. Critics have been generally unforgiving, it seems, dismissing in short reviews the novel's stubborn conundrums as "temporal hocus-pocus" (Kipen) or, still worse, evidence of DeLillo's "fossilized academic futurism" (Kirm), thus furthering the very reductionism they rail against. I intend to take what I feel to be a more constructive, thoroughgoing, even appreciative approach, by acknowledging and wrestling with the profoundly complicated problems the novel appears to raise.

Cosmopolis works as a kind of Faustian parable showcasing a protagonist, 28 year old and absurdly wealthy Eric Packer, who wants to know all there is to know. More specifically, he attempts to decode or intuit flows of capital with the faith that the future is predictable in principle, such that the future would be now, bereft of the agential or substantive influence of any chance, choice, or change. What forecasting the future requires, the novel tells us, is a shift in the perspective of the prognosticator. On the subject of analyzing and predicting the vicissitudes of the Japanese yen, Eric tells his currency analyst, Michael Chin, that "[what is happening] charts. You have to search a little harder. Don't trust standard models. Think outside the limits. The yen is making a statement. Read it. Then leap" (21). Prediction is thus merely a matter of interpretive prowess, the world being reduced to a system of signs whose latent content (in this case, the future itself) remains illegible only insofar as the reader fails as an

interpreter. As one might expect, the novel is thus not only concerned with events in the world and their relation to destiny and chance, but with the open and labile nature of the human subject that traverses and transcends its own limits or models. *Cosmopolis*, in other words, is a meditation on those very threshold experiences that DeLillo and Deleuze associate with the act of writing itself.

Fittingly, then, the novel begins with an account of that most common of limit experiences, sleep. More accurately, it begins with an account of the *failure* of sleep, with sleep's delay or deferral, as the anti-hero suffers from insomnia. Eric tries to read himself to sleep, using the twin muses of science and poetry as sedatives, but finds they only make him more wakeful. Beginning the novel's foray into comic absurdity, we're told that "He tried to sleep standing up one night, in his meditation cell, but wasn't nearly adept enough, monk enough to manage this. He bypassed sleep and rounded into counterpoise, a moonless calm in which every force is balanced by another. This was the briefest of easings, a small pause in the stir of restless identities" (5-6). Despite the outcome of Eric's ascetic travails, he manages to enter a state that might be best described as sleep-like, a kind of stoic equilibrium notable most of all for being nondescript. And if we can agree with Blanchot that "You must sleep: this is the watchword which consciousness assigns itself, and this commandment to renounce the day is one of day's first rules" (265), then Eric's Faustian dimensions begin to emerge in full relief: he is somehow at odds with nature itself, even as nature admits his meditative state as a simulacral substitution for sleep. Something is amiss here, which is not to say it is not admissible.

The description of Eric's "moonless calm" is also revealing. DeLillo, perhaps gesturing toward his preoccupation with the limits of knowledge, uses the language of science sporadically throughout the novel, here relating Eric's mood to an effect of interacting forces. That is, more

specifically, Eric becomes depersonalized, a representation of the *relation* of forces whose total effect is nil: he becomes unidentifiable, imperceptible, without affect, a zero-position of perspective. And yet, his state of being remains a perspective of sorts, even though it appears as the foreclosure of all positive perspective that could make heads or tails of things, that could effectively allow for feeling or sense. He remains a perspective only insofar as he himself *remains*, that is, insofar as he endures or takes part in duration itself: he experiences “the briefest of easings” and “a small pause in the stir of restless identities.” He is in and of time, that’s all. Here, the description of Eric as a relation of forces in time suggests that his experience is on par with that of inanimate matter, being buffeted about in such a way that stillness sets in. But perhaps it is hasty to argue that he is completely affectless in this strange torpor which is, after all, experienced as an *easing*. His calm cannot be equated with a perfect nullity since it is experienced within a larger affective context, and this context is actively productive of affect all along its trajectory: his feeling-nothing is itself a feeling, an experiential “something” with its own affective contours. Thus, in a nutshell and by its second page, the novel establishes its primary problematic: how do we acknowledge the full power of law-like behaviour to the point of affirming fate (seeing ourselves as the outcome or effect of impersonal forces in relation and motion) while *at the same time* affirming the irreducibility of feeling in time as something purely expressive and singular, always distinct from merely “what” happens (seeing ourselves always as the “new” that is itself an active and creative unfolding that cannot be predetermined since its nature is to be *sensed*, to happen)? The former position objectifies, seeing everywhere results and effects, while the latter is thoroughly subjectifying, (dis)locating its perspective in the mobile present of sensation. The formidable challenge of *Cosmopolis* is, then, in this reading, to provide

a narrative account of effects as events, to walk the line between object and subject, between being and becoming.

DeLillo sets this extraordinary undertaking into motion with a simple plot device that serves as the impetus for all of the novel's action. As Eric stands at one of the windows in his forty-eight room apartment complex, watching like an all-seeing god "the great day dawn" over the city, he sees various forms of "archaic business just beginning to stir," with trucks and vans transporting provisions for the city's populace (6). He then sees "a hundred gulls trail a wobbling scow downriver" (7). Instead of following whatever migratory patterns we might imagine for them, these gulls follow the movements of capital, just as Eric does in his professional work—birds of a feather, perhaps. Only then does the novel introduce the driving force of the narrative action: "[Eric] didn't know what he wanted. Then he knew. He wanted to get a haircut" (7). From this point forward, the novel follows Eric in his Ulyssean, and frequently desultory, quest through the streets of New York to find a barber. But the nature of Eric's desire here is made no less enigmatic for all its mundanity. It takes the form of inspiration, arriving from nowhere, without identifiable cause, or at the very least, receiving no textual explanation. And lest we disregard this explanatory elision, DeLillo reminds us of its importance later in the novel when Eric recounts the pivotal moment: "I woke up this morning and knew it was time.... I said to myself. I want a haircut" (160). Echoing DeLillo's own comments on his motivation for writing, the novel's action spins out centrifugally from a transformative limit experience that, despite its ostensible banality, seizes the protagonist with all the force of the new: we don't know why, we don't know how, but from one moment to the next, everything is changed.

The novel, however, is clearly not content to shrug its shoulders and wallow in the morass of the purely unexplained phenomenon. Eric's inspiration to get a haircut (a slang term used, incidentally, among market movers and shakers to denote a severe financial downfall [Walker]) is, after all, an instance of desire: it is what he *wants*. Consequently, we might assume that the force mobilizing the narrative's events, which at times appear both fated and contingent, is not utterly opaque; rather, it is open to our interpretation *as* force. DeLillo returns to the sea-going gulls for a description of this force, as if to represent by analogy the operation of Eric's desire: "[Eric] stood a while longer, watching a single gull lift and ripple in a furl of air, admiring the bird, thinking into it, trying to know the bird, feeling the sturdy earnest beat of its scavenger's ravenous heart" (7). Zooming in like a camera, Eric's gaze moves from the hundred gulls to a single specimen, effectively focusing his attention on the muscle in the bird's breast responsible for its movement. That is, knowing the bird, knowing its essence perhaps, is tantamount to *feeling* the organic movement and force of life itself. What DeLillo does is extract the animating feature from an animal so as to make it, this animating force, a point of contact between two separate beings, Eric and the bird. Knowing the bird is not a matter of rehearsing the intricacies of its anatomical structure, or developing an understanding of the physics of its flight, but is rather a case of feeling the beat of its heart *and not the heart itself*. It is a matter of feeling its animating force, which should not be confused with the heart as object, as tissue. I argued earlier that DeLillo fits well within the vitalist tradition, and here we can see why: he places as absolutely primary the *actions* of things, what they can do, as opposed to the things themselves, whatever they may be. As the central, mysterious impulse that sets the novel's wheels rolling, Eric's urge or desire to have his hair cut, I would argue further, can be best understood as a force on par with the gull's heart. Irrespective of the particular, concrete forms it may take up as its

expression, Eric's desire is essentially a kind of force. It is, in other words, an immanent movement within and of nature itself, responsible for enlivening Eric's affective being.

Deleuze offers a compelling way for thinking about this force, here writing on Foucault:

The power to be affected is like a *matter* of force, and the power to affect is like a *function* of force. But it is a pure function, that is to say a non-formalized function, independent of the concrete forms it assumes, the aims it serves and the means it employs.... And it is also a pure unformed matter independent of the formed substances, qualified objects or beings which it enters: it is a physics of primary or bare matter.

(*Foucault* 71-2)

The key point here, I believe, is to regard the powers to affect and be affected as functions exterior to any actually occurring phenomena, even as these functions find their physical manifestations in the depths of bodies. Force is non-corporeal in nature, it is purely operational, and as such it traverses the bodies it animates without itself being identified as a body. It is real without being actual. In grammatical terms, we could say it's a verb that skims along the surfaces of nouns without itself becoming a noun: a doing that pervades all things, or the reality of becoming.

Not surprisingly, DeLillo's expression of this notion of force assumes many forms, not least of which is his marked interest in the surfaces of things, in the boundaries separating one thing from another. On one occasion, still near the novel's opening, Eric takes a moment to look at and appraise his palatial residence:

He felt contiguous with it.... They shared an edge or boundary, skyscraper and man....

The one virtue of its surface was to skim and bend the river light and mime the tides of open sky. There was an aura of texture and reflection. He scanned its length and felt

connected to it, sharing the surface and the environment that came into contact with the surface, from both sides. A surface separates inside from out and belongs no less to one than the other. (8-9)

Here, we might say that Eric locates the proper “place” for the functioning of force. Note, for example, all of the things that happen on this surface: sharing, skimming, bending, miming, texturing, reflecting, scanning, connecting, contacting, separating, belonging. The sheer breadth and measure of activity that the surface accommodates suggests it is a special place, indeed. Even more intriguing, however, are the *kinds* of activities that DeLillo describes. The surface does not merely invert the images it might reflect in its windows, but the very actions of particular locales: the river becomes a source of light, the sky a bearer of tidal pull. As a zone of transformation, the surface is a place where action is not confined within or to any specific body, but is shared among and between bodies. Again, force is always on the move, transferable, independent of the bodies it invigorates. And we can see just how far DeLillo takes things when he describes the sharing that goes on at and around the surface. Eric’s sense of connection with the surface expands to include that which surrounds the surface, as if the surface itself spreads out into a contiguous relation with everything, with its greater environment. The surface as boundary has no boundaries, precisely because it is not a body: it is instead an operation, a function, the place where everything happens. As Deleuze says, “And just as events do not occupy the surface but rather frequent it, superficial energy is not *localized* at the surface, but is rather bound to its formation and reformation” (*Logic of Sense* 103-04). I should amend my earlier suggestion that Eric locates the surface as the proper “place” of force. More accurately, force has no place or site, so to speak, since it never occupies a body. It is, again, a pure operation, moving among and between things, along their surfaces. We might say, then, that in

separating inside from outside, while belonging equally to both, the surface constitutes a kind of “third space,” not really a space at all, but the process itself of being-in-relation.

The importance of this nature of surfaces becomes more and more apparent as Eric’s compulsive interest in the shifting value of the yen begins to spin around the problematics of interrelation. In the back of his stretch limousine, still en route to his haircut, Eric’s weekly meeting with his “chief of theory,” Vija Kinski, gets to the heart of the matter:

“There’s an order at some deep level,” he said. “A pattern that wants to be seen.... But it’s been elusive in this instance. My experts have struggled and just about given up. I’ve been working on it, sleeping on it, not sleeping on it. There’s a common surface, an affinity between market movements and the natural world.”

“An aesthetics of interaction.”

“Yes. But in this case I’m beginning to doubt I’ll ever find it.” (86)

An intuition of a grand order behind all things develops the novel’s interest in the relation between chance and necessity. The common surface supposed here between capital, itself a thoroughly fluxional phenomenon, and the natural world clearly suggests that what Eric is after in his search for a pattern is a realization or understanding of the totality of the real, at least insofar as it might be predicted. This may seem an audacious undertaking. Some might say it is the desire to know or even *be* God. However, putting aside for a moment the protagonist’s remarkable challenge, we should remind ourselves of the fact that the great enterprise of science is not bereft of such an imagined end or goal. Eric’s sought-after pattern closely resembles what continues to be the Holy Grail of scientific enquiry, a “theory of everything,” a theory that would explain with exacting predictive prowess the behaviour of all things. Newtonian mechanics, to take a powerful historical example, is one such theory, a system of pure determinism. We can see

in *Cosmopolis*, again, the problematizing of a human relation with respect to the limits of knowledge and understanding. The hypothesized affinity between market movements and the natural world generates a paradoxical Gordian knot: the surface between the two emerges as both the key to an ultimate understanding and the lock that keeps it buried, shifting, fluid.

Nonetheless, Eric's intuition does not suggest merely that the world, including human experience that reflectively observes and is expressive of nature itself, unfolds in accord with destiny. The problem is a matter of subjectivity, of witnessing one's involvement in the creative expression of the world, and even more than this, of stretching one's affective limits so as to become identical with an "aesthetics of interaction." In the flux of interaction, one *becomes* as a surface by aligning oneself with it.

But Eric has good reason to doubt the success of a totalized vision of the world, even though much is made of his firm's communication systems, "the complex's" network of satellites and screens that processes reams of information in real time to facilitate efficient and wise decisions (66). Everything, from the latest market figures to the best directions through bottlenecked New York traffic, is computed instantly. We're led to believe that, through his vast system of information, Eric is in touch with everything, in a perfectly contiguous relation with all the events of the world, until a series of bizarre hiccups appears to threaten the system's integrity.

First, a "report from the complex" arrives, warning ominously of a "credible threat" to the president of the United States, who also happens to be travelling through the streets of the city (19). The alert means little to Eric, save for the fact that his route downtown will have to be modified. As his chief of security, Torval, states suggestively, "the situation is not stable," indicating both the limits of the complex's purview and the chaotic complexity of the events

under observation (20). And when Eric meets with Chin to discuss his colossal wager against the rising yen, a wager nothing short of an “assault on the borders of perception,” a speculation “into the void,” the truly extraordinary begins to happen (21):

The two men talked and made decisions. These were Eric’s decisions, which Chin entered resentfully in his hand organizer and then synched with the system. The car was moving. Eric watched himself on the oval screen below the spycam, running his thumb along his chinline. The car stopped and moved and he realized queerly that he’d just placed his thumb on his chinline, a second or two after he’d seen it on-screen. (22)

This is the first of four episodes in which Eric has an eerie presentiment of events. Befitting his position as an asset manager, “he liked to know what was coming. It confirmed the presence of some hereditary script available to those who could decode it” (38). His foreknowledge is, however, linked explicitly to his network’s alleged omniscience, its security and protection “from [any] penetration” that would reveal “holes” in its operation (22). For if the system’s gaze is total, without corruption, he asks, “then why am I seeing things that haven’t happened yet?” (22). One obvious answer is that he *himself* may be an incursion against his own array of information. This possibility is problematic, to say the least, because the decisions to which Chin must adapt are Eric’s, and Eric’s decisions make the system what it is. In short, Eric and the system are made out to be completely concurrent, harmonious, unified. His visions of the future, then, amount to a breach not only within his system’s security, but within his own subjectivity. DeLillo prepares us early on for this interpretation, writing that “every act [Eric] performed was self-haunted and synthetic. The palest thought carried an anxious shadow,” as though Eric were fractured and multiple (6). Additionally, in each of his four visions, it is Eric’s own image that he sees in the future, only to catch up bodily with this external representation

through a lived passage of time. As the object of his own prescience, he is the slippery surface between now and then, between the present and the future.

How can we make sense of this? Clearly, any adequate reading will involve a theory of subjectivity, not to mention a theory of time. But the novel complicates matters even further by insisting on the crucial role played by technology in transmitting Eric's visions. Each time Eric sees himself not in his imagination or as some hazy, hallucinatory mirage whisked out of thin air, but *on screen*. Moreover, in case we'd rather dismiss his intuition as the product of a sleep-deprived or medicated mind, he shares one of these episodes with another person, Kinski, in his limousine. They talk about it. Perhaps it is not even accurate to refer to these glimpses of the future as "intuitions" since they are fully embodied in plain view, outside anything resembling his interior experience. They are real images caught up in real time that perfectly anticipate and represent future, real events. A not-so-simple reversal of the status quo occurs here: instead of a technological representation lagging microseconds behind the real, taking time to break down and digitize what is portrayed, these images actually precede nature itself *while still being a part of that very nature*. Through technology, the present is being shown to both precede and coincide with itself. What could it possibly mean for the present to precede itself? Perhaps even more perplexing, what could it mean for the present to *coincide* with itself? In a word, it means that the present is in excess of its own determinations, it is multiple, layered. Chance is afoot in spades. Clearly, Eric's computer systems suffer from a virtual virus, a most metaphysical worm.

To lend ourselves some purchase in fleshing out these temporal problems, we can begin by asking what is the whole? In *Cosmopolis*, we're told that contemporary technology, or informatics in general, and nature share together that same dexterity of the surface we examined

earlier, namely, that they comprise first and foremost a fluid process rather than a steady-state of fact:

It was shallow thinking to maintain that numbers and charts were the cold compression of unruly human energies, every sort of yearning and midnight sweat reduced to lucid units in the financial markets. In fact data itself was soulful and glowing, a dynamic aspect of the life process.... Here was the heave of the biosphere. Our bodies and oceans were here, knowable and whole. (24)

Knowable *and* whole. This is one of the passages in the novel where DeLillo proposes that a totality can be, in principle, fully grasped. If by the whole we mean the real, nature with a capital N, the emergent universe, call it what you will, then knowing this reality would require that we accept one of two positions. First, we could say that, along with every form of determinism, all things are knowable by proxy and in advance of their actual occurrence in time. Second, we could say that “knowing” reality can never be a matter of simply representing its operations in “lucid units” or “data,” precisely because the actual *happening* of the real is its only modality. “Knowing,” in this latter case, one I fully endorse, would be more like feeling or sensing, an alignment with happening.

The two propositions differ in interesting and challenging ways with respect to the concept of the whole. The first does not countenance an *open* whole, one that is defined by virtue of its actually emerging. It does not respect the real *as event*. Neglecting to configure the act of knowing within what effectively occurs, this view remains an abstraction, a law-like formula removed from events. Or, in other words, it does not appreciate actual process. For this is what it means, ultimately, to be open: to fully affirm the reality, the actual process of the world’s occurring, not in the past, not in the future, but in the infinitely rich and mobile present,

that is, *in and with the world's differentiation from itself*. An openness in these terms is something that cannot be known in advance because the world is its own unfurling limit. It cannot be known *at all* since it is perfectly singular, an immanent force that must be lived, and not an object of knowledge. It must be felt, or sensed, always in the midst of becoming. Thus, the world should not even be considered a thing; it is better described, rather, as a collection and interplay of forces. If, in one final attempt to secure for ourselves a totalized, meta-position, we were to abstract this “happening” and say that it *itself* could be known in advance and irrespective of any *singular* happening in the present, we would be making a categorical mistake. As Dorothea Olkowski suggests, “merely reconceptualizing difference is not enough to restore difference as difference; rather, the ruin of representation can be accomplished only on the level of actual practices” (25). If we were to merely reconceptualize difference, we would be eviscerating the event of its vital component, the actually occurring dynamism of the real, a lived process. We would be leaving processes of properly changeful emergence entirely only to be fully immersed in a *concept* of the singularity without relation to its effective becoming. All actualization constitutes a self-differing, since the whole is never given but remains creative and open in a wildly elastic present.

In *Cosmopolis*, it may very well be that this “and” falling between “knowledge *and* whole” complicates things beyond all recognition. As a conjunction, it happens to be that which puts things in motion, connecting and separating, setting up relations as an in-between space. “And” is a grammatical surface. Deleuze writes provocatively about this process and its effects on our notions of the whole:

Substitute the AND for IS. A *and* B. 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. The AND as extra-being, inter-being. Relations might still establish themselves between their terms, or between two sets, from one to the other, but the AND gives relations another direction, and puts to flight terms and sets, the former and the latter on the line of flight which it actively creates. (*Dialogues II 57*)

We can see here that the “and” is of becoming, a virtual “something” that circulates freely wherever relations exist. Being in relation does not mean, in this case, securing a particular position with respect to some other term, to some other position. It means, essentially, to partake in the overflow of potentiality that is the hallmark of all relations, to be on the move. The “and” is that character of the world that can only be understood as being out-of-this-world, the world’s movement outside of itself. As this purified mobility and change, the “and” remains real without being actual, without *being* itself a body. It is, rather, the *way* of bodies, not the bodies themselves.

We can now make some sense of what *Cosmopolis* attempts to do with its temporal paradoxes. It would appear that, when Eric sees his own future broadcast live, only to experience affectively, bodily, the “truth” of this image after a lived lapse of time, the actual and the virtual share a common surface. The Deleuzian power of the “and” has put into relation the embodied, the concrete, and the incorporeal or enlivening. The “and” has become active, has found its own representation: outside and external to all things, the “and” itself has become a thing of another order, namely the being of becoming. For Deleuze, this would mean that “the multiple is no longer the One which divides or the Being which encompasses it. It has become a noun, a multiplicity which constantly inhabits each thing” (*Dialogues II 57*). It were as though

Eric experiences the world's potential to be otherwise. His seeing is itself an affective experience, but one utterly distinguished from his delayed embodiment of the virtual image: his affective embodiment of the image is *its own* experience. We would be wrong, then, to say that there is no active chance here simply because what Eric sees on screen accords perfectly with what eventually happens. Instead, chance insinuates itself all along the line through the production of difference between and among events. Chance is not a figure of the difference between two possible outcomes, but of the difference that inheres within what actually occurs. Eric has a vision of his future, perhaps, but his *experience* of that future, running his thumb along his chinline, say, is radically different from his oracular experience, witnessing himself on screen, and in this difference lies all the power of the singularity, the chance-event. Chance and fate, it would seem, find no clear opposition, for chance is simply another term, another way, for conceiving the phenomenal complexity of becoming, of pure difference.

Despite its broad, though certainly conjectural and paranoiac, interest in the wonders of a human interface with modern technology, *Cosmopolis* puts human subjectivity at the centre of its focus. Kinski highlights the novel's only explanation for Eric's bizarre foresight, making this focus clear:

There are rare minds operating, a few, here and there, the polymath, the true futurist. A consciousness such as yours, hypermaniacal, may have contact points beyond the general perception.... Technology is crucial to civilization why? Because it helps us make our fate. We don't need God or miracles or the flight of the bumble bee. But it is also crouched and undecidable. It can go either way. (95)

If technology is in part responsible for ushering in the virtual totality of the universe's events, as the novel suggests through Eric's visions, baring the future to his gaze through mediated images,

then it would seem that Kinski may have underestimated or misappraised its function. Perhaps technology *reveals* our fate instead of helping us make it, or perhaps a revealed and a humanly created fate are not opposed, comprising a single, skewed, and utterly confused reality. Perhaps there is no indeterminacy in the world with respect to the events that actually occur. Instead, indeterminacy may reside *within* what actually occurs, as that kind of extra- or inter-being that Deleuze sees in the operative power of the “and.” The power or capacity to go either way that Kinski describes may have little to do with technology or, indeed, with anything remotely human. Rather, it may be that very multiplicity that inhabits and circulates among all things. DeLillo presents a number of ways for thinking about this curious situation. I have already touched briefly upon one, the novel’s treatment of affect, while another is the perennial problem of choice, and both need to be examined more fully in order to make some sense of the novel’s treatment of the plainly tortuous relationship between chance and subjectivity.

Cosmopolis lends considerable attention to Eric’s affective experience, locating feeling and sensation somewhere within the essential constitution of the subject. The primary role given to affect in making subjectivity what it is would seem to suggest that, for DeLillo, everything may turn on sensation itself, on sensation as the surface that mobilizes difference. As we saw with Eric’s clairvoyant moments, it is critical that we pay witness to what is effectively happening in the slippery present, and with respect to the subject, this means assessing affect. On another occasion, during a routine medical exam conducted in the back of his car, Eric has what we might suggestively call a brief encounter with his body, a sensation produced by the prodding of his “asymmetrical” prostate (8):

The pain was local but seemed to absorb everything around it, organs, objects, street sounds, words. It was a point of hellish perception that was steady-state, unchanging in

degree, and not a point at all but some bundled other brain, a counter-consciousness, but not that either, located at the base of his bladder. He operated from within. He could think and speak of other things but only within the pain. He was living in the gland, in the scalding fact of his biology. (50)

Shedding light on this passage should give us a provisional but useful hold on the novel's representation of affect. We can note first of all that we are dealing with a sensation, a feeling, as opposed to any particular or material body. In a description clearly reminiscent of DeLillo's earlier comment on surfaces, the sensation here is both local and expansive, both bound and open. It has a determinate position and no position at all. It is configured as an action, but shows none of the quantitative variation we normally associate with action. It betrays such a vitality of its own that it assumes the status of an *other life* living within the subject whose affect it is. "But not that either": the pain remains indescribable even as it envelops words themselves, a pre-verbal intensity that Eric identifies with absolutely and consistently throughout all his experience, even while he retains the ability to *do* other things, to somehow be more than his pain, not *only* the pain. The problem is one of reciprocal excess between the two figures, Eric-as-subject and the pain itself that he experiences, his affective reality: he is both more than and other to his pain, just as his pain is both more than and other to him. Or better yet, Eric and his affective experience do not share a coherent identity. The disarmingly simple line, "he operated from within," sets the whole enigma alight. If Eric operates from within, what is it that contains him? Evidently, his affective experience, the sensation of his pain. But if Eric operates from within his experience, then this experience, his own pain that is *always* with him, must be in some way separated and distinguishable from Eric himself. How can we conceive of affect in such a way that will allow for this distinction between the subject and the affects of which the

subject is comprised? How can we maintain a coherent notion of subjectivity if the subject is not consistent with itself? What *is* Eric if not the total aggregate of his affects? And perhaps most baffling of all, what is it, ultimately, for a subject not to act, to will, or perform, but to “operate”?

These questions and the nagging philosophical quagmires they introduce can be approached if we pay especial attention to the fact that Eric is “living *in* the gland, *in* the scalding fact of his biology” (emphasis added). Again, he is separated from but identified with his body. And before we introduce an anachronistic dualism of the mind-body type in order to flesh out this problem, we should remember that his pain is a kind of counter-consciousness, though not quite. That is, his pain is *itself* a kind of perception. DeLillo thus raises the possibility that it is not Eric, the subject, who perceives any particular agony, but rather a self-perceiving, self-generating agony that defines a particular zone of affectivity whose name, out of pure convention, happens to be “Eric.” Still, and this is where a theory of subjectivity must be developed, as a *particular* zone of affectivity, and even though his affective experience may overwhelm his consciousness, setting him adrift through sensations of varying intensity, Eric is not other people. He is himself, though he relates to himself as an other, echoing Rimbaud’s famous adage, “*Je est un autre.*” To repeat, Eric encounters his own body. Such a reading would account for the apparent contradictions in DeLillo’s description of Eric’s pain: it is this, and that, not quite this or that, but more than either, more than both. Affect is under constant negotiation as a perpetual process.

An entire philosophy of the body is implied here, though it may be too complex, too elaborate for me to provide an entirely satisfying interpretation. The nature of affective experience that I am investigating, however, is summarized cogently by Deleuze and Guattari:

Flesh is not sensation, although it is involved in revealing it.... Flesh is only the thermometer of becoming.... In short, the being of sensation is not the flesh but the compound of non-human forces of the cosmos, of man's non-human becomings, and of the ambiguous house that exchanges and adjusts them, makes them whirl around like winds. Flesh is only the developer which disappears in what it develops: the compound of sensation. (*What is Philosophy?* 178-83)

Sensation is itself not a body, though it takes a body as its mode of expression. It is, along with all that is virtual and real, an instance of incorporeality. Flesh, the body, becomes primarily a process of flexion, the concrete expression of a sensation that is its expressivity. So, far from being identical with the body that operates, sensation must be seen as that compound of what a body can do, an expressivity of the body that is not the body itself. There is a distinction, so to speak, between the activities, the potentialities, of the body and the actual flesh that makes up any given body. When Eric lives *within* the scalding fact of his biology, then, we can see him living within the gap between these two modalities, the corporeal and the incorporeal. His is the expressivity of a non-human force, the force of affect, that is beyond him, flowing through him as a force that is first and foremost a capacity of the world. Albert Einstein once said that he considered himself to be a part of nature, a piece of it, as though his sense of self was conditioned by a belonging to a greater, open whole that was not, necessarily, human. The same could be said of DeLillo's protagonist. Within the fissure between his own body and its affective expressivity, Eric embodies the surface-like processes of "man's non-human becomings."

Cosmopolis's renderings of Eric's affects follow similar lines wherever they occur, whether he happens to be seducing a co-worker in the back of his limo or, in arguably his wildest moment, intentionally shooting himself in the hand with a snub-nosed revolver. A major

element is added to his affective life, however, and the treatment of affect in general, when, at the close of the novel's first half, Eric receives notice of a credible threat against his life, a "specific and categorical" threat that is a breach of his system's security (101). His gamble against the surging yen is sending his financial empire into a tailspin, and his determination to get a haircut seems the only thing giving his life any purpose. If ever his complex's gaze were thought to be impregnable and total, it is clearly vitiated now. Though I will deal with Eric's relationship to his own death, that ultimate and most stark of threshold experiences, in my final chapter, it needs to be mentioned here that the very real approach of his imminent death changes him in some fundamental way.

The recognition of his own mortality in the face of the credible threat is, in fact, what partitions the novel into two halves, with the first half ending on a teasing, anticipatory note: "Now he could begin the business of living" (107). Eric's life as an assets manager is not over quite yet, but a more pressing, more intense business is clearly at hand. Part two of the novel opens in the middle of a short tryst Eric shares with one of his bodyguards, Kendra Hays. Eric begins to exhibit a kind of Nietzschean affirmation of all things, of experience itself, when he makes a peculiar request to Hays involving the one hundred thousand volts of electricity at her disposal via her stun gun: "He said, 'Stun me. I mean it. Draw the gun and shoot.... Show me what it feels like. I'm looking for more. Show me something I don't know. Stun me to my DNA.... I want all the volts the weapon holds'"(115). We don't get a real time description of the zapping he receives, suggesting that its affective register may be beyond the scope of representation entirely, but we are privy, after the fact, to the effect it had on him:

He felt even freer than usual, attuned to the registers of his lower brain and gaining distance from the need to take inspired action, make original judgments, maintain

independent principles and convictions.... The stun gun probably helped. The voltage had jellified his musculature for ten or fifteen minutes and he'd rolled about on the hotel rug, electroconvulsive and strangely elated, deprived of his faculties of reason. (115)

There is a distinctly euphoric element in the affective flooding of his being, and though his experience may be in some way mental, it is clearly not of any rational order. Deleuze and Guattari write that "the brain is the *mind* itself" (*What is Philosophy?* 211): that is, sensation, for all its incorporeality, is essentially an effect of the body, of bodies and powers in relation. This is not to say that sensation and the body it takes up form two hopelessly separated phenomena. Quite the contrary. Indeed, it were as though the body and its sensations are not beholden to strict relations of cause and effect, as is normally assumed with the body actively *causing* the effects of its sensations. Taken together, they form a perfect unity, a single form, *but with various dimensions*. The body and its sensations are a single multiplicity, without recourse to a linear relation between cause and effect. Eric may experience the evisceration of all his reason, but his mind, the feeling brain itself, is synonymous with his body's most intense expression: he's a synonym with a difference. Lurking within the description of what some might say amounts to Eric's self-inflicted torture, however, is his curious sense of freedom, which, more than anything else, defines the influence of the credible threat to his life. Between the first and second halves of the novel, Eric becomes unmoored from his habitual sense of self that kept him in a passive relation to his affective experience. Now, he actively searches it out. He has become, in a word, a figure of affirmation.

It appears, then, that Eric's awareness of his own mortality, or even his death itself, attends all of his actions and feelings as a properly virtual reality, accompanying his every move as a kind of "Nothingness that is not nothing" (Irigaray 174). His death is with him now, even as

he lives; it has become a figure of fate. A gap is thus introduced *within himself*, accounting for the “distance” he has gained “from the need to take inspired action.” I would contend that this gap is precisely the function of the will, but it is a peculiar will, and some unpacking is in order to show how it works.

Deleuze is helpful again as an interpretive ballast, and we can see a consideration of the will at the uttermost extremities of the theory of the event:

What does it mean to will the event?... We are faced with a volitional intuition and a transmutation. “To my inclination for death,” said Bousquet, “which was a failure of the will, I will substitute a longing for death which would be the apotheosis of the will.”

From this inclination to this longing there is, in a certain respect, no change except a change of the will, a sort of leaping in place (*saut sur place*) of the whole body which exchanges its organic will for a spiritual will. (*Logic of Sense* 149)

If, earlier, Eric was merely experiencing, and even noting, his own relationship to his affects, as was argued with respect to the pain produced by his prostate exam, then he was surely encountering a distance that emerged from within himself. However, now, and throughout the second half of *Cosmopolis*, he not only *encounters* this distance, but *wills* it. He has paid witness to his own bifurcation and now puts it into operation, actively selecting it as its own experience in order to effectively give it a body. He chooses to enact his own multiplicity, to bring it into being. Again, if our earlier interpretation of affect was correct in configuring it as a surface, it would appear that a *new* element has arrived in the membranous fold: choice. Could this be the site of the subject? And what of this active selection of the multiplicity? Can this be properly termed a will, and then how free would it be? For if everything said thus far about affective experience and its decidedly non-human character is correct, then the will *itself* must also be a

function of a greater affective flow that is in and of nature. The human expression of will is fundamentally an expression of the world's affective powers.

What we have then is a thoroughly compelling vision of human subjectivity. At the surface of Eric's affects, themselves a kind of division and intermingling of the co-present categories of the actual and the virtual, the corporeal and the incorporeal, we have a second order of division, that of the will. In his selection of the multiple expressivity of affect, Eric does not remove himself from its operation, as though he could stand completely outside of it and thus become what we might call a "subject," but *enters into it*, giving life to its divergent becomings: he gives life to the becomings of the surface in such a way that we can no longer tell if *he* is acting or if, in fact, the surface *itself* is the only agent. Put another way, we can say that the surface enters into communication with itself through that expressivity we call "Eric." He becomes a "subjectless subjectivity," to borrow Paul Bains' terminology, a self-acting and self-reflective subjectivity that is inclusive of a will that constitutes a shift of intensity. By virtue of this will, it would appear, the surface, that pure process of separating and connecting, has at its heart a *divergence of itself*, a kind of fractal diffusion. This, finally, is how and why Eric becomes an "operator," as DeLillo wrote earlier: through his own will, and by selecting the complex of fragmentation and unity as the experience to which he gives a body, Eric operates as the world's experimentation with itself. He becomes an embodiment of the world's power to will, lending it his affirmation, and thus succeeds in releasing the event. In the end, we can say that to will itself is to act or serve as a conduit for a non-human power and give it expression. The infinitive verb form, in fact, says it all: there is a power or force called "to will" that is not ours but the world's, an expressivity and function of the real itself. The crucial matter is to align

oneself with this power, to give it expression and a body, even to represent it, and thus take part in the rich pageantry of subjectivity.

Eric's long day through the streets of the Big Apple leads him inexorably toward his death, it is true, though whether or not he actually dies is another matter, one I will examine in my final chapter. Suffice it to say, for the time being, that Eric does not actually *choose* his own death. Instead, the novel's most searching and trenchant interest in the phenomenon of choice is reserved for that passive activity toward which the entire narrative has been spiraling, Eric's haircut. Even upon learning of the threat to his life, Eric remains stalwart in his resolve, not to be deterred: "But we still want what we want.... We want a haircut" (101-102). His journey leads him just past Tenth Avenue, a fine round number, and into a rather slovenly and clichéd district, complete with graffiti-tagged steel shutters and an abandoned, overturned shopping cart. His finances are in ruins; indeed, "the whole system" of integrated markets and institutions is in danger because of his heedless gamble against the yen (116). His short-lived marriage will soon be dissolved, Eric having stolen and lost his wife's family fortune, and he's dispatched his chief of security with a single gunshot, distancing himself from those worldly attachments that defined who he was, how he could or should act. He has intentionally isolated and exposed himself to his own being only, without ground or connection to other people. Welcome to the wasteland of the subject, we might say. But then he arrives here, in the neighbourhood in which his father grew up, to have his hair cut by Anthony Adubato, the barber who gave Eric the very first haircut of his life. And Anthony tells anecdotes about days gone by, about Eric's father, perfectly predictable stories that Eric "had heard... a number of times and the man used the same words nearly every time, with topical variations" (161). Anthony welcomes Eric. They have *history*. And it is this history, finally, that gives Eric a place in the world, a safe haven for his subjectivity

to remain attached to a specific time and place instead of floating aimlessly but vitally adrift. His history *locates* him within a cultural milieu rife with memory, within the interconnections made between people and places. He has not forgotten who he is, nor have people forgotten about him.

So Tenth Avenue is, after all, an appropriate setting for Eric's haircut. He returns exactly to who he is, setting all balances aright, and takes a seat under Anthony's well-practiced scissors to get what he wants, what he has wanted all along:

After a while he threw off the cape. He couldn't sit here anymore. He burst from the chair, knocking back the drink in a whiskey swig.

Anthony looked very small, suddenly, with the rake comb in one hand, clippers in the other.

"But how come?"

"I need to leave. I don't know how come. That's how come."

"But let me do the right side at least. So both sides are equal."

It meant something to Anthony. This was clear, getting the sides to match. (169-70)

Caught up in the middle of the event he has pursued throughout the day, Eric changes his mind, leaving his hair, like his prostate, that centre of an earlier affective rush, asymmetrical. We are asked, I believe, to make a connection between these two episodes. That is, if his asymmetrical prostate was responsible for his overwhelming pain that exposed the surface-like quality of his subjectivity, then his uneven head of hair reveals a similar phenomenon. Only now, the affect under consideration is not pain or agony, but choice itself. The decision to cut short his appointment with Anthony arrives for Eric much like the inspiration for the haircut did in the first place: it simply *comes*, without apparent cause, and Eric again assumes the role of the

operator by aligning himself with this force, by putting it into action. His choice, ultimately, has no justification external to itself: “It belongs only to its own field conditions of anomaly” (Massumi, “Like a Thought” xxvii). Eric’s will is thus, like his hair and his prostate, an asymmetry, emerging from the fold like an affective body, an affective flesh taken up by force. We could say that the entire novel has been one long event, the event of Eric’s haircut, from his initial, unaccountable drive to get it to his sitting here in Anthony’s shop. His decision to leave the event keeps him in its middle. Were he to finish the haircut, the ledgers would be set straight and all things would find perfect, symmetrical closure. In choosing to end his haircut, Eric exhibits precisely the same dynamic that was at work when his desire first manifested itself. Only now, this dynamic changes the event’s trajectory, just as it did when it first arrived: it sets Eric on a new course, rendering himself as a “line of flight,” to borrow from Deleuze and Guattari (*Thousand Plateaus* 277). Eric is, again, on the move. He leaves the barbershop to continue a journey, no one knows where or why, but it will not end here, at Tenth Avenue, along an even, logarithmic thoroughfare. Ultimately, being in the middle of the event means to change its constitution and its path, to mobilize difference. It is the process of choice itself that remains autonomous, without regard to means or ends, just as the subject enacts this process to give it a body. The power to select, however, is also a concomitant of the autonomous processes at work. Thus the subjectivity active here does indeed appear to leap in place as a kind of operator. To quote Brian Massumi, in summation:

The ‘will’ to change or to stay the same is not an act of determination on the part of a unified subject in simple response to self-reflection or an internal impulse. It is a state of self-organized indeterminacy in response to complex causal constraints. It constitutes a real degree of freedom, but the choice belongs to the overall dissipative system with its

plurality of selves, and not to the person; it is objectively cocoused at the crossroads of chance and determinacy. (*User's Guide* 81)

I have argued throughout that *Cosmopolis* exposes a suspicion of any totalized, meta-position through its playful treatment of temporal paradox, its attention to the complexities of affective experience, and its reflection on the chance-like and deterministic nature of will or choice. I contend, along with Deleuze, that “the *Amor fati* is one with the struggle of free men” (*Logic of Sense* 149). As Eric embarks on a different path once again, shifting from and extending the event that has given the narrative its thrust, thus ramifying it, the novel offers yet another intriguing way for destabilizing a closed whole: Eric comes face to face with the “specific and categorical” threat to his life (101), itself a breach of his company’s besieged security system, in the form of an ex-employee who adopts the *nom de plume*, Benno Levin. I will reserve my analysis of Eric’s relationship to Levin for my final chapter on the event of death, or dying. Needless to say, far more work remains to be done on *Cosmopolis*’s problematizing of subjectivities in relation with chance and becoming. If this chapter has succeeded in showing some of the ways in which we can see Eric as a kind of living excess to himself, a chance-inflected subjectivity, then my last chapter will have to take the issue even further, to Eric’s confrontation with his own death, with his seemingly fated killer, “the other, the subject” (*Cosmopolis* 187).

Chapter Three

“Throwing Dice on Two Tables”: Chance and Split-Subjectivities in Paul Auster’s *The Music of Chance*

Because what happens will never happen,/ and because what has happened/ endlessly happens again,// we are as we were, everything/ has changed in us, if we speak/ of the world/ it is only to leave the world/ unsaid.

—Paul Auster

When we speak the word “life,” it must be understood we are not referring to life as we know it from its surface or fact, but to that fragile, fluctuating centre which forms never reach.

—Antonin Artaud

It is only fitting that there are so many ways, perhaps too many, to segue between my second and third chapters, chapters focusing on works by Don DeLillo and Paul Auster, respectively. Both novelists are representative of a postmodernism marked famously by the shifting and blurring of cultural or textual boundaries, fostering new connections and relations that might make the segue a site of particular critical interest. Besides being good friends, to whom each has dedicated a work of fiction, for example, DeLillo and Auster also share many concerns around which their novels revolve. A short list of these concerns, clearly not lost to literary critics, would include “an interest in coincidence, frequent portrayals of an ascetic life, a sense of imminent disaster, obsessive characters, [and] a loss of the ability to understand combined with depictions of the importance of daily life and ordinary moments” (Barone 11). To this list, and apropos of my current study, we should add their shared fascination with “the single or isolated individual’s efforts to realize a degree of independence and freedom” (Woods 143), a theme, I have argued, shot through with the relations between chance and subjectivity.

Leaving aside for the moment the specific, thematic connections between the two writers, we might look to the segue itself for a common link. The segue, as the OED tells us, is a “move

without interruption from one song, melody, or scene to another.” The paradoxical function here is hard to miss: we have one thing and another, more or less clearly defined, and the seamless movement between the two that effectively dissolves their distinction. That is, we have two things that both retain and lose their structural integrities. They are separate *and* without interruption. We might think of a segue, then, as nothing other than the operative dynamic of the event itself: the *productive relation* that unfolds between two provisionally discrete phenomena that are nevertheless expressive of a shifting continuum, or that connective potential that overflows every “single” thing, leading it always elsewhere. We have Don DeLillo and Paul Auster, Chapter Two and Chapter Three, but what happens between the two is a movement *itself*, a turning of the page, perhaps, or the connective and connecting force that traverses both terms, sending them outside of themselves. Both of these novelists, alike in so many ways, might be most compellingly connected through their shared interest in the phenomenon and dynamic of connection itself. The type of connection I mean to suggest here, however, is not one that merely orders and joins unchanging, constituent parts into a unified formation, but one that actively *transforms* these parts *through* their interaction, giving rise to their new expressive and connective potentials.

The subject of connectivity raises problems similar to those encountered in the aesthetics of the surface, of interaction, that I examined throughout my reading of Don DeLillo’s *Cosmopolis*. Incidentally, the title of that novel, derived from the Greek *kosmos*, meaning “world,” and *polis*, meaning “city,” provides us with an intriguing way to introduce our investigation of Paul Auster’s *The Music of Chance*. Auster’s work makes ample use of its own “City of the World,” yet another possible, not to mention irresistible, segue. His, however, is not a fictional New York City, like DeLillo’s, in which we find a broad intersection of cultures and a

protagonist vying to bring himself into contact with all processes, thus turning the city, and the self, into an instance of a great Whole. Auster's *City of the World* is quite literally a model along the lines of the toy plane or train type. It's a single character's artistic, allegorical, and autobiographical representation of the world, "a place where the past and future come together," where "everything... happens at once" (Auster 79). It represents an interconnectivity so absolute and without recourse to an outside that it effectively becomes One. In a word, it is everything that *Cosmopolis* sets out to explore. Only here, the problematic of totalities, whether open or closed, is suggested in the form of a representational figure, a work of art, brought within the narrative itself. How exactly this device functions will have to be examined in further detail. As novels that dramatize the dynamics of interconnection, however, we can say for the time being that *The Music of Chance* and *Cosmopolis* share a careful attention to matters of chance and fate that ask us to conceptualize processes of connection and the corollary issues of change and process.

Auster's novel is difficult to summarize. Paul Bray, writing in 1994, concludes a review of *The Music of Chance* by claiming, somewhat exaggeratedly, perhaps, that it stands as "a whole new kind of fiction" (86). His claim that it is also "a fiction where events and the language of mental process seem at times indistinguishable" (86), speaks incisively, however, to the degree to which the novel can be seen to function as a sustained meditation on subjectivity. Like many of Auster's works, *The Music of Chance* is primarily a story about the self, about how it operates and how it might be conceived. Tim Woods puts it well when he suggests that "the text oscillates between the notion that mental and conceptual representations passively reflect the structure of an ultimately fixed and unaltering reality of essences, and alternatively, the recognition that existence is largely an aesthetic act, and that one can become the author of one's

own life, become one's own supreme fiction" (145-46). We're confronted, again, with subjectivities that bear an unstable and ultimately indeterminable relation to destiny and chance.

More prosaically, the novel tells the story of Jim Nashe, a Bostonian fireman who, after being left by his wife, finds himself unable to provide a good home for his daughter, Juliette. His ostensibly disinterested decision to leave Juliette under his sister's guardianship sparks the beginning of a kind of subjective purging, a severing of those connections to other people responsible for keeping his own identity secure, "as if the farther he took himself away from the person he had been, the better off he would be in the future" (Auster 10). Upon the death of his estranged father, a surprise inheritance lands in his lap, prompting Nashe to quit his job and begin a wayward and wandering life, "traveling back and forth across America as he waited for the money to run out" (1). In fact, as this first line of the novel indicates, it's difficult to say exactly what Nashe *does*: he's both active and passive at once, throwing himself headlong into an uncertainty that is itself a kind of waiting, an anticipation of something else, something more. The narrative then follows Nashe's travails through "the real story of his life," the creation of a life opened up to and by chance (215).

Given its title, it's not surprising that the novel begins almost immediately by establishing chance as the operative force behind the narrative's trajectory. As Woods argues, "the entire plot is shaped by a chance event" (147): when Nashe meets the young and brash poker player, Jack Pozzi, forging a friendship that will direct much of the novel's action, we're told "It was one of those random, accidental encounters that seem to materialize out of thin air—a twig that breaks off in the wind and suddenly lands at your feet" (1). But we need to work out a *concept* of chance if we hope to make heads or tails of its purported relevance for subjectivity. To that end we can note that what "materializes" here is, counterintuitively, not a material or a thing at all,

but an *encounter* between two things, between two characters. What does it mean for an encounter, and not a designatable thing, to emerge? Answering this question requires that we shift our focus from thinking about things themselves to thinking about the ways in which things can act or interact. The emergent, conceived as a chance encounter, concerns things in and of themselves only insofar as their *relations* become active. For Nashe and Pozzi, this means that their meeting, as an encounter with each other, should be understood as an encounter with *what they can become*, with what they are capable of becoming: they encounter encountering, a dynamic invention that is fundamentally a matter of the real and communicating potential between them. The emergent appears to come from nothing at all, from out of thin air, because it is the operation of a field of emergent activity. Encountering, in this account, is pure transformation or process, divorced, as it were, from the things which come to embody whatever effectively occurs. It is activity itself, the vitalism that traverses all events and lends them their capacities for change.

Although the meeting between the two protagonists is described as “*one of those random, accidental encounters*” (emphasis added), implying that there exist encounters of an altogether different sort, I aim to show that *The Music of Chance* can be opened up powerfully using a concept of chance resonant with encountering itself, without regard to types or classes. And by configuring chance as primarily an encounter, as opposed to a state of affairs, I draw once again from a Deleuzian philosophy, especially with respect to the notion of becoming. Deleuze writes, “it is not one term which becomes the other, but each encounters the other, a single becoming which is not common to the two, since they have nothing to do with one another, but which is between the two, which has its own direction, a bloc of becoming, an a-parallel evolution” (*Dialogues II* 6-7). The becoming to which Deleuze refers, central to the dynamism of the

encounter, concerns the changeful nature of things. It asks us to see things always from the perspective of their capacities, of what they can do and how they can do it, in effect, to view everything in the midst of its becoming something else. The individual trajectories, or lines of transformation, of two things immersed in an encounter are thus not shared at all, since the encounter is precisely that which sends each outside of itself and along a new path of becoming. This encounter between things is “shared” only to the degree that each becomes dissimilar to itself as a result of their interaction. A problem of terminology, then: “sharing,” in this sense, has nothing whatsoever to do with similitude or the mutually possessed, but concerns rather an involvement or engagement *external* to the terms themselves. A single becoming, or what I’ve called a field of emergent activity between the two ensures for each thing its unique evolution.

The contingency specific to becoming, if it can be said to exist at all, is one of Auster’s main themes here. Early in the novel, and still establishing the plot’s self-reflexive relation to chance, he writes, “It all came down to a question of sequence, the order of events. If it had not taken the lawyer six months to find [Nashe], he never would have been on the road the day he met Jack Pozzi, and therefore none of the things that followed from that meeting ever would have happened” (1-2). Sequence has become a force in its own right, somehow responsible for affirming the chance-like nature of what actually occurs. But how? What, in effect, are the implications of this claim, reminiscent of chaos theory’s “butterfly effect,” whereby a relatively small, initial influence can trigger massive fluctuations for a system as a whole? I think everything hinges on how we assess the function of a single—yet notoriously recalcitrant—word, “if.”

The conditional mood itself bears a fundamental relation to how *The Music of Chance* appreciates the events it describes, though it’s a conditional mood linked inextricably to events

only insofar as they take place in and through time. That is, in raising the problem of chance, Auster asks us to imagine not one, but two worlds, one hypothetical and one real, their difference being primarily an effect of timing. But that is not all. Their difference is not *merely* a matter of sequence, as if both worlds are comprised of precisely the same events, differing only in their order, because a change in the sequence of events amounts to a change in the events themselves. Nothing short of a theory of the event is proposed, whereby each occurrence must be seen to emerge as a part of a unique environmental totality, just as the event itself lends shape to that environment and what it can become. The meeting between Nashe and the lawyer, for example, is made properly eventful when understood in light of the worlds, both past and future, through which it may pass, in light of the various configurations of *other* events with which it may connect in a unique series. And it is only by virtue of this event's actual occurrence that the potential of the world as a whole is actively transformed: in its happening, the event alters qualitatively the relations that the world is capable of expressing. To locate the lawyer's meeting with Nashe at a specific moment in the processual unfolding of the world is to change constitutionally what that world may become: a difference in timing, or in the sequence of events, *is* a difference in potential. In essence, this difference is not determined through a comparison between the real world and an imaginary one, since the event's actualization puts into play difference *in itself*. *The Music of Chance* thus challenges us with a dizzying contingency: the operation of chance and difference is to be found in the *single*, open, and transformative sequence of events. If chance exists at all, we're going to have to find it at work in the real world.

Nashe's nomadic life provides the backdrop against which the novel deepens its investigation of chance and subjective freedom. As Ilana Shiloh argues, if "freedom, for Nashe,

is associated with anonymity, lack of commitment, and absence of human contact...., it is also closely associated with chance” (491). Appropriately enough, the beginning of his directionless travel is occasioned by a chance event:

He had told [his family] he was planning to go back to Massachusetts, but as it happened, he soon found himself traveling in the opposite direction. That was because he missed the ramp to the freeway—a common enough mistake—but instead of driving the extra twenty miles that would have put him back on course, he impulsively went up the next ramp, knowing full well that he had just committed himself to the wrong road. It was a sudden, unpremeditated decision, but in the brief time that elapsed between the two ramps, Nashe understood that there was no difference, that both ramps were finally the same. (6)

In fleshing out a working concept of chance, we need to confront seriously the claim that Auster makes, namely, that his protagonist realizes there is ultimately no difference between two different paths, two different trajectories, one that would lead him home and one that would send him adrift. Clearly, however, Nashe’s decision to roam further afield, further away from his home, is due in large part to the fact that his home, at least insofar as one considers it a collection of relationships to people and places, has been thoroughly dismantled: “He could go anywhere he wanted, he could do anything he felt like doing, and not a single person in the world would care” (6). Nashe is, for better or worse, homeless, his freedom seemingly rife with potential. But how are we to understand this rationale of equivalence? In what way are both ramps the same, or what is it that they share? Shiloh writes, “when one realizes that the world is devoid of meaning and purpose, that it is morally indifferent, all decisions become equivalent” (491), as if Nashe’s navigational uncertainty is rooted in moral bankruptcy. She claims, in other words, that

any notion of difference must be tied perforce to a moral system that would, by establishing a ground whereby determinate evaluations are made, allow for purposive action. Even better still, Shiloh claims that difference presupposes judgment, equality presupposes apathy, and both difference and equality are simply effects of a human, subjective appraisal of a given situation, having nothing whatsoever to do with an actual process that must be undergone, lived, and sensed *as* difference.

Shiloh's reading of this passage makes much of Nashe's realization that both ramps are the same, disregarding completely the fact that there are still *two* ramps, and, crucially, that a brief passage of time has to be endured as Nashe passes *between* the ramps. A theory of properly active chance will have to affirm simultaneously all of these elements. If Shiloh's schema involves a kind of inauthentic appraisal, as I have suggested, judging the purported equality of the two ramps *without actually travelling them*, then I hope to raise a critique whose perspective is always (un)grounded *within* activity itself. It is a matter of supplanting a predictive, evaluative critique with a sensing one, a philosophy of the living and the present. Again, then, what is it that these two ramps share, or how are they the same? From the perspective of a life that actually takes a ramp, whichever one it may be, the two different paths might be said to be equal only insofar as they mobilize difference itself. They are the same, not because Nashe couldn't care less about which he chooses, or even because the worlds onto which they would open do not differ. Quite the contrary: the two ramps can be said to be the same because, from the perspective of a traveler taking their paths, they share this quality of releasing and belonging to irreducibly singular worlds. They are the same only insofar as traveling along either path involves an immanent creativity of the unique and the new. Shiloh's critique thus remains mired in the measurement between hypothetical results (i.e., Nashe will remain the same in any case,

regardless of what he does) instead of assessing equality and difference from within what actually and effectively occurs. In essence, she annuls the efficacy of real change in the world by appealing to a stoic sensibility that says in the face of anything and everything, “it makes no difference to me.” But there is always a difference. Such is the simple truth of Nashe’s experience of the brief time that elapses between the ramps—everything changes in the interim, a new world, *the* world, has been set in motion, even as Nashe moves *between* the ramps. The ramps are ultimately the same because each expresses this extreme motility of the world, without reference to the particular ends that each path might come to represent. That is, finally, their sameness or equality arrives not through the erasure of the differences between the two ramps and all that they might represent, but through the operation of difference itself that attends the taking of a path, any path, including the “path of hesitation” that marks the process of choice. Their equality is a difference of potential.

The fact that Nashe finds himself in the middle of this bifurcating path is particularly suggestive. As Deleuze and Claire Parnet write, “What matters on a path, what matters on a line, is always the middle, not the beginning or the end. We are always in the middle of a path, in the middle of something” (*Dialogues II* 28). What matters, in other words, is the process of effectuation in the present. And when Nashe relieves himself of his personal effects, “treating his past as if it were so much junk to be carted away” (10), we get the sense that it may be subjectivity itself that operates most clearly as a kind of middle-space: “He felt like a man who had finally found the courage to put a bullet through his head—but in this case the bullet was not death, it was life, it was the explosion that triggers the birth of new worlds” (10). The suicide invoked in this simile really concerns the death of the past and nothing else, creating for Nashe a space of maximal potential, unfettered by any connections that might impede the formation of

new ones. It is a shifting of the present from the long history that precedes and prepares it and from the limitless future into which it will plunge: the present becomes an intensional point. We can imagine such a temporality, seemingly at odds with that conventionally adopted, if we ask some deceptively simple questions: in what way, for example, is the moment, say, fifteen minutes ago, real? In what way is it real *now*? What was I doing fifteen minutes ago, and does it have any reality for me now?

Everything depends upon our understanding of the present, of what this “now” is and how it can be conceived. Surely the past has some type of reality, that which corresponds, specifically, to the mixture of bodies in depth as they give rise to effects in a kind of serial evolution, making what happens now dependent upon what happened earlier. But then, crucially, there is another way of conceptualizing the present, wholly separate from the state of affairs of the present or from “what happens,” and it extracts the ideal *process* of the present from what actually occurs, configuring the present as the operational truth of becoming. Nashe’s experience is emblematic of this second form of time. He feels when he drives across the country that “Nothing around him lasted for more than a moment, and as one moment followed another, it was as though he alone continued to exist. He was a fixed point in a whirl of changes, a body poised in utter stillness as the world rushed through him and disappeared” (11-12). Woods argues that this passage “has an uncanny resemblance to certain descriptions of the modernist existence: the hierarchy of space over time; the transitory and solitary nature of existence, almost solipsistic and psychedelic; the subject as the ‘still point’ in a modernist vortex, gyre, or chaos of existence, in which life is only manifested *through* him” (146-47). We’re confronted with a paradoxical situation. If Nashe alone can be said to exist, to *continue* to exist, and his existence is constituted purely upon the world that rushes through him, an external

environment that intrudes and disappears the moment it arrives, then, instead of being simply a “fixed” or “still point” in a universal chaos, he seems to function as a kind of interface between two levels of reality. More precisely, Nashe’s subjectivity is comprised of the impermanent, flickering sensations of the world itself that flood through him, just as he lends these sensations a body through which they are expressed: he is both the movement of the world in all its variation and the empty but consistent scene or territory through which it plays itself out. Ultimately, we can’t even say that the world “intrudes” as such, since Nashe’s subjectivity is tantamount to a confusion of the categories of interior and exterior. The world rushes through him, as though he were nothing but the expression of a pure exteriority, an exposure to the outside, yet that world cannot be said to exist outside of him, its actualization a matter also of pure interiority: he is the flux of the world incarnate, a living lability, or the surface upon which the world finds its expression. And far from implying a hierarchy of space over time, as Woods suggests, the subjectivity described here relies crucially on a temporality specific to the surface, or on “floating times,” to quote Deleuze (*Dialogues II* 92). It is a time specific to incorporeal potential, understood only from the perspective of change itself, and thus a measure of the positive difference between intensities that are differential in themselves—a time, that is, specific to a subjectivity made properly eventful. Nashe, we might say, overturns the hierarchy of space over time, not by reversing their positions of power, by making space subordinate to time, but by operating as the fissure or fold that separates and connects the two, becoming a variegated continuum, both a still point and the movement by which it is enlivened.

Deleuze develops throughout his work an extensive and programmatic treatment of the “fractured” or “cracked” subject that informs my reading (*Difference and Repetition* 276, *Logic of Sense* 157). He writes, “The activity of thought applies to a receptive being, to a passive

subject which represents that activity to itself rather than enacts it, which experiences its effect rather than initiates it, and which lives it like an Other within itself.... It is as though the *I* were fractured from one end to the other” (*Difference and Repetition* 86). Here we see a difference between the *activity* of thought itself, a thoroughly immanent and pre-individual force, and the subject which is said to think. In acknowledging this difference, we lose our hold on the subject as a ground for the effects it comes to express. The “fracture in the I” (277) becomes an event whereby the self is opened up as a surface relation between two differential planes, between an embodied actualization (the moment of thought) and its incorporeal, impersonal double (the power *to think*).

Auster’s treatment of this event-like process is elaborated when he describes Nashe’s reunion with an old acquaintance, Fiona Wells, yet another circumstance that occurs, we’re told, “purely by chance” (14) while Nashe continues his travels on the road:

There was a strange inevitability to it, he felt, as if their fluke encounter called for an extravagant response, a spirit of anarchy and celebration. They were not creating an event so much as trying to keep up with one, and by the time Nashe wrapped his arms around Fiona’s naked body, his desire for her was so powerful that it was already verging on a feeling of loss—for he knew that he was bound to disappoint her in the end, that sooner or later a moment would come when he would want to be back in the car. (15)

A clearer example of the logic of the event would be hard to find. All the elements of chance and fate that mark the event are here, forming the problems that the novel continues to develop. Immediately, for example, the “fluke encounter” is accompanied by a sense of “strange inevitability,” as if the most unlikely is at once the most destined. And the meeting between Nashe and Fiona creates an affective surge, a shift in intensity. Their encounter, that is, should

be understood fundamentally as a transformational effect that occurs between the two. In a similar vein, and in keeping with his definition of becoming, Deleuze reminds us that the proper name “does not designate a person or a subject... [but] an effect, a zigzag, something which passes or happens between two as though under a potential difference” (*Dialogues II* 6). It is a matter of apprehending subjectivities through the collection of affects and affective capacities to which they give expression, and of viewing the encounter as a resonance between two unique sets of potentialities. Even though Auster’s only reference to chance here concerns the improbability of the meeting itself, we see all the signs of chance’s handiwork throughout the encounter, in the process or unfolding of the event, and these most saliently in the temporal confusions the event inspires. What we’re after, really, in developing a concept of chance amenable to Auster’s novel is inseparable from an understanding of the present proper to the event itself.

We can note, to begin with, that what happens between Nashe and Fiona in some way *precedes* them, as if the event as such is perpetually lying-in-wait, staying just on the futural horizon. At the same time, however, it is a kind of *fait accompli*, having somehow already occurred, thus producing, at least for Nashe, a sense of loss. In a similar way, Deleuze claims that the event “is not the object as denoted, but the object as expressed or expressible, never present, but always already in the past and yet to come” (*Logic of Sense* 136). Things become very interesting here, because in both cases, in the event’s anticipatory and recollective regimes, so to speak, nothing of the unexpected rises to the surface: the event appears to presuppose the strictest determinacy, taking on a force of its own that admits no chance whatsoever. The entire problematic of the event is revealed if we ask this question: in relation to what, exactly, does the event take on this dual formation as that which is already while remaining yet to come? The

answer: the event's becoming. For it is only from the perspective of the event's transformation itself that Nashe lags behind the event *at the same time* that it remains behind him. Subjectivity takes on the quality of the event's transformative process and, as such, occupies its middle space, "the scintillating abyss of a future-past" (Massumi, *User's Guide* 20). Nashe must move into the space that the event prepares just as it appears behind his back. He must *keep up* with the event, as if dislocated from it in the direction of the past, while experiencing a desire that only *verges* on loss, thus dislocated from the event in the direction of the future: he is effectively nowhere, or nowhen, without a determinate position, configured as a kind of asymptotic approach, in two directions at once, towards *something*. The present, then, is precisely that which is always eluded, that which eludes itself in a dynamic displacement, and is thus coincident with itself only insofar as it involves pure difference or a transformative becoming. It is the instant of the pure operation.

Nowhere does *The Music of Chance* show a keener interest in the structure of subjectivity than in the relationship that develops between Nashe and Pozzi. The two characters meet at a critical moment in each of their lives: Nashe's inheritance is quickly dwindling, such that "another month or two [on the road] would be enough to push him into a full-blown panic" (19); and Pozzi wanders the sides of that road, beaten and penniless after having been accused of hustling a group of gamblers, "a thin, bedraggled man lurching forward in spasms, buckling and wobbling as if he were about to fall on his face" (20). Nashe and Pozzi are at the end of a line. Or better yet, both men are open to, perhaps even desperate for, some kind of transformation in their lives: they meet when each betrays an openness to new connections and a potential to be otherwise. And in this regard, a mutual utility exists between the two. When Pozzi presents Nashe with the opportunity to prolong his itinerant lifestyle, bringing news of a high-stakes

poker game that promises to be “an honest-to-goodness walk down Jackpot Lane” (31), Nashe offers Pozzi the stakes with which that game can be played, ten thousand dollars, and a fifty-fifty split of the expected winnings. Auster is careful to define the nature of this relationship:

At that point, Pozzi was simply a means to an end, the hole in the wall that would get [Nashe] from one side to the other. He was an opportunity in the shape of a human being, a card-playing specter whose one purpose in the world was to help Nashe win back his freedom. Once that job was finished, they would go their separate ways. (36-37)

The reduction of another human being to the status of a tool, nothing more than a function to serve one’s end, is conventionally quite damning, to say the least. At least one critic forwards such a critique when she writes that “Nashe’s decision to use Pozzi as an instrument to get back his fortune is his tragic deed” (Shiloh 496), thus taking the moralizing bait that Auster offers.

The ominous foreshadowing of Pozzi’s attempted escape from the estate of their poker-playing opponents, Flower and Stone, a failed escape through another hole in a wall that leaves him for dead, would seem to corroborate this judgment, imbuing the threshold experience with a sense of hopelessness and violence. The novel, on the other hand, is not so simple, presenting us with a much richer and complex situation. For if, indeed, Nashe *uses* Pozzi to further his own ends, he may do so only by turning *himself* into an instrument for the *other’s* use, thus submitting himself to the very functional mode he imposes on the other. He can use Pozzi only if Pozzi uses him; Nashe’s wall takes Pozzi as its hole only when Nashe, in turn, becomes a hole in Pozzi’s wall. These are the terms of their relationship.

But then we need to ask, does such a relationship *have* terms, in the sense that we normally understand them, that is, as principles that regulate the behaviour of an interaction? In the case of Nashe and Pozzi, the only “term” of their relationship is precisely that which allows

for their relationship, any relationship, to emerge in the first place. Deleuze puts it well when he writes that the encounter between two things, “the double capture,” “[is] not even something which would be in the one, or something which would be in the other, even if it had to be exchanged, be mingled, but something which is between the two, outside the two, and which flows in another direction” (*Dialogues II* 7). In concert with this line of thinking, it appears that Nashe’s leap beyond his own impasse is made possible, in principle, only by exposing himself to a “something more” that remains beyond his personal purview. In becoming *for each other* a means to an end, both Nashe and Pozzi are opened up to a relation external to each. Getting to the other side of one’s wall always includes a becoming-conduit of oneself, and thus subverts the rigid dualism of subject/object and the utilitarian paradigm upon which such a dualism is based. They are in excess of every intention. Subjectivity itself, then, can be said to share with the temporal present what we defined as the pure operation, that becoming which must be understood as a subjectless multiplicity, or metaphorically, a leaping through walls that is always itself a wall being leapt through.

This concept of subjectivity is admittedly difficult to hold in mind at all times, so powerful and constitutional are our habitual modes of thinking. But it is entirely resonant with a wonderful passage Auster gives us that will, I hope, clarify what’s under discussion here. On their way to the big card game, Nashe and Pozzi have what on the surface is but a lighthearted discussion about what exactly it is they’re doing, about their impetuous wandering. Nashe begins:

“I’m just following my nose and waiting to see what turns up.”

“Welcome to the club.”

“Club? What club is that?”

“The International Brotherhood of Lost Dogs. What else? We’re letting you in as a certified, card-carrying member. Serial number zero zero zero zero.”

“I thought that was your number.”

“It is. But it’s your number, too. That’s one of the beauties of the Brotherhood.

Everyone who joins gets the same number.” (62)

Echoing the dynamics of connectivity with which I began this chapter, the “I” implied by a literal interpretation of Nashe’s colloquialism, “following my nose,” is a fractured or layered multiplicity, a composition of elements falling on both sides of an active/passive divide, the characteristic proper to becoming. And the first order of business upon entry into the International Brotherhood, a collectivity that knows geographical borders just as it crosses them, is to receive a new identity that supplants the proper name, a serial number that would ostensibly determine and represent its bearer. Assigning a serial number is meant to presuppose, or even substantiate, the verity of the individual subject, but precisely the opposite is accomplished here. Nashe becomes a kind of numberless number, a number that is, paradoxically, unidentifiable in terms of any binary system that would require at least a minimum of difference between a one and a zero. This nullity of signification is only redoubled as each member of the Brotherhood receives the same numberless number. But what is it that Nashe and Pozzi share beyond their serial number, what does the serial number attempt to signify, or what is it that constitutes the collective in the first place? For if the Brotherhood’s system of representation includes no room for difference, but only repetition of the same, then it would appear that *what is being represented* remains inassimilable to representation. The serial repetition of their serial numbers thus enacts the ruin of the very representational matrix that would, under normal conditions, coordinate all “card-carrying members.” These are indeed the Lost Dogs of the world, because

each must be lost to each. Caught up in the eventful emergence of “what turns up,” Nashe and Pozzi find their identities as “the product of a deep disparity” (*Logic of Sense* 261): the collective is predicated upon the difference itself that inheres within each member just as it circulates among and between members, if only to prevent the collective from ever resolving into a static system. And what each member of this shifting Brotherhood shares, then, is a becoming-different beyond identity, an activity open to chance as an encounter; incidentally, and given their title, we might even say that they enact what Deleuze and Guattari call “a becoming-animal” (*Thousand Plateaus* 239), or in this case, a becoming-canine. At any rate, as we learn later in a particularly suggestive passage, “even the smallest zero was a great hole of nothingness, a circle large enough to contain the world” (*Music of Chance* 155). The zero is less a number or a thing than it is a pure potential.

I have tried thus far to provide an account of how Auster’s novel explores the phenomenon of chance and its relationship to subjectivity. However, Shiloh argues that a “gradual shift in the nature of chance” accompanies the novel’s development, particularly when Nashe and Pozzi visit Flower’s and Stone’s estate to play their game of high-stakes poker, “suggesting that fate, rather than accident, is the force governing human life” (Shiloh 494). If by “accident” Shiloh means “chance,” then I take exception with her claim: it should be evident by now that I feel any stark distinction between chance and fate ignores the problems of difference, becoming, and temporality that lurk at their hearts. We’ve already seen, in the interaction between Nashe and Fiona, for example, that a “strange inevitability” attends the chance encounter from the novel’s very beginning (15). One of Auster’s most trenchant and provocative examinations of these problems is reserved for the aforementioned City of the World, Stone’s model where the world and its representations collide, mingle, and blur.

When Nashe and Pozzi arrive at the site of their poker game, they're treated to a tour of their hosts' mansion and this City of the World, Stone's life's work, which has the peculiar characteristic of rendering the real, temporally existent world as a static, timeless set piece. It is a frozen image of a single instant, a discrete spatialization of time, in which everything occurs simultaneously; Stone himself is represented in the model at various stages of his life, as both a child and a grown man. Where there are no distinctions between temporal frames of reference, the very concepts of past, present, and future find no purchase, melting away into a single plenitude. If this were all, we would have to admit that the model belies the very connectivity I described earlier as productive of difference and change: it would amount to a *closed* interconnectivity. But there is reason to suggest otherwise. Stone, the model's architect and caretaker, remarks that the City of the World is "only about half finished," that he plans on adding "the house we're standing in now" and "a separate model of this room. I'd have to be in it, of course, which means that I would also have to build another City of the World. A smaller one, a second city to fit inside the room within the room" (80). The model of the model, however, "would be the last element, a thing to add at the very end" (81), so that both models would be identical in content, differing only in scale. As Nashe rightly observes, Stone's plan includes an infinite regress at the core of its composition: "It could go on forever" (81), models within models. But how? Why? Because, fundamentally, the City of the World is self-reflexive. It will attempt to represent itself *as* a representation. Or, in other words, its representational status will be signified and made actual, *in bodily terms*, by repeating itself indefinitely, that is, by an appeal to infinity. Thus, upon completion of its first stage of construction, the model will merely multiply the very operation of representation. And once the idea of representation is brought within the matrix of the model, the categories of form and

content lose their clear distinction. The City of the World's existence *as a model* is both its form and its content, represented and repeated *ad infinitum*, as are its particular compositional details.

But we must ask whether this model is productive of the same or the different, whether it is essentially closed or open. Pointing out that the novel's events begin to mirror those depicted within Stone's model, Shiloh argues that "this is the realization of Baudrillard's notion of simulacrum—a simulation which does not refer back to reality but which generates its own models, a simulation which has become a hyperreality" (515). Indeed, if the world on which the model is based is found to be *identical* to that model, then there could be no distinction between the two, and all reference to a reality beyond or outside the model would be made entirely irrelevant. Perhaps, then, we should say that the world itself is based on the model, and not the reverse. It hardly matters, in any case, since such a situation would amount to a closed system of reference among and between models "which do not refer back to reality." Even the designation of an "original" model is not necessary, nor is it possible, since each constitutes yet another instance of the same.

Though *The Music of Chance* certainly introduces this series of mutually interpenetrating, reflecting, and reinforcing models as its primary structural symbol, it also exposes the limitations of the concomitant Baudrillardian critique. More specifically, the City of the World *does* in fact make reference to a reality that more than mirrors the model itself, as Stone himself makes clear when describing his plans for the future, for building microscopic models within models:

But I think it would be very difficult to get past the second stage, don't you? I'm not just talking about the construction, I'm also talking about time. It's taken me five years to get this far. It will probably take another five years to finish the first model. If the model of the model is as difficult as I think it's going to be, that would take another ten years,

maybe even another twenty years. I'm fifty-six now. If you add it up, I'm going to be pretty old when I finish anyway. And nobody lives forever. At least that's what I think. Bill might have other ideas about that, but I wouldn't bet much money on them. Sooner or later, I'm going to leave this world like everyone else. (81)

The problem of death is once again, as in DeLillo's *Cosmopolis*, invoked as a locus for testing the limits of representational thinking, a theme I will return to in my final chapter. Suffice it to say for now that I see *The Music of Chance* ultimately resisting the ontological confines of the hyperreal by paying particular attention to subjectivities in time. For if Stone's model must include Stone himself, and not only that, but Stone *in the present* as he continues his meticulous labour, the model must open up and on to the real itself, populated by fluxional and temporal subjectivities. The paradoxical nature of the City of the World is due wholly to the arbitrary and hypothetical assignment of an end to the first stage of its construction, to imagine that the present itself, in all its vitalism and transformation, could be effectively represented rather than lived. When Stone suggests that the second and smaller model could be added as a final element only after the first is completed, we must pause to ask how the first could ever be resolved if in fact it attempts to represent the present itself. The present, as real and lived process, as pure variation, is in principle alien to representation. Stone's suspicion that his project is ultimately doomed is thus well warranted, though his own mortality has little to do with it.

I would argue that the City of the World meets its absolute representational limit at the real itself, not because it makes no reference to the real, but precisely because it attempts to signify it. Stone's life, through its active happening that remains beyond signification, is consequently the great Work, the doing that has no other which could possibly bring it within a representational fold. If the City of the World is Stone's life's work, then it is also the work of

his life. To imagine that his model could be anything but a failure would necessarily involve the specious supposition that there are at least *two* real worlds, since the model itself would need to overcome the limits of representation and become a world in its own right, identical with the first. And what then would be the difference between the two? What sense would it make to say that there were two worlds and not one when both become figures of the same? Clearly, the insistence upon a single, open, self-ramifying world, the very non-representational world to which Stone refers when he recognizes his life and death as a singular, unique event, ultimately invalidates the Baudrillardian hyperreal. As Deleuze and Guattari maintain, however, “It may be that believing in this world, in this life, becomes our most difficult task, or the task of a mode of existence still to be discovered on our plane of immanence today” (*What Is Philosophy?* 75). Perhaps, in a sense, Stone is right all along: perhaps our belief in this world and in our own lives is something to be wagered on, a great chance to be taken, since it is anything but given and remains ours to invent.

If the City of the World stands at the centre of the novel’s investigation of the relation between fate and chance, determinism and freedom, it is because the world outside the model begins to mirror that depicted within after Nashe and Pozzi lose all of their disposable capital in the poker game: the ontological status of the real world in which they live is thrown into question when that world begins to resemble Stone’s microcosm. Auster does nothing less than ask, where and how does the world foreclose our efforts to represent it? Or, more pointedly, is the world properly representational? Desperate to pay off their gambling debts, Nashe and Pozzi agree to work as manual labourers for Flower and Stone, working to erect a massive wall while taking up residence in the millionaires’ meadow. Woods notes that “the ideologies that are theorized and conceptualized in the model are reproduced practically in the meadow” (152):

where in the model a “threat of punishment seemed to hang in the air” (Auster 96), an “atmosphere of suspicion and mistrust continued to hover around the [meadow]” (125). And while the miniature prisoners in the City of the World work “happily at various tasks... because they’re glad they’ve been punished for their crimes” (80), Nashe responds similarly to his own predicament, rationalizing that “he had brought this problem down on himself, and now he would have to take his medicine” (106). Indeed, after enduring over two months in the meadow, Nashe has trouble authenticating his own experience, as if the City of the World’s representation of reality catches up with that reality, ultimately overwhelming and subsuming it: “Sometimes, powerless to stop himself, [Nashe] even went so far as to imagine that he was already living inside the model” (178). From the basis of his ideological critique, Woods concurs with this reading, arguing that “constructing the physical wall becomes a reconstruction of the model of the City of the World” (153). If Woods is correct, and the isomorphic relation between the City of the World and an external reality is maintained at the level of ideology, then this relation is made possible only through a pragmatics of interpretation that disregards becoming. That is, only by *interpreting* his own experience, by resolving it into abstract terms, can Nashe compare and confuse the life he leads with anything depicted in the model. *The Music of Chance* offers a way out of this interpretive dead-end, however, this repetition of the same and triumph of the model, by appealing to a temporally-informed subjectivity, a sensate body in time.

In fact, it’s in the work on the wall itself that we can find Auster’s attention to a becoming that frustrates the overdetermination of the model. When the work finally begins, we’re told, “the world suddenly changed again” (129):

As Nashe and Pozzi discovered, it was one thing to lift a sixty-pound stone, but once that stone had been lifted, it was quite another thing to lift a second sixty-pound stone, and

still another thing to take on a third stone after lifting the second. No matter how strong they felt while lifting the first, much of that strength would be gone by the time they came to the second, and once they had lifted the second, there would be still less of that strength to call upon for the third. So it went. Every time they worked on the wall, Nashe and Pozzi came up against the same bewitching conundrum: all the stones were identical, and yet each stone was heavier than the one before it. (129)

There are two distinct, coexistent paradigms contributing to this paradox of the stones, one involving a logic of equivalence, the other a logic of irreducible difference. The first paradigm attempts to evaluate the stones from a position of pure objectivity, as if any stone could be exchanged for any other without effect, since their *value* is fixed and abstract. They are the objects of a representational discourse that appreciates them as units of measurement, interchangeable and equivalent in principle, because there exists no difference between stones one and two, between stones two and three: each is determined as simply another instance of a sixty-pound stone. What's more, all of the stones are evaluated simultaneously. But in the second paradigm, the problem of becoming is introduced, and with it, the affective capacities of bodies in time. Nashe and Pozzi encounter each stone as a singular event, not as an abstract quantity determined in isolation from other bodies, but as a unique intensity *between* bodies, as an intensity proper to an encounter that shifts through time. It's crucial to notice that it is not the stones themselves that are repeated over and over again, in a series of identical instances of the Same: every stone is different from the next, precisely because we are not concerned with the stones themselves but with their affective relations to other bodies, with what they might become in an encounter. A *difference itself* is repeated when every stone is considered from the perspective of an event between and among bodies whose affective capacities are in ceaseless

flux. Each time a stone is lifted, new intensional forces particular to the moment in question interact, giving rise to a new expressive effect of the world. Hence, this labour, too, becomes an extension of the co-implicated relationship between Nashe and Pozzi insofar as it revolves around difference. We should say, then, that far from being merely a reconstruction of the City of the World, Nashe's and Pozzi's work on the wall is replete with that very intensity of the real which Stone's model could not represent, with that "outside" antithetical to models *in toto*.

Wherever we find this difference in itself, we find chance also, not as that which is strictly opposed to determinism or the passive effect of interacting forces, but as the operation of the singularity. Auster's novel presents its most extensive and explicit meditation on the nature of chance when, after a day's work in the meadow, Nashe and Pozzi reflect upon their loss in the poker game. Pozzi's defeat leaves him incredulous; he was in a perfect position to wrap up a win when Flower and Stone turned the tables. And he tries to explain to Nashe the feeling he gets when things are going his way:

Once your luck starts to roll, there's not a damn thing that can stop it. It's like the whole world suddenly falls into place. You're kind of outside your body, and for the rest of the night you sit there watching yourself perform miracles. It doesn't really have anything to do with you anymore. It's out of your control, and as long as you don't think about it too much, you can't make a mistake. (136-37)

Pozzi's experience is described in curiously schizoid terms, as if the self fractures at the very moment a transcendental order is established, thus reiterating Deleuze's description of a subjective "cracking" at the surface. "Philosophy and schizophrenia have often been associated with each other," Deleuze and Guattari write in *What Is Philosophy?* (70); what rises to the surface is the operation of "a great maniac, someone frenzied, who is in search of that which

precedes thought, an Already-there, but at the very heart of thought itself” (70). Pozzi, we find, becomes expressive of an immanent force. What he experiences as a bifurcation into a disembodied gaze and an automaton form is inseparable from a *world* that finds its perfected expression. Before this occurs, we can only suppose that the world is in a state of disorder, or at least a lower level of intensity. But when it rises to its optimum state, the self becomes a desubjectified operation. Pozzi is without a proper place, without a stable form. He can only merge with the happening of what occurs by splitting apart at his own surface, by occupying two uneven halves of a multiplicitous subjectivity opened to the world. His final, paradoxical claim, that this state of affairs is simultaneously beyond one’s control yet dependent upon one’s actions, cuts to the heart of the matter. The desubjectified operation short circuits the binary distinction between doing and not-doing, between agential responsibility and pure passivity. It brings the event into being as a process of individuation that dismantles personal identity.

We should think to find Pozzi’s experience rife with a chance commensurate with the aesthetics of the encounter I described earlier, but it isn’t quite so. His description of his string of good luck is couched within an accusation against Nashe for having disturbed “the rhythm” of the event by leaving the poker table during the game, visiting Stone’s City of the World, and whimsically pocketing the miniature figures of Flower and Stone (137): “You were a part of it.... We had everything in harmony. We’d come to the point where everything was turning into music for us, and then you have to go upstairs and smash all the instruments. You tampered with the universe, my friend, and once a man does that, he’s got to pay the price” (138). The music of chance appears to occasion the fortuitous event, as though its chords strike only when things go well. Not only does Pozzi argue that Nashe contributed to his good play by simply being present, “breathing life” and “good luck” into him, but he ties his unshakable belief in the

interconnection of all things, with “everything balanced...[and] all the wheels [...] turning,” to a *predicted and particular result* (138). He abandons what Deleuze refers to as the ideal game, in which “there is nothing but victories for those who know how to play, that is, how to affirm and ramify chance, instead of dividing it *in order to* dominate it, *in order to* wager, *in order to* win” (*Logic of Sense* 60). Pozzi, we could say, relinquishes his membership in the International Brotherhood of Lost Dogs the moment he accuses Nashe of wrongdoing, thus becoming a figure of *ressentiment* who maligns what actually occurs instead of merging with it, ramifying it, becoming, in effect, nothing more or less than its embodiment and operator. In his accusation itself lurks an abandonment of the surface he claims to have expressed, since his play does not affirm difference itself, or the mobilizing of a *something else*. Essentially, he fails to affirm chance sufficiently by insisting that the world missed its golden opportunity. He plays to win, shrinking from that wild and inventive play that mobilizes and expresses play itself. Instead of becoming himself an *openness* to being otherwise, he obstinately holds that things *should have been* otherwise.

Nashe tries to be faithful to the Brotherhood when he rebukes Pozzi, telling him that “You want to believe in some hidden purpose. You’re trying to persuade yourself there’s a reason for what happens in the world. I don’t care what you call it—God or luck or harmony—it all comes down to the same bullshit. It’s a way of avoiding the facts, of refusing to look at how things really work” (139). However, Woods points out in response to this passage that “Nashe reinscribes a narrative by also claiming an epistemological high ground, as he argues that his perception is clearer, less prone to distortion and that he gets to the root of things by looking ‘at how things really work.’ His cognitive action is purer, more forthright, and more veracious” (156). The only way out of this tortuous bind, whereby Nashe’s postmodern denial of a grand

narrative morphs at once into a narrative in its own right, is to adopt for an aesthetics of the encounter that is not so much an articulable position as it is an active transformation within and of the real. It is a lived and emergent process, not a product. After Nashe sets the wooden replicas of Flower and Stone alight, hoping to divest them of their talismanic powers for Pozzi, he proclaims cryptically, “You see? There’s nothing to it. Once you know the magic formula, no obstacle is too great” (141). If Nashe is only demonstrating a belief “that everything can be rationalized,” as Woods maintains, then he too forsakes the properly active chance I have been outlining (156). On the other hand, if by burning the figures Nashe becomes expressive of something caught mid-way between a creation and a destruction, “a process without a fully determinate agent or product (an open-ended *subjectification*)” (Massumi, “Like a Thought” xxviii), then he is immersed within the event as its surface effect. To Pozzi’s charge that “You’re out of your mind,” Nashe responds, “If I am, then that makes two of us, my friend.... I’m with you every step of the way, Jack. Every damned step, right to the end of the road” (141). A literal reading of this sets us spinning into the aleatoric event. For all of Nashe’s pragmatic prudence, he appears to embrace the very schizoid experience Pozzi described earlier, leaving his mind where Pozzi left his body, only here, it takes the form of an encounter *between* two individuals. Nashe and Pozzi become different from each other only by becoming different from themselves, by opening up a germinative, schizoid surface from within, and thus sharing in the fractal profusion of difference itself. That is, in the properly chance-like encounter, each experiences himself as an operation of the in-between, but only by belonging to a becoming that is itself between the two, that operates as a pure resonance or communication of difference itself.

Auster’s novel presents a challenge to its audience to develop a concept of chance sufficiently versatile and complex to accommodate its rich presentation of the problematics of

subjectivity, becoming, temporality, and representation. I have tried to confine my study to the relation between chance and each of these issues, though by no means is this work comprehensive. Again, as with DeLillo's *Cosmopolis*, *The Music of Chance* reserves its most penetrating examination of this constellation of problems for the event of dying, the stark limit experience that gives shape to subjectivity just as it engenders its dissolution. In my final chapter, I will consider the conclusion of Auster's novel to pick up this investigation, where the story of Nashe ends where it began, in the driver's seat of his car, with everything changed in the interim.

Chapter Four

“Fugitive Energies”: Invention and an Aesthetics of the Mime in Edmund White’s *Forgetting Elena*

A gesture, unless lyrically sustained, is but a drawing in space.... A gesture is not sufficient; it needs to be clothed in a thought.

—Marcel Marceau

This mime, I believe, has not the feeling of pantomime, nor of a school, nor of a fixed aesthetics. It strives to be purely animal: The face becomes a natural mask.

—Jean-Louis Barrault

We play people, elements, animals, plants, trees, colors, lights, matter, sounds—going beyond their images, gaining knowledge of their space, their rhythm, their breath through improvisation.

—Jacques Lecoq

When asked in 1994 to give an interview for an issue of *Review of Contemporary Fiction* dedicated in part to his work, Edmund White decided instead to interview himself. The piece proceeds conventionally, question followed by answer, and despite its provocative title, “Edmund White Speaks with Edmund White,” it appears more informative than it does performative. Edmund White, the interviewer, does little more than pose short, simple, even predictable questions concerning Edmund White’s, the author’s, relation to his written work. Likewise, Edmund White, the interviewee, sticks more or less to the general spirit of the questions, preserving the conventions endemic to the genre. We learn about his early unpublished novels, the different approaches he takes when writing fiction and biography, and his feelings about being “neither an American nor a European but an American expatriate in Paris,” a distinction he’s proud to share with Stein and Hemingway, among others (20).

Nevertheless, what seems on its surface a perfectly ordinary interview belies a more tortuous literary production, not least because, of course, it happens to represent a dialogue

between two personae, both of whom stake a claim to the identity of Edmund White. The interview dramatizes the creation of characters, leaving the reader to suppose, perhaps, that a spectral, supra-Edmund White, a man behind the curtain, orchestrates the interaction of the talking heads. Near the end of the piece, for example, we're offered this exchange:

Q: Finally, how has living in Europe affected your work?

A: I suppose you mean have I lost touch with my roots? Have I been cut off from the vitality of New York? Have I lost contact with the evolution of English?

Q: Well, not exactly...

A: But exactly enough, I see. (20)

The problem here, it would seem, is that the assumption of a controlling, authoritative, and writerly Edmund White working behind the scenes of the "interview" remains purely conjectural, and not merely because we as readers are limited to the survey of textual documents and have no access to this supposedly original source. The piece reveals, instead, a dialogical dynamic at the heart of subjectivity itself: Edmund White fractures into the contrapuntal call-and-response procedure particular to the interview. If he is a figure at all, it is one that assumes the form and function of a dialogue, a conversation between two independent and interactive agents. He becomes, in other words, the figure of an emergent process, as both the "I" of the interviewer and the "I" of the interviewee arise out of a relation or performative function that hovers between the two, sending "himselves" along their various paths, that gives them the power or potential to develop as expressions. The M.L.A. might be scratching its collective head for some time, dreaming up a way to document such a text: an interview? a fiction? a poem?, conducted or written by whom? "Edmund White."

All of which is only compounded by an intriguing claim White makes concerning the writing of his first published novel, *Forgetting Elena*:

I felt as though possessed. There was a certain hum that would be generated by the book when I was writing well; I'd stop working the instant that hum snapped off. People assume I must have been on acid while writing *Elena*, but in fact up to that point the most I'd ever "done" was grass. Yet it was as though I were stoned or entranced. I remember thinking I wasn't fully aware of all the implications of my book but that didn't matter so long as I mastered the tone or rather obeyed it. (16)

This sense of being possessed or populated by a force or identity not quite one's own resonates well with the hallucinatory quality of the novel about an unnamed and selectively amnesiac narrator who finds himself an inhabitant of an island society governed absolutely by codes of conduct which remain inscrutable and amorphous. But White's suggestion that he submitted to the vicissitudes of the book itself during its composition elaborates further the strange set of circumstances attending our reading of his involuted, self-reflexive interview. At the crux of this suggestion is the problem of agency. In a single turn of phrase, for instance, White moves from authorial master of the text to its loyal servant. The *tone* of the novel exerts a force of its own over the composition of the work, preparing a matrix of tonal possibilities to which White, as novelist, must enter and fulfill. Complete mastery of the book's significations is simply discarded, rendered irrelevant. White enters into the play of a curiously self-generative writing, as though he were entranced, and becomes both creator of and conduit for a tonal register that remains somehow in a relationship of exteriority to himself. The novel's tone, as he reports it, represents a kind of virtual potentiality that assembles a set of power relations within which White comes to occupy an ambiguous position. And tone, I would suggest, cannot be located in

the particular words that comprise a text, even though it requires these in order to emerge, but exists rather in-between the words or hovering above and around them. Tone is what words do to each other, the emission of a style from their interaction. In the activity of writing, then, White becomes a figure emblematic of the event: he writes in such a way that both he and the novel itself he creates enter into a relation of chaotic and generative cross-interference, each subsisting as a force external to the other, yet linking up to find their expression through an interactive autogenesis.

It's little wonder that White cites the problematics of invention, of what constitutes the creative act and how it might be precipitated, as central to his experience during the writing of *Forgetting Elena*, since the novel, too, takes these issues as part of its focus. *Forgetting Elena*, described by one commentator in a *New York Times* Book Review as a "detective story...., the tale of a sleuth who strives to detect the mystery of the self" (Friedman), puts its nameless protagonist at the heart of this mysterious invention. Once again, as with *Cosmopolis* and *The Music of Chance*, it is subjectivity itself that must be explored, searched for, and experimented with. The novel's forgetful narrator attempts to piece together the various clues he finds in the behaviour of his fellow inhabitants on the island that might reveal to him his own identity, but in the process of determining *how* he is supposed to act and what attitudes or inclinations befit his character, he must *assemble* this identity by testing it amid the unspoken codes of the society. He becomes someone else in trying to discover who he is. Thus, *Forgetting Elena* rehearses White's comments about the controlled and controlling tone of the novel through its portrayal of subjectivity as something that both "precedes" one's articulation, that remains something to be discovered or revealed, and yet requires active construction as a work under continual progress and transformation.

It appears that the first-person narrator of *Forgetting Elena* does nothing less than dramatize a kind of aesthetics of the mime, paying witness to a (potential) performativity in everything he sees and couching this same performativity in everything he does. Being partially ignorant of the social mores governing all activities, whether using the bathroom, washing dishes, or having sex, the narrator acts *as though* what he does happens naturally and of its own accord. It is a self-consciousness designed to appear as its opposite, an acting out of not-acting. Castiglione might have called this *sprezzatura*. But there's a complication here: if the Prince does not know what is expected of him, fearing as he does a misstep at every turn, then he must embark on an elaborate experimentation with his own behaviour, effectively testing the limits of what his society deems acceptable or desirable. I aim to flesh out the implications that such a dynamic holds for this narrator's subjectivity, and to this end, Deleuze's concept of counter-actualization, developed in *Logic of Sense*, will prove helpful. He writes, using the trope of acting to make his point:

the actor maintains himself in the instant in order to act out something perpetually anticipated and delayed, hoped for and recalled. The role played is never that of a character; it is a theme (the complex theme or sense) constituted by the components of the event, that is, by the communicating singularities effectively liberated from the limits of individuals and persons. The actor strains his entire personality in a moment which is always further divisible in order to open himself up to the impersonal and pre-individual role.... Thus, the actor delimits the original, disengages from it an abstract line, and keeps from the event only its contour and its splendor, becoming thereby the actor of one's own events—a *counter-actualization*. (150)

The crucial point in Deleuze's account of the counter-actualization is to locate our understanding of subjectivities under construction from the perspective of a present without any tangible duration. It becomes impossible, from this perspective, to assign particular attributes to a character as we would normally, saying, for example, that this character is shrewd or that character is naïve, since these determinations are themselves made after the fact, from a perspective that objectifies the performance. Instead, from within the actor's present, the subject retains only the transformative movement between a vast constellation of affective registers or intensional points that direct this movement without being confused with it. For the actor is not the character, nor even is there something definable as a character from within the actor's performance. The counter-actualization renders obsolete the categories of the subject and its dramaturgical analogue, the character, leaving in their place the activity of a mobile subjectivity constituted by a processual and expansive series of affects. Deleuze offers a helpful way to situate this problematic when he writes, "'To green' indicates a singularity-event in the vicinity of which the tree is constituted" (*Logic of Sense* 112). Like Deleuze's tree, whose constitution is predicated on the singularity-event of the infinitive power, "to green," and is itself thus an effect of that power, a subjectivity seen through the eyes of the counter-actualization is a contraction and passing through of innumerable, incorporeal capacities. The actor is a flash point opened up where these potentials take on a body, but that do so only on the condition of overspilling that body with a surplus energy that is embodied as a potential for further connective activity: a becoming-immanent, becoming-other. Consequently, the things that an actor represents are never fully present, and yet are stitched together in a kind of affective patchwork in the actor's mobile but empty place, and thus constitute the trajectory, the "contour" and "splendor" of a subjectivity made eventful.

The narrator of White's novel, whom we will later learn to be a member of his society's royal family—the Prince—begins and ends the novel in the midst of the same existential crisis, having no idea who he is. This lack of self-awareness serves as the springboard for his investigation of a subjectivity exercised (and insofar as a fully-formed subject is concerned, perhaps exorcised) through performativity. Early on, for example, he relates his experience before his reflection, the first description of his own physiognomy:

I run into the bathroom to comb my hair, and see in the mirror a friendly face, deep lines around my eyes and on either side of my mouth. I smile, and realize that the lines have come from frequent smiling; yes, a friendly, disarming person, no furrows in the forehead, not used to frowning. How old? Late twenties if poorly preserved, early thirties if well. Not handsome but not ugly (I think; perhaps these large nostrils, downturned eyebrows and small chin are considered hideous). My head starts bobbing. A short jerk every few moments, like a curt nod. My neck becomes so tight that I half fear my head will lose its mobility. Nodding reassures me I still have control over it. (31)

It's not the last time he will survey the reflection of his face with surprise; at one point, having thoroughly, if only momentarily, forgotten what he looks like, he actually mistakes the approach of another person for the growing image of himself in a mirror (122). But we can note here a few characteristics particular to his subjectivity and, more specifically, a subjectivity resonant with Deleuze's counter-actualization. The first thing he sees is *a* face, a friendly face. It's the logical function of the indefinite article to delimit an original, *his* face, *the* face that is his, and make of it a phenomenon floating free of the possessive voice and the definitive subject that voice implies. It makes of the face an effect with which one may identify, but only with a difference, a distance. This difference is precisely the movement between subject and object

positions, not as confirmation of their eternal dualism, but of the *relation itself* between the two positions which is not proper or internal to either of them. That is, he identifies with his own face, but only insofar as that face remains simultaneously in a relationship of exteriority to him. His face can only be his when it's also a face of the world's, an operation of the real that he merges with through an irreducible difference, a force for becoming-other. Of course, the narrator immediately refers to his features in the possessive voice, restoring the subject to its place of power. It may be that the subject is itself a linguistic construct, a grammatical effect of the possessive voice. No sooner does the narrator make this move, however, than he shifts to consider not his face but the person, *a* person, more precisely, that his face suggests: a friendly, disarming fellow. The subject is thus supplanted by an impersonal subjectivity with a range of determinate affects, the process by which this subjectivity is revealed being not one at all of direct self-awareness, but one of inference given the traces available at the level of the surface effect. The Prince does apparently have some concept of time and its concatenate effects on a body that ages. But his aesthetic appreciation of that body remains uncertain, held somewhere between his own middling evaluation and an indecipherable evaluative standard that overrides any determination he might make, a social standard or code bereft of specificity and whose existence he can only suppose. All interpretation, or the lending of value to his face, is, as it were, a mug's game.

The complex process of the counter-actualization does not culminate, however, until the closing lines of the passage when the narrator's head begins to bob. We should note, for starters, that all of this takes place in the present tense, that nearly the entire novel, in fact, unfolds in the middle of an active present, the temporal scene proper to Deleuze's actor-mime. His head starts bobbing, his body seized by a movement or force not quite his own, that is, one not initiated by

anything resembling a will. This movement is then brought into focus and detailed. It resembles a nod, but is not synonymous with one. Next, the narrator experiences a tightening of his musculature that threatens to completely immobilize him. He then begins to nod, an act that may involve his will, confirming for himself that he still has control over his head: the apparent return of the subject to its position of authority and safety, but not without having undergone a curious transformation.

The scene in its entirety is a remarkable instance of a counter-actualization. From the bobbing of the head, to its rough approximation as a nod, to the stiffening of the neck, to the presumed assumption of an active agency, the narrator's subjectivity shifts between a number of registers. The two middle stages of the process are especially germane to the counter-actualization of Deleuze's actor-mime. Everything starts, of course, with the immanent movement of the bobbing head, which seizes the narrator's body and threatens his sense of self and need for control. When he describes this movement, he brings it within the purview of a socially determined array of signs, but not without a transformation. A line is drawn between his bodily state of affairs and what can be said about it, and everything changes along this fissure. He renders his bobbing head under the likeness of a nod, a physical movement that is, perhaps, no different from a bob save for the incorporeal difference that attends its very expression. More precisely, the expression "*like* a nod" implies the mutual and singular differences lurking at the heart of both bob *and* nod; it affirms, and in its articulation, *creates* difference from both sides of a movement divided between bodies and their accompanying sense-events. Effects of language are thus brought to bear on the potentials of things themselves. Instead of *resembling* the bob at the level of appearance, the nod constitutes a shift in the very potential of the movement itself. The transformation of a force aligned with bodies in depth, then, cannot be accomplished without

passing through two connected stages. First, this force must be *transformed* through a difference that may amount to nothing more than its articulation in other terms, signifying the adoption of an *open* perspective within which bob and nod resonate through their communicating differentiation. This marks the event of thinking itself, an event that is there to begin with in the fecund potentiality of the bob: the bob is not an originary terminus wholly unrelated to its potential to become a nod. Second, and as an extension of this transformation, the body is wracked with an affective surge. In all, there are two stages of movement, bob and nod, separated and taken up by an operation of language (which is also, always, essentially and crucially transformative) and the narrator's physical inertia. The language- or sense-event here has an ossifying corporeal effect, as if on the way to becoming socially recognizable and laden with meaning, the body must be temporarily frozen, shored up. The transformation acts on the body but is not *of* the body—it is an incorporeal, surface effect of sense playing itself out along and bringing life to the narrator's physical form.

Interestingly, what exactly reassures the Prince is left unanswered. On one hand, his provisional mastery of the body, affirming his status as a controlling subject, is not clearly *willed*. It is a nod, after all, that installs his sense of self, a social sign whose *meaning as an affirmation* may be responsible for the production of the subject. In taking on the status of a subject, the Prince may be, it is slyly suggested, nothing more than a kind of looping effect of the social sign system, of signs in communication with themselves that produce a *sensation* of control through the process of recognition, a sensation created and sanctioned by a social code and not by anything resembling an autonomous agent. Is it his willing of the nod or its semiotic signification that reassures? On the other hand, and perhaps more importantly, it seems as though the Prince has not changed the movement of his head that began with a bob. He has

resumed the very same movement with which the process began, but now under the sign of a different power. Between bob and nod there need not be any physical difference, but a change in what the physical movement is capable of doing and producing, a change in its potential. It is in this sense that the counter-actualization need not involve any appeal to an agential subject. Instead it configures subjectivity as an operation, a shifting of potentials that reorganizes the expressive range of the event. The narrator has “become the mime of *what effectively occurs*, [doubling] the actualization with a counter-actualization” (*Logic of Sense* 161), as Deleuze says, identifying with a process but not without the inclusion of a difference. He’s back where he started but everything has changed, enacting “a sort of leaping in place (*saut sur place*) of the whole body which exchanges its organic will for a spiritual will” (*Logic of Sense* 149). Brian Massumi captures this dynamic well when he writes that “Autonomic responses [can be] counteractualized as *autonomous*. This increase in the body’s degrees of freedom is called ‘imagination.’ Imagination is rational thought brought back to the body” (*User’s Guide* 100). We might say, finally, that the narrator quite literally goes through his own motions, never identifying with them completely, but attending them through an operational distance within subjectivity itself, and thus becomes “the offspring of [his] own events” (*Logic of Sense* 150). From the bob to the nod, the narrator has brought to the surface the counter-actualization of the actor-mime.

Not surprisingly, *Forgetting Elena* develops a complex account of sensation for its narrator. For all his attentiveness to the surface of the phenomenal world, he is far from being bereft of affect. In fact, sensation becomes one of the ways in which he probes the problem of his identity, to search out who (or what) he is. As a member of the “Detached Residence,” a fraternal coterie that whiles away its time reading from copies of the same book outlining the

“metaetiquette” of the island (167), primping and preening themselves in preparation for nights of socializing, or dancing at the hotel, the narrator quickly surmises that one individual, Herbert, “unmistakably rules the cottage”: “he, more than any of the other men in the cottage, has mastered the casual, permissive air” that hangs over all social interaction (5). And despite Herbert’s assertion that “everyone follows his own impulse and, amazingly, the house runs along all by itself” (5), he gives the narrator the task of clearing a grove of its pine needles. It is during this exercise that the narrator muses on the nature of sensation and its relation to his identity:

If I were blind and beginning consciousness this instant, would I be able to start from these few points of sensation and sketch in a fully accurate picture of my body? Since I feel nothing below my shoulders and above the slight cinching of my drawstring, would I imagine that I came in two separate sections, one floating above the other on a cushion of air? Ah, but now a drop of sweat courses from my armpit down my side, drawing a connecting line. Yet, if I stood absolutely still and didn’t flex my solar plexus or chest or bend my arms, I might still labor under the delusion that the perspiration marked only a thin stream of flesh growing between the upper and lower decks of my body; similarly, I might believe that my rake-holding hand was an appendage not of my shoulder but of my waist. (32-3)

Although the Prince suggests that the sense of touch provides misleading evidence in the sketching of a “picture” of his body, a picture corrected by his sense of sight, we should pause to consider the problem raised here; namely, implicit in this suggestion is the experience of the self as a multiplicity, an assemblage of qualitatively different experiences of the body.

The body itself is composed of affective registers that do not cohere. Sight and touch do not so much oppose as they do complement each other, giving rise to a complementarity that is

not harmonious but dissonant, dissociative. Another term, then, for the multiplicity of subjectivity: dissociative complementarity. The passage's rich treatment of the narrator's tactile experience, meanwhile, only ramifies this multiplicity. Sketching an accurate picture of the body, or fixing it once and for all, knowing and representing it, may well prove impossible since that picture is actively developed in the present *as* a sketching. Thus, he starts with two "sections" of the body, two separate zones of affectivity between which there is an insensate void. The body revealed through the sensation attending his falling sweat is thoroughly constructivist and belongs, once again, to an unfolding present. The eventful nature of the narrator's subjectivity lies in precisely this: that the body is equally an effect of sensation itself as sensation is an effect of the body. In *What is Philosophy?*, Deleuze and Guattari write that "In the first case *sensation is realized in the material* and does not exist outside this realization.... [and] in the second case it is no longer sensation that is realized in the material *but the material that passes into sensation*" (193). Likewise, for White's protagonist, his drop of sweat and the sensation it produces do not *traverse* a flesh that awaits its sensate awakening, but actively *produce* it as an organic growth. Flesh and sensation arise in a reciprocal autogenesis. It were as though sensation itself functions as an incorporeal dimension between the sweat and the skin, thus mapping out an expressive relation between inside and outside. When Deleuze maintains that "'the deepest is the skin'" and that "The skin has at its disposal a vital and properly superficial potential energy" (*Logic of Sense* 103), we must take him to mean that everything occurs at the surface of an unfolding event, never collapsing into bodies as if they were a ground, but riding along the relations between bodies and releasing their expressive affects. The surface effect is the modality proper to subjectivity, not only because the body traces an intensional line between itself and the "outside" world, but because the body and its sensations emerge in a way

that prevents the subject from adopting a fixed perspective. The surface effect, despite its literal meaning, is neither a place nor a thing. It's a happening in and of the present, a name given to the unfolding, compositional interaction of potentialities. We must become, again, the progeny of our own events. The line of sensation traced by the narrator's bead of sweat connects his affective zones, and in the process it throws those zones into new territories of possibility, ones that must be lived, unthinkable and never before dreamed of.

The searching out of new territories of possibility is, in fact, part of the declared purpose of the island society in *Forgetting Elena*. Having undergone a revolution of sorts, replacing an "Old Code" of social hierarchy and judgement with a purportedly egalitarian "New Code" aimed at leveling all distinctions of status, the community becomes "mad for novelty" (72). Much of the novel's farcicality springs from this zeal. As the title character, Elena, notes in her memoir, under the New Code, the island's inhabitants display a struggle "waged between candor and the desire to appear original and complex and elusive: *not quite human*" (76). The narrator echoes this observation later in the novel, claiming that he and "Herbert's islanders can't accept the paucity of the possible emotions. They're always trying to work up some exquisitely novel shade of feeling in themselves; they want to appear *not quite human*" (171). Elena's position with respect to subjectivity is worth considering in this context:

We all know that human emotions are banal, that only a handful of motives exist (lust and greed and particularly vanity); and even fewer sentiments—notably love, fear and hate—which form, at that, an extremely unstable triad in which any element may transmute in an instant into any other. But the islanders are not reconciled to this parsimony of human nature. They crave a whole host of new sensations and reflexes. As soon as one of my new friends would grow truly passionate in the expression of an

enthusiasm or antipathy, he'd suddenly remember to be—not more discreet, but more puzzling. (76)

Examining a few key elements in Elena's description here should open up the larger interests of the novel as a whole. For instance, an entire machinery of classification underlies her position. In identifying the few motives and sentiments available to the human, she has supposed that both motive and sentiment constitute stable, unified categories that can be broken down into particular sub-species. Any possible sensation, then, is merely a representation of a type, an instance of a genus. She isolates motive and sentiment from a larger field of becoming in order to tame them, and then reprimands the islanders for not doing the same. Hers is a perspective that sees only repetition of the same in everything that happens, as if all things, all processes, were definable *in principle* with reference to only a few primary and constituent parts. She turns sentiments into determinable things instead of events, becomings. We should note that she admits an absolute distinction between the true and the false, the truly passionate expression, in this case, and the affected, constructed appearance disconnected from an authentic truth. This is, in fact, the major philosophical problem that the novel raises, and it never finds its way out of the quagmire: it problematizes the distinction between the true or authentic, the "genuine article," and its supposed imposters. *Forgetting Elena* almost never lightens its paranoiac load, precisely because its characters incessantly categorize, always quick to suspect the authenticity of everything.

Ian Hacking sums up a similar methodology when he states that "the question 'Is it real?' is not of itself a clear one. The classic examination of the word 'real' is due to the doyen of ordinary language philosophers, J.L. Austin. As he insisted, you have to ask, "a real *what?*" (11) That is, Austin would have us begin with a set of definitions or criteria against which our

empirical observations must be measured in order to authenticate a thing. This in itself is no easy task, of course. But the entire purpose of such a question is grounded in a need to judge, to evaluate, to order and classify. It operates only at the level of things or nouns. This is why, for Elena, the truly passionate expression (the authentic, the real) must be *of* something, be it enthusiasm, antipathy, or anything else. All expression becomes an instance of either real feeling or it is dismissed as mere posturing. We should redefine the terms of the dispute here, since it appears to have less to do with an opposition between the true and the false, the real and the unreal, than between the spontaneous and the affected. Or perhaps it's even simpler, and what she derides is self-consciousness. At any rate, the spontaneous or true expression, for Elena, belongs to a realm that suspects contamination of the natural at every turn. The nature/culture divide could not be clearer. Having closed the book on what it means to be human, or what the human is capable of feeling, she sees affectation in puzzlement and complexity, as though the struggle to comprehend or express were not evidence of and a response toward a subjectivity's openness to something "not quite human."

But what could comprise this non-human quality? Contrary to what Elena maintains, the non-human, if it exists, cannot be located in whatever appearances the islanders consciously fabricate. Nor would it suffice to reverse her terms, and turn the loss of self-consciousness she so reveres into a non-human power. Both of these alternatives insist still that the non-human would be a *state* of the subject, that one might actually *be* not quite human, and thus both remain mired in the logic of categorization. Both, in other words, involve "a logical investigation of being leading to the closure of a solution" (Massumi, *User's Guide* 183). Instead, the non-human concerns not what one is, nor even what one is becoming, "since 'what' each [thing involved in an encounter] becomes changes no less than 'that which' becomes" (*Dialogues* 2). It

is a lived situation made real whenever two things enter into a relation that brings their disparate potentials into communication and thus sends each into a new territory of sensation. The only transmutation available to Elena occurs between static elements, love, fear, and hate, her “extremely unstable triad,” that ensures a perpetual becoming-the-same, whereas non-human becomings remain open-ended and singular. Accordingly, Elena claims that the islanders’ non-human becomings are nothing more than rational exercises completely devoid of sensation, a kind of robotic pantomime made to “*seem* august and never-before-felt” (italics added 77). She does not allow for thought and the action of the mime to return to the body through its transformational potential, mapping new territories for sensation, and fathoms nothing of the singularity. Even Elena’s method for commenting on the ways of the islanders is made redundant: she recites from a manuscript written at an earlier time. As the narrator notes, “She’s chained to that text, which was composed long ago, in solitude, for a different audience or, if for the same, one in a different mood. Why does she persist?” (72). Why indeed? Because she cannot countenance the haecceity, the event of becoming in the present, and thus rehearses an eternal repetition of the same. She treats the lived present as if it were the past.

The narrator, on the other hand, is onto something altogether different. He’s certainly not free from his own paranoiac episodes, but he manages often to move beyond them all the same. For example, after a lyrical detailing of a beachfront chiaroscuro, where “the light refuses to concentrate on any object,” he muses:

I feel there’s something familiar about these wastes of water, sand and sky. Nothing recollected or well known. Not familiar in that way. But similar. They resemble me, we’re all dispersed. I’m a carousel of possibilities turning on emptiness. But someone might say something to me. I might answer. My answer exists. One remark produces

another. Now we have something to go on. Statements to reconcile, consistency to maintain, inventions to elaborate. Features emerge, waves gather, a dune dries, crumbles and slides.... and the grit between my toes, like a man's five-o'clock shadow scraping a lady's cheek. (132-33)

To unpack the implications of this passage, we first need to distinguish between the repetition of fixed forms that Elena endorses and the peculiar operation of familiarity, similarity, and resemblance that the narrator puts in its place. He enters into a relationship with the landscape. But what allows for this relationship to exist is not a point of contact between subject and environment, as though some element were common to the two. No *thing* is shared since the resemblance that allows for interaction is itself a dispersion, a mode of composition.

The sympathy the narrator feels with the landscape is thus radically opposed to that which we find in Elena's account of the limited range of human feelings. We are no longer dealing so much with determinable feelings as we are with the ways in which sensation emerges as the effect of an interactive process. The narrator's first intuition is to suppose that, far from being a grounded and grounding subject, he is fundamentally of potential, a mobile constellation of possibilities that keeps him from being identical with what is effectively actualized. This is a vital discovery, vital in the sense that it releases something more from within whatever occurs and keeps the process of emergence open, charged with a potential energy. The emptiness upon which he turns, we see, is not a pure void—it is rather a condition of potentiality immanent within whatever is happening. Someone *might* say something, and this possibility reveals the narrator's belonging to a burgeoning field of expressivity, one made possible by his openness to being otherwise than he is. When he acknowledges the actualized reality of his own (hypothetical) response, it is only registered from the perspective of something more to come

that would extend that actualization and thus actively transform it. His is a subjectivity taken up by an unfolding made properly eventful because it springs from within the interactive in-between of a dialogue. Consistency, in this view, is a matter of processual invention, not of conformity between what has occurred in the past and what is still to come in the future. It is the work of an active constructivism.

But what is at the heart of the odd resemblance of sensation he notes between the sand at his feet and the stubble of a man's face on a woman's cheek? In his critique of Plato's debate with the sophists, Deleuze writes that "It is precisely because [Plato] cannot master [the huge dimensions, depths, and distances of the simulacrum] that he experiences an impression of resemblance.... In the reversal of Platonism, resemblance is said of internalized difference, and identity of the Different as primary power" (*Logic of Sense* 258, 262). In this reversal, resemblance concerns only the singularity. White's narrator describes a sensation embroiled in a logic of the simile, which is, of course, altogether different from a logic of the metaphor that proceeds by substitution without remainder. The simile internalizes difference on both sides of its comparison through that destabilizing conjunction, "like." It is not a matter of finding the direct correspondence between the two separated series that the simile connects, but of noting the irreducible singularity of sensation at the heart of the resemblance that mobilizes the entire operation and keeps it moving. There is a power of the "as if" buried within sensation that defies representation, but that also keeps representations in communication *as* resemblances. There is a becoming-organic of the sand, *like* a man's five o'clock shadow, a becoming-cheek of the toe, *as if* the parts of the body could be exchanged, and a becoming-woman of the narrator himself, whose subjectivity remains fluxional, submerged within a compound of sensation.

If all of these becomings conspire to keep the narrator from resolving his identity once and for all, the unstable cultural milieu of the island helps to do the same. The New Code has replaced the Old, but near the novel's close, a "New Order" appears in the works as a kind of compromise between the disparate factions: the society is caught within a playful paradigm shift. As Harry Mathews notes, under the New Code and Herbert's direction, "lesser codes of behaviour are unstable and perpetually redefined. There are always rules in play, but no one is sure what they are. Not only the amnesiac narrator struggles to decipher how to act in his beach house (amnesiac or not, he knows there *is* a code to decipher): his fellows also labor to improve their social styles" (35). It would be easy to miss the great paradox Mathews has identified in the island society's relation to codes of conduct. For if codes are themselves unstable and under constant modification as a result of the behaviour they're intended to police, if each and every act is itself a rewriting of the rules designed to govern all action, then the codes are invested with the same creative potential that we have seen in eventful becomings. From whence can there be a code *to decipher*, then, if the code is preeminently torsional or immanently creative from within an active present? It were as though the island community of *Forgetting Elena* contains elements of both immanence, and thus a series of codes whose constitution is itself inseparable from the articulation of those codes and of behaviour in general, and transcendence, whereby inhabitants intuit a code beyond all action that simply awaits its solution.

The narrator occupies both sides of this division at different times in the novel, as do the other characters. He will opine, in one revealing passage, that "every word or movement takes on overtones and produces ripples that work through the entire society, so every object must be wired to every other," only to add that "even the most innocent and insignificant thing, like a particular leaf of grass, may serve as a template for all natural and human configurations and

events, and if I could only pick out which leaf, ... then, magically, all else would fall into place” (55). Everything is interconnected, and yet there is this dream of finding the key that would crack the code, and thus admit mastery of the system in its entirety. Or, in other words, the narrator posits a pure interactivity immanent within the world *and* the possibility of a transcendental order that would lend structure to all events. The question he asks at the close of the fifth chapter, “Who am I?,” aligns roughly with this transcendental dimension, as if its answer would herald the arrival of the subject and thus ground what is essentially a “transpersonal agency” proper to subjectivity (Massumi, *User’s Guide* 33). We are faced with some old problems that show no sign of remitting. Namely, how could a single thing *within* the total field of events be effectively separated from that field by virtue of its ordering function without itself being *affected* and thus having its ordering function altered by the very process of interaction for which it claims to be a model? The paradox involves the intimate collusion of two distinct series, that of lived process and that of eternal truth. The novel does, however, point a way out of, or rather *into*, this paradox that concerns not a talismanic leaf that might unlock the secrets of the universe, but another exotic phenomenon, a subjectivity made eventful. And as Deleuze and Guattari say, this subjectivity turns upon the insight that “We are not in the world, we become with the world; we become by contemplating it” (*What is Philosophy* 169), whereas the narrator’s search for the world’s Rosetta Stone, and by extension for his own identity, necessarily implies a break within the becoming of the world, or in the concept of difference itself, that would allow for the concretion of a privileged position.

The issue comes to a head in what I take to be one of the turning points of the novel, when the narrator visits the island’s hotel for yet another night of socializing. But before he arrives, and on his way home to prepare for the evening, he is waylaid by Doris, matriarch of the

Old Code, and some of her associates. They're neighbours of the Detached Residence, and because they remain essentially isolated from the adherents to the New Code, albeit with a bird's-eye view of the Residence's bathroom, the narrator hopes that, as objective observers, they might shed some light on his own situation. He asks one individual known simply as "the Hand," "What constructions have you put upon your data?", and receives the inevitable reply, "Nothing conclusive of course" (100). The narrator's audience with Doris herself sets the stage for what will come at the hotel—he is the first character in the novel to bridge the divide between the New Code and the Old, remaining clearly a denizen of the Detached Residence and yet fraternizing with members of a rival faction. Doris speaks to their cultural rift when she comments, "But perhaps you think my whole style of address old-fashioned and tiresome," eliciting this response from the narrator:

"If you regard *old-fashioned* as a derogatory word, then I will forbid you the description, since"—I pause, thunderstruck, waiting to hear what words of mine will flow into the trench I've dug with that connective, that *since*—"since your style of address must remain, in my eyes, unexceptionable."

Doris and I breathe heavily as we eye each other across the arena where our words continue to posture and spin, mimes seized by the last spasms of their fugitive energy.

(108-09)

Here we can see the narrator's faithful representation of the New Code in his permissive attitude; he simply denies the implicit, judgmental freight of the word "old-fashioned" while leaving its specific meaning untouched. But something more interesting is at work, and it returns us to the question of style or tone. For what could it be to have an "unexceptionable" style of address?

It could mean, of course, that the style is not objectionable, nor exciting and novel: a veritable neutrality whose effect is pure indifference and apathy. Such a reading would be tantamount to admitting the perfect correspondence between styles, between speaker and listener, Doris and the narrator. Conversely, it could imply an *absolute* gulf between styles that would bar any communication. In any case, both readings involve an *affectless* encounter, not really an encounter at all, since either we're left with a repetition of the same or the pure lack of relationality. But within the "unexceptionable's" matrix of possibilities also lies the potential of the singularity, and I believe this is exactly what White's novel demonstrates. That is, more specifically, it may be that a style becomes unexceptionable because in its singular unfolding, and in another's eyes, it finds no home, no ready-made representation that would fix it. Deleuze writes, "I should like to say what a style is. It belongs to people of whom you normally say, 'They have no style'" (*Dialogues* 4). This notion of style remains alien to type or category since it is always involved in side-stepping the same as it makes new connections, always obliquely, and charts its own trajectories. We can see this in the passage precisely because something *does* happen between Doris and the narrator. Their interaction is not devoid of affect or transformation. *What* happens is nothing other than the rising to the surface, once again, of the counter-actualization. As the narrator pauses in mid-sentence, unsure of what might follow, he becomes "not... a stammerer in one's speech, but... a stammerer of language itself" (*Dialogues* 4). It is a pause distinct from his corporeal speech because in its midst he attends the connective powers of language itself. His spoken pause becomes the site of an incorporeal hesitation and stuttering, in a way strikingly reminiscent of White's own experience with regards to the tone of the novel: he is both creator and effect of a language that maintains itself in a relationship of exteriority. He *waits* to hear the words that he will only belatedly make his own by opening

himself up to a tensile present in which no identification is possible. Or in a word, he identifies with a present that prohibits all identification: a becoming-eventful, becoming the offspring of one's own events.

The degree to which the narrator becomes embroiled, then, in a language-event is only emphasized as he and Doris stand in a space created by the interactivity of their words, words themselves made into mimes because their resonating potentials, a "fugitive energy," pass through them or take them up without ever being made their equal. The interactive potential of words is what makes language possible. Interestingly, the site of language is an arena, a place of combat created by the relations between opponents. Deleuze writes in precisely this way with regards to the battle as "the Event in its essence": "the battle *hovers over* its own field, being neutral in relation to all of its temporal actualizations, neutral and impassive in relation to the victor and the vanquished, the coward and the brave.... Never present but always yet to come and already passed, the battle is graspable only by the will of anonymity which it itself inspires" (*Logic of Sense* 100). The language-event, likewise, is thoroughly in and of potential, in and of relations, such that it prepares the spaces into which one might move. Note the narrator's temporal ambiguity. He waits for the sound of his own words, opening up to both sides of a future-past. Just as he anticipates the arrival of his words, he stands on their other side, hearing them emerge: always yet to come and already passed. Everything arises out of the middle, within the productive gap of a pause and the potential of a connective, and it is this dynamic that marks a subjectivity made eventful.

The encounter with Doris, as I have suggested, prepares the way for one of the novel's most compelling episodes, the narrator's dance at the hotel, which deserves careful attention. Having been locked out of the Detached Residence, unable to prepare appropriately for the

evening, he arrives alongside Doris and her group, sporting a bathing suit and woman's robe. He has thrown caution to the wind, breaking all the standard codes of propriety. And when he begins to dance, it becomes clear that he does not so much belong to any particular faction, Old Code or New, under the auspices of either Doris or Herbert, as he depends on their relative formations to do something completely different that could only spring from between them. He dances with Billy, Herbert's young and loyal attendant, and two members of Doris's following, of whom he remarks, "I need their support, all the support I can get, but I don't want to be stuck with them. Nor do I want to return to [Doris's] 'circle'" (124). He relies on the relative contributions of group dynamics, on the play that these dynamics make possible, but only to free himself from a stultifying identification. He then rescues Doris's lackey, Jimmy, from his menial servitude, fetching his superiors their next drink, by recruiting him forcibly into the growing network of dancers. Doris and the Hand are "alarmed, insulted," presumably at this subversion of established power relations, but they do nothing to intervene (125). They realize that making a scene would only publicly expose their weakness derived of a need to observe hierarchical order. Power thus turns upon itself because a space has opened up in which new relations and affiliations, new assemblages, are in formation.

When the music stops, "Doris and the Hand, armed with some new strategy, are approaching, ready to suborn us into their 'circle,' or whatever it is" (125). Doris represents a wholly repressive force that is itself capable of modification, if only reacting to tame a movement which resists capture. Hers is a reactive operation, as opposed to an active one, a reproduction of the same, not because she never changes, but precisely because her changes always aim to create order in the image of what has already been instead of entering into a flux so as to ramify it. Accordingly, the narrator must improvise and invent a further deflection from

the status quo in order not to fall back into one of its staid formations. He leads Billy and two girls to the centre of the room, leaving Jimmy behind without an explanation. By temporarily adopting Jimmy, and thus destabilizing the power relations upon which Doris and her Old Code are predicated, the narrator has set everything in motion. He need not maintain a direct affiliation with Jimmy, that is, because Jimmy himself is not a person, as such, but rather a nodal point in a web of relations that has already been shifted. He has thus *used* relations of power to undermine them and unleash a becoming-revolution. He picks up one thing, drops it a moment later, and does whatever he can to ensure a perpetual transformation of the different. What he seizes, in fact, is not a thing at all, but the transformational potential that inheres in the relations between things. The Old Code and the New are put into flux in the creation of a line of flight that emerges from within their relation.

The conditions are ripe for the narrator's *coup de grace* that will turn the island culture on its ear. As a new song begins to play, "palace music" representing everything ordered, old, and hierarchical, Billy remarks, "It's not up-to-date,... [and] I find anything that's not up-to-date preposterous" (126). Another bystander concurs: "Oh, the old songs are all right, but not for dancing. At home, fine. I play this one on the guitar as a matter of course. But for dancing?" (126) The narrator announces, "I'll dance alone then," and notes that "For some reason all my fears have dropped away.... Great powers are surging through me.... Everyone in the room, or at least a face in every group, is familiar, has been propitiated" (126-27). He has within himself created a vast connectivity that is not totalizing, but that makes elements from sundry assemblages resonate amongst themselves such that none can be left unmoved, unchanged from his own actions. He is interconnected to all through purely finite relations. He puts into play relations upon relations. Billy's incredulous:

“You’ll do what!” Billy shouts.

“Dance,” I reply offhandedly. “Alone.”

“But you can’t do that!”

“No?” (127)

It is the only moment in the novel when an outright prohibition is declared. There is no threat of punishment, only Billy’s very clear understanding that something remains impossible: an unspoken rule, all the more ironclad because it is unspoken and thus functions as an unthinkable, forbids what is about to happen, and therefore the narrator’s dance will be at once a leaping beyond the rule and a redefining of its contours. It will create its own rule on its own trajectory. White then delivers this very suggestive passage: “Like water thundering off the surfacing dome of a bathyscope [*sic.*], the crowd drains away from me and forms a silent circle. The circle, imperfect as it is, I regard as charmed space, myself the geometer” (127). The circle that forms around the narrator is an effect of his rising to the surface, no longer submerged in the depths of things, but becoming utterly exposed, with nothing left to hide, and for this reason he enacts a becoming-imperceptible: the crowd drains away from him and he is nothing more than the operational reality of his relations, the geometer of an imperfect, skewed arrangement. And the surface, as I’ve argued before, is the site where effects interact, and is thus not really a site at all, but the eventful emergence of what effectively occurs. It is the immanent play of relations. There is nothing left to do but dance.

The dance, in some respect, would appear entirely conventional: it’s riddled with symbolic and representational gestures, as though the narrator were attempting to translate all his thoughts and feelings into a bodily language that might be communicated to his audience. The Hand is accused, Herbert is acknowledged, and Doris is edified. But there’s a complication here.

Since it proceeds by a series of obscure gestures that use the audience as its reference points, the dance does not limit itself to a body in isolation from the space around it. If it makes sense to say that the narrator is the dancer, then it is the circle itself that is danced. He asks himself, “Yes, indeed, what *do* I want? Order.... I am here now, a circle has been drawn, and I am *occupying the centre*” (128-29). He constitutes one of the dance’s privileged points, a pivotal one to be sure, but only by virtue of aligning himself in myriad ways with other privileged points, by putting into operation a mobile connectivity that makes of his movements a creation of space. The dance itself is an enlivening of the relations of the community as a whole, of their bodies in space and time and the cultural tensions that render people as intensional points.

Everything turns upon his sudden revelation:

How can fires break out, impropriety prosper once someone occupies the centre and makes motions of order?... But how to act out my admonitions to Doris? Ah! Of course. By not *acting* at all. Yes, for I’m not an *agent* of order, but its source. No need to mend my design when I am generating it from the centre. My usefulness to all the elements of the island... is not as exemplar. What I’m doing is far more generic. I occupy the centre. (129-30)

The narrator realizes that even though the dance begins and shifts through the use of representational movements, “motions of order” orchestrated by the interactive relations between the centre of an irregular circle and its circumferential points, he himself, *as* the centre, is not really a point at all, a thing or agent, but an operational intensity, a process of structuring as opposed to a structure. And he achieves this subjectless dynamism by paradoxically *acting out not-acting*. That is, he is neither acting nor not-acting in the sense of *performing* his own comportment, but identifies, instead, with a self-generating force that works through the

interaction, and thus the affective dynamism, of relations in and of themselves. He realizes that the creation of order, in this sense, is not a matter of intention or of directing actions with an eye toward their correspondence and continuity, but is simply the reality of becoming with the world: an immanent power of creativity that establishes its own consistency among effects. To be an exemplar of something is to still retain an external point of view, to maintain distinctions of subject and object, whereas the narrator's occupation of the centre implies here a decentering of subjectivity caught amid a fluxional field of interactivity. For *what* is the narrator generating if not a plane of consistence by simply becoming something that at once puts into operation a power to affect and to be affected? He creates the world by becoming with it, being neither subject nor object, but rather a generative happening or event, a vital process. One bystander will comment on the dance, "it's not my cup of tea but you've got to admit,... it's up-to-date—so up it's off the calendar" (130). It has managed to wrestle free from all representational thinking.

The narrator will reflect later that "When I danced at the hotel I suppose I was trying to reconcile irreconcilable energies" (142), as though a confluential plurality of forces were at play, making reconciliation impossible. Any order, in this light, is always a confrontation with chaos, the further elaboration of a singularity inclusive of difference and change itself. The rest of the novel I consider to be a denouement, but one that resists closure or resolution, and instead spills over into and creates uncharted territory. White's title, we should remember, places primary importance upon that active gerund, *forgetting*. It is up to us finally to show how the capacity to forget affects the subjectivity under question.

It is true that the narrator remembers many things throughout the novel in his search for selfhood. Be that as it may, I find no reason to conclude, as White himself declares in his self-interview, that the narrator exhibits "a selective forgetting that serves his moral cowardice" (16).

Mathews suggests the very same thing when he insists that the narrator “is lying” when he claims to forget: “The narrator prefers what he calls innocence, meaning safety, the control of appearances, the reassurance of satisfying others. He has taken literally the admonition, ‘In the struggle between yourself and the world, back the world’” (38-39). I would argue rather that the narrator is indeed unreliable, but not at all because his reliability is simply a matter of deciding when he’s truthful and when he lies. There is no reason at all to claim that “He is lying to no one but himself—the narrative is pure soliloquy—but lying all the same” (Mathews 38). Such a critique does nothing more than entrench the dubious distinction between the “depths” of reality, *the* truth, and the play of surface effects. The narrator does not control appearances. He is perpetually interpreting them in several ways at once, and when he does finally decide upon a particular interpretation to the exclusion of all others, perhaps resolving appearances in a provisional way, the novel shows this process to be anything but controlling. It is instead a turning point where perspective upon perspective communicate, where various characters approach a field of appearances from their own vantage, and *something else*, unaligned with any one perspective or any unified truth, unfolds, affecting all. Even the seizing of a particular perspective is thus shown to be a communication with other perspectives and not necessarily with the perspectives of other characters: a virtual communication of perspective with its own potential to be otherwise, and the becoming-multiple internal to a singular subjectivity. There is not a true and fixed realm of appearances anterior to the interplay of perspective that helps to generate those appearances. It would be better to say that each character is populated by characters. Herbert, in fact, is closer to the mark than either White or Mathews in this regard, when he states that “we live by ambiguities, spiders balancing in midair on threads of our spit and casting still further threads, hoping they’ll catch on something but content, should they not,

to blow about on those fragile hawsers and *take our chances*” (116). The unreliability of the narrator is itself an effect of an interactive multiplicity of perspective that creates an open, indeterminate reality that is everywhere taken up by chance. Conventional unreliability is beside the point, since it presupposes something to be reliable about, a fixed and unified truth. The narrator’s forgetting is, in my reading, not beholden to the categories of the true and the false. It is rather a pure operation, a forceful, intensive point where effects communicate amongst themselves.

Forgetting takes on its central role in the novel through the ritualized practice of the islanders who, we find at the novel’s close, maintain a peculiar relationship with the Old Code that once held sway over their community. The island still acknowledges the rulership of their monarchy, though only during the “Royal Arrival,” a yearly holiday marking the arrival of the Prince. Forgetting has turned into a ceremonial:

Two days before the Royal Arrival, a party of gentlemen visit the ancient burial grounds beyond the dunes. They carry silver spades and dig a fresh grave in accordance with the superstitious customs of the past. Here, on the evening of the Arrival, the Prince buries a memory of the year that has just concluded—perhaps a poem, perhaps an article of winter clothing, perhaps a ring or a book.... During the Arrival, however, old forms are revived, but only so that they can be filled with new content. For instance, young victims were once buried alive during the Arrival in order to propitiate the spirits of dead monarchs; now only a symbol of what the Prince might regret or wish to forget is dropped into the grave. (168)

At this point in the narrative, we and the narrator learn that Elena has killed herself after the narrator abandoned her the night before, during a party celebrating the Prince’s imminent arrival.

She will be the memory that gets buried, not a symbol representing something else. But it is only when the narrator actually takes part in the Royal Arrival as just one spectator among many that we finally learn, if we have not guessed already, that he is in fact the Prince. The entire island population acts in concert as they kneel before him, affirming finally that he is the Prince, that this is his identity. The novel's remaining pages take a radical turn as the narrator remembers *everything*, people's names, his long relationships with Herbert and Doris, even the landscape of his former home, the palace, of which he remarks, trenchantly, "How I used to study that garden and lose myself in its shallow, infinite perspectives!" (179).

But the novel ends with another extremely abrupt shift. He remembers all, even, ostensibly, his former, forgetful self as if it were performed, and it is, *from the present of his current perspective*. He sees a figure now known as Jon standing around the burial site, noting "how it amuses me to call him the Pale Stranger," a moniker used throughout the novel (183). It is as though this present and omniscient perspective has a relation with the narrator's self in the past, that the two selves, forgetful and remembering, are here reconciled, but *only to the extent that his forgetful self is no longer forgetful but merely acted*. That is, they are not reconciled at all, but remain wholly distinct modulations within an unfolding subjectivity made multiple. More specifically, the narrator's knowing, remembering self is *limited* by the perspective outlined by the narrator's forgetful self in that both perspectives unleash separate possibilities and are capable of wholly divergent affects. His all-knowing perspective categorically does not herald "The return of reality," as Mathews argues (40). Reality is never missing to begin with. Instead, his two selves are never reconciled, but only constitute a fracturing within a subjectivity itself that develops new powers of expression, and reality is transformed as new expressions and potentials begin to circulate. This understanding of subjectivity is a crucial insight deserving

careful articulation: the narrator's two selves, if we can call them that, represent two separate series of potential within a single subjectivity. The two series communicate with each other, but only through a transformative event that marks their connection, as can be seen clearly in how the narrator's selves relate to the figure of Jon and his name. In what we might call the *forgetful series*, Jon's name is not known, and thus referring to him as the Pale Stranger implies an entire matrix of potential particular to that series: the narrator works within a purely provisional set of determinations that create their own effects and thus contribute to the expression of the world. Contrariwise, in his *remembering series*, the narrator *has a perspective on his earlier perspective*, and thus finds amusement in referring to Jon as the Pale Stranger, but this is not at all the same as what is made possible by not knowing Jon's name to begin with. Everything is made possible in the relation between the series, and thus their virtual resonance is properly productive, but the series themselves nevertheless remain separate. They each constitute distinct assemblages in their divergent expressive potential. Again, what is mobilized in the communication between the series is a transformation of potential and of affect. There is only the eventful play of perspective upon perspective and not a bedrock reality underlying the entire process of emergence, as if *one* perspective were true and the other false. So when the narrator finds amusement in referring to Jon as the Pale Stranger, he only develops an active perspective on his past and forgetful self that in no way absorbs that self with regards to its own possibilities in the middle of an unfolding present. The selves constitute separate perspectives not on the same thing, but on other perspectives themselves.

Finally, Herbert defers to the narrator so that he might eulogize Elena for the concluding lines of the book: "Do you want to say a little something about Elena," he asks me. I look around at this ring of strangers and wonder what this man expects of me. Is there a dead person

in that box? Am I a newcomer to the island? I remember nothing. Who is Elena?" (184). The narrator suddenly forgets everything once more, even Herbert himself, and is thrown into yet another series, again forgetful, but not at all the same as his former self. The forgetful series resumes but only under the power of a transformation made real by the world around him, by the emerging context of his present environment. I argued earlier that the narrator ends where he began, knowing little or nothing about who he is, wondering again if he is a newcomer to the island, and now we can see why: everything has changed and is about to change. Herbert's memory of events now resonates with the narrator's forgetful subjectivity in order to send the island culture itself along a new trajectory that emerges from the middle of a changeful present. We are led to believe that in one year's time, and beyond the pages of the text, the narrator will experience the same leap within his subjectivity, that he will remember everything about Elena and her suicide. It is in this sense that his omniscient and forgetful perspectives do indeed repeat themselves, but only by virtue of their inclusion of difference. Difference itself is repeated in the middle of an event charged with the potential of what is yet to come and never *is*, ensuring a perpetual becoming-other within the culture as a relation of subjectivities and within these subjectivities themselves. And it is within an active, lived present, from within the event of forgetting Elena, that White's novel ends, charged in the middle of transformative process.

Chapter Five

“The Cleave in the Middle”: Rhizomatics in Nicholson Baker’s *The Mezzanine*

The feeling that you are stupider than you were is what finally interests you in the really complex subjects of life: in change, in experience, in the ways other people have adjusted to disappointment and narrowed ability. You realize that you are no prodigy, your shoulders relax, and you begin to look around you, seeing local color unrivaled by blue glows of algebra and abstraction.

—Nicholson Baker

We are told in the opening sentence of Nicholson Baker’s first novel, *The Mezzanine*, that the narrator, Howie, is carrying with him a black Penguin paperback on the way back to work from his lunch break, only to learn the paperback’s title much later: it’s the *Meditations* of Roman Emperor and Stoic philosopher Marcus Aurelius. And near the end of the novel, we’re told that when Baker’s narrator purchased the book, some two weeks before the lunch hour that serves as the *locus in quo* for *The Mezzanine*’s labyrinthine narration, he opened the work at random while still in the bookstore, finding, serendipitously, the following sentence: “Manifestly, no condition of life could be so well adapted for the practice of philosophy as this in which chance finds you today!” (124) The narrator’s reaction is instructive for my reading of the novel:

I thought that the statement was extraordinarily true and that if I bought that book and learned how to act upon that single sentence I would be led into elaborate realms of understanding, even as I continued to do, outwardly, exactly as I had done, going to work, going to lunch, going home, talking to L. on the phone or having her over for the night. (124)

We might ask, for starters, what is it in Aurelius's declaration that would allow for the traversal of "elaborate realms of understanding"? There is first the assertion that *this* condition of life, the present condition of life in the middle of which one exists, is the best suited and most perfect for philosophical practice. The line by Aurelius makes no reference to particulars; wherever you are, whatever you're doing, that is, whatever the make-up of this condition of life, the world provides a perfect potential and opportunity for the practice of philosophy. But what is it, specifically, about this condition of life that might open up new vistas of experience and insight, that opens up the very possibility of philosophy at all? As I believe *The Mezzanine's* narrator intuits, it is the involvement of chance, stretching itself out along all possible permutations of the real, that makes of each and every condition of life an absolutely unique and singular becoming, irreducible to representation. Nothing need change in Howie's daily routine since this routine carries change within itself; he can continue to do exactly what he has done, albeit having seized upon the element of chance in any event, such that his outward life becomes charged with a changeful power: elaborate realms of understanding weave their way through the fabric of his existence. Wherever you are, whatever you're doing, chance finds you there, opening up potentials for becoming in a unique unfolding.

Appropriately enough, it is with this inclusion of chance that the narrator summarizes the events that comprise the general course of the narrative, events most remarkable, perhaps, for their very mundanity. He writes,

Chance found me that day having worked for a living all morning, broken a shoelace, chatted with Tina, urinated successfully in a corporate setting, washed my face, eaten half of a bag of popcorn, bought a new set of shoelaces, eaten a hot dog and a cookie with

some milk, and chance found me now sitting in the sun on a green bench, with a paperback on my lap. What, philosophically, was I supposed to do with that? (125)

What indeed? Howie's question may be *The Mezzanine's* most superbly ironic moment. For throughout the novel, and in the midst of each of the events listed here, the narrator sets about creating a wonderfully rich meditation. Surveying only this plot summary, one might be tempted to say that the novel is about nothing—novels don't normally concentrate on such quotidian ephemera. But this is a part of Baker's playful subversion of the form. As Ross Chambers argues, Baker's novel enacts a "transvaluation of the trivial.... [and] substitutes for the principle of narrative, which inevitably tends toward closure, the principle of meditative genres of thought and writing, which is the idea that one thing leads, not to an end, but to another" (766). *The Mezzanine's* narrative strategy is eminently digressive, replete with footnotes and lists chronicling Howie's attention to a world of endless inventive potential. This digressiveness is also, however, what makes writing on *The Mezzanine* so extraordinarily difficult: identifying any one point of entry invariably requires following its sundry connections in an effort to show how the narrative shifts across registers and references. We must follow the text in some regard, being thrown in the midst of its narrative maze, while still taking it in yet another direction, demonstrating what it is capable of doing and how it works. Howie writes in the first chapter, "Under microscopy, even insignificant perceptions... are almost always revealed to be more incremental than you later are tempted to present them as being" (8-9). What the narrator does not mention here, and what I aim to show, is that a defining of increments engenders a becoming-fractal of the narrative itself; each increment assumes its own qualitative contours, its own potential for expressivity that both connects it to and establishes a trajectory independent from the larger process in question. In identifying transitional moments or points, and through

their interrelation with each other, such a procedure invests processes with new ranges of potential at every turn. The book thus appears to put into operation a network of processes within processes, connected and divided through so many textual sutures. Baker's novel consistently problematizes moments of transition and transformation as in-between spaces, charting its course always from within the middle of its own textual events, with connections being made in multiple directions at once. My own strategy for treating the text, then, will involve entering into this process, jumping into the middle of some of the text's main narrative streams, and some of its tributaries, in order to demonstrate *how* its connections are made, that is, to conceptualize its processes of connection and divergence.

We might begin fleshing out the ways in which *The Mezzanine* demonstrates this narrative fractality by considering its formal composition. Other commentators, among them Søren Pold and, most notably, Chambers, have written incisively about the novel's form in this regard, showing how the work's "riot of footnotes... divide[s] the reader's attention at various seepage-points and induce[s] the exquisite pleasure—and anxiety—of hesitation. One can't quite decide whether to continue following the text (and miss the relevant material in the note) or to plunge into a luxuriant note (and risk 'losing track' of the text's direction)" (Chambers 770). It is likely that such readerly indecision accompanies any text that makes use of footnotes since a footnote functions as a bifurcation of narrative itself. Nevertheless, Chambers' description makes it clear that *The Mezzanine* forces the reader to assume a certain suspension, caught between divergent narratological trajectories. If a footnote marks a "cleaving" of the narrative, a perfectly apt and ambiguous term denoting both abscission and adhesion, then we might see it as a textual instantiation of the surface-effect of an event. The narrator himself, in one rather protracted footnote taking up the better part of three consecutive pages, a footnote self-

reflexively footnoting the word “footnotes,” uses the language of surfaces to describe this operation. He writes that in the scholarly tradition, the great lovers of footnotes

knew that the outer surface of truth is not smooth, welling and gathering from paragraph to shapely paragraph, but is encrusted with a rough protective bark of citations, quotation marks, italics, and foreign languages, a whole variorum crust of ‘ibid.’s’ and ‘compare’s’ and ‘see’s’ that are the shield for the pure flow of argument as it lives for a moment in one mind.... the pursuit of truth doesn’t have clear outer boundaries: it doesn’t end with the book; restatement and self-disagreement and the enveloping sea of referenced authorities all continue. Footnotes are the finer-suckered surfaces that allow tentacular paragraphs to hold fast to the wider reality of the library. (122-23)

We can see here the denial of a cumulative, linear, and unified system in favour of one more octopoid and sprawling in nature. The footnote mobilizes connectivity and divergence simultaneously: it is a pure enabler, a surface that fundamentally *allows* paragraphs to enter into a wider textual assemblage, connecting texts only by opening them to each other’s influence in an ever-expanding range of reference. It is entirely characteristic of Baker to mix his metaphors, but we might pause to ask how they’re being used here. The footnote and its textual ilk are variously described as forming “a rough protective bark,” “a whole variorum crust,” a “shield,” an “enveloping sea,” and “finer-suckered surfaces.” Indeed, the first three of these images connote anything but exposure and openness, instead signaling closure or impenetrability, perhaps because they’re related to “truth”; the whole machinery of reference, of digression, citation, and comparison, constitutes a heterogeneous layering that keeps anything we might call truth, a terminal, representational state of affairs, at a distance, putting in its place a narrative with multiple directionality.

The narrator's fascination with physical and mechanical processes admits yet another layer to the footnote's function, this time with respect to its effect on the reader. The great lovers of footnotes, again,

knew the anticipatory pleasure of sensing with peripheral vision, as they turned the page, a gray silt of further example and qualification waiting in tiny type at the bottom. (They were aware... of the usefulness of tiny type in enhancing the glee of reading works of obscure scholarship: typographical density forces you to crouch... over the busyness and intricacy of recorded truth.).... The muscles of the eye... want vertical itineraries; the rectus externus and internus grow dazed wagging back and forth in the Zs taught in grade school. (122)

Not only, then, does the footnote mark a switch between trains of thought, but it directs alternative affective possibilities for the reader. It puts into play different qualities of sensation; one no longer focuses upon merely the line one currently reads, but senses with an expanded receptivity what lies at the margins of one's vision. The visual sensations at play between text and reader thus become an integral part of the experience of reading. In Baker's rendition of this reading process, the sensation produced is one of pleasure, but it needn't be. It's enough to recognize that footnoting alters the reader's relation to the text in a palpable way. For instance, Baker points out that the footnote's reduction in font size corresponds to a shift in readerly intensity and comportment: it forces one to crouch, such that the body of the reader himself is transformed. Moreover, he claims it's the footnote that frees the body, or the eye, from the enervating reading habits drilled into the body from an early age; it marks a moment of difference, not only between layers of narration, but between the very sensations that reading may produce.

The Mezzanine uses its many footnotes, in part, to disrupt linear narration, offering explosions of content regarding virtually anything that strikes the narrator's fancy. The primary narrative is itself extraordinarily digressive, shifting between periods in the narrator's life and covering a staggering range of topics. I agree wholeheartedly with Chambers when he maintains that the "text" of the novel cannot be clearly identified with its narrative, as though its footnotes were nothing more than departures from the story (770):

Baker's narrative, such as it is, is already thoroughly clogged and his footnotes are themselves expansive and subject to digressions of their own.... [The difference] is not between linear "narrative" and disjunctive "digression," but between something like the continuity of an *already* extenuated, distended narrative text and supposed discontinuities that are in fact scarcely distinguishable from the extenuations that are the natural product of the spinning out process itself. (770)

There is, nevertheless, a story here, though it's never made clear *why* this particular lunch hour deserves the narrator's especial attention; in keeping with Aurelius's claim, one gets the sense that *any* time of *any* day would serve equally well for Howie's meditations, though they'd surely be different if another day were chosen. The novel begins with Howie's return to work at nearly one o'clock. But as he approaches the escalators that will take him up to the mezzanine housing his office, what he is carrying catches his attention, thus diverting the narrative's focus from the events at hand in the present and into a historical account of what has transpired over the past hour to get Howie this far. The majority of the novel's "story" is a recounting of this single lunch hour, while countless digressions, appearing in and out of the footnotes, hijack and supplement its primary course. As the narrator himself asserts, "Digression—a movement away

from the *gradus*, or upward escalation, of the argument—is sometimes the only way to be thorough” (122).

Given this claim, it’s interesting to note that the novel’s storyline, despite its penchant for digression, moves quite literally *toward* an upward escalation in the narrator’s ride to the mezzanine. At the conclusion of the penultimate chapter, the story returns to its beginning, with Howie’s narration finally catching up with itself as he approaches once again the escalators that will take him back to work. In fact, the novel reaches the foot of the escalators two other times, once near the middle of the text, and yet again in chapter twelve, when we’re given an actual account of the narrator’s ride. Howie makes but one trip up the escalator after his lunch hour, but *The Mezzanine*’s complex method of narration returns us to that moment four times, from four different narrative points of entry. Each of those moments of escalation, furthermore, provides an opening into a different digression, which itself begets further digressions, forever elaborating on the lunch hour’s events and whatever the narrator cares to address. The novel continues to return to an upward escalation, and by implication to the principle of narrative itself, albeit always from different narrative perspectives, just as the same upward escalation continues to diffract into multiple narrative trajectories. It would appear that, like its beloved footnotes, the novel’s escalator “functions as a switch, offering the model-railroader’s satisfaction of catching the march of thought... and routing it, sometimes at length, through abandoned stations and submerged, leaching tunnels” (122). To borrow Deleuze’s term, Baker’s novel is thoroughly rhizomatic. “The rhizome,” Deleuze and Guattari write, “pertains to a map that must be produced, constructed, a map that is always detachable, connectable, reversible, modifiable, and has multiple entryways and exits and its own lines of flight” (*A Thousand Plateaus* 21). “A rhizome,” they clarify, “is made of plateaus... [and] a plateau is always in the middle, not at the

beginning or the end” (*A Thousand Plateaus* 21). Baker plays insistently with middle-spaces as events of transformation, where connections and divergences are actualized. A mezzanine is, of course, nothing other than a plateau in the middle. The novel’s lunch hour, itself positioned in the middle of a workday, takes place midweek (34), even though its boundaries are subject to dispute: Howie asks, “Is a lunch hour defined as beginning just as you enter the men’s room on the way to lunch, or just as you exit it?” (71) The middle is always constituted as an indeterminate space, precisely because it is not a steady state, not even a space at all, but a process of transformation.

And Howie, we’re shown, occupies this kind of middle-space in the midst of his own life, as his speculation on the transition from childhood to adulthood suggests. He determines with some imprecision the moment he became an adult (54), at age 23, and then surmises that before that time, he had accumulated seventeen years’ worth of childish thoughts. In seventeen more years, it follows, he will have reached his “Majority,” when the “the universe of all possible things I could be reminded of [will be] mostly an adult universe” (47), when “any subject I call up for mental consideration will have a whole sheaf of addenda dating from my late twenties and my thirties in it.... *Middle age!*” (58-9). But the transition from childhood to adulthood, as irrevocable and decisive as it is, does not put to rest the influence of his childish perspective. To the contrary, as the narrator claims earlier, “It isn’t right to say, ‘When I was little, I used to love *x*,’ if you still love *x* now. I admit that part of my pleasure in riding the escalator came from the links with childhood memory that the experience sustained.... I have to say that no matter how hard I try to keep sentimental distortions from creeping in, they creep in anyway” (35, 41). What happens in the transition between perspectives is a linking across the positions that effects a distortion, a modification that keeps any one position from becoming self-identical. Howie’s

subjectivity here is at play between different registers, or different plateaus, so to speak, such that his present perspective is a middle-space always diffracted from itself. He is now firmly entrenched in adulthood, having experienced “a notable, once-in-a-lifetime change of –hoods” (57), and yet, at the same time, he continues to undergo the process of transition *between* childhood and adulthood; that is, he continues to become in two directions. There is a continuity of sorts between the two perspectives, but it operates as an event at their surface that emits shifts in intensity: a continuity productive of difference rather than sameness. Howie affirms that “once you invoke those kid-memories, you have to live with their constant tendency to screw up your fragmentary historiography with violas of lost emotion” (41). Any fragmentary historiography, in this reading, must contend with a persistent refraction among its own elements. The adult perspective within which the narrator finds himself is thus characterized as “an *intermediate* stage of personal development” (54, italics added), not because it resides between childhood and, say, old-age, but because it is itself an enfolding or interrelation of multiple perspectives which resists closure.

We might wonder, given this self-conscious interest in the nature of perspective, how old the narrator is at the time of the work’s diegetic composition. Chambers takes up this point, arguing that because “we don’t learn the age of the narrator when he undertakes his memoir,....[w]hether the narrative perspective is that of Majority attained, or of Majority still to be reached, is... strictly undecidable” (784). Chambers’ claim is, quite simply, untrue, and at the risk of appearing pedantic, I would like to clarify the issue. It is likely a testament to the novel’s tortuous narrative structure that Chambers could overlook Howie’s age, despite the fact that he has “been reading [*The Mezzanine*] for the nth time with undiminished pleasure” (804). Buried within a welter of detail and digression, the narrator’s age is clearly revealed, but only by cross-

referencing the information he provides. On page 37, and quite independently from his thoughts on his Majority status, Howie begins an anecdotal account of an event that occurred “only a few weeks ago, several years after the escalator ride that is the vehicle of this memoir.” On the next page, again after lengthy description and some minor footnoting, we learn that the event in question took place “*at age thirty*” (38, italics in original), and that at the time of writing, consequently, the narrator must be either 30 or else he has just celebrated his 31st birthday. We cannot finally say how old he is, but we can determine that the narrative perspective is decidedly not that of Majority attained. The point is important if we consider Chambers’ implication that it is only by leaving a piece out of its textual puzzle that the novel makes the matter undecidable. The narrator’s age is decidable, within reasonable limits, but because it places him somewhere on the way to “middle age,” and because this way to middle age is itself an “intermediate stage,” we can better appreciate the intractability of Baker’s project. What we have is a series of middles within middles, each with their own qualities. Even middle age, calculated to arrive at age 40, is paradoxically the age at which Howie will assume his Majority, and is thus not a “middle” at all. In *The Mezzanine* the middle is constructed not as a mean between two points, not as a point at all, but as a unique, processual, and transformative event; it’s a scene of change. What is undecidable, then, is not whether the narrator has reached his Majority, but how to represent this perspective *from within*, as a playing out of the surfaces between two co-present forces that deform each other in the expression of a multiplicitous subjectivity. Howie, it would appear, has a way to go before he reaches middle age, and yet he remains always in the middle of his own life.

The narrator’s insatiable interest in the mechanics of everyday objects, and the human ingenuity required to operate them with efficiency, supplies the narrative with several examples

of this surface-like activity. One of the most effective of these comes during a section detailing the narrator's discovery of a quick way to apply deodorant to the underarm while fully dressed, what he counts as the fifth major advance in his life (16): it involves undoing the *middle* button of his shirt and "entering [it] through the gap," a strategy inspired by Ingres's portrait of Napoleon (51). Howie relates this movement to that required when "women take off bras without removing their sweatshirts" (51). But it's "the earliest point on this topological time-line," a memory Howie has from his early childhood, that best demonstrates the mechanics of the surface, and as if to further ramify the novel's layered narration, we find it in a footnote to these other sartorial tricks (52). The narrator recounts watching his mother doing laundry:

The T-shirt happened to have been washed inside out: my mother turned it upside down and reached into the torso of the shirt with one hand, as if fishing for something in a deep bag, and took hold of a sleeve; then she reached in with her other hand and took hold of the other sleeve. She raised her elbows, and the T-shirt began to fall around the two fixed sleeve-points; a last flip and it hung, no longer upside down, *and no longer inside out*, from her fingers. I felt my brain perform an analogous inversion, trying to take in the seeming impossibility and wonderful intelligence of what she had just done.... [T]he dexterity was based on a leap of mind that had understood the need for a set of seemingly incomprehensible preparations before a single transforming motion that... disclosed your purpose. (52)

Many things are worth noting here. First, vaguely related movements, each with their own specific dynamics, form a constellation, a topological time-line, that makes each contemporaneous with the other. It's a contemporaneity based not on *simultaneity* but on relations of movement and force among themselves without relation to time, as such: it is its own

time-*line*, another plateau formed through the resonating potentials inhering within events without regard to their moments of actualization. It functions as a variegated *concept*; having extracted a concept from a bodily mixture, it joins events through their incorporeal ideality. This time-line, then, functions at the level of sense, finding connections pell-mell through the relations of force and bodies as they are actualized. Added to the list of events falling within this constellation are five more feats of mobile dexterity, including shoe-tying, fitting a pillow within its pillowcase, putting on a coat, tying a simple knot with string, and putting on socks (52).

What specifically connects these events is their way of disclosing a purpose only upon their successful completion. That is, the concept of the event lies within a “single transforming motion,” defying, apparently, any purposive thinking that would predict the outcome of a series of actions before it occurs. Or, more precisely, the concept lies in drawing a line between cause and effect. In *The Logic of Sense*, Deleuze writes that “The foundation can never resemble what it founds” (99). Between cause and effect, in the case of the unfolding T-shirt, there is no resemblance, but rather a complex of forces in relation that unleashes an event *with its own contours*: “like the final flowering of the NBC peacock” (52), the effect emerges in such a way that the incremental stages leading to its formation appear in no way to anticipate it. The effect is its own event, and thus draws a line of differentiation between itself and its cause(s). To clarify, we can see the surface as that which relates inside and outside, allowing even for their reversibility; and given the proper set of constructed conditions, the surface operates of its own accord: the shirt begins to fall, unfolding and righting itself. But in no way does the event itself resemble the conditions used to release it. Certainly, the steps used to perform the trick can be retraced so that Howie might learn to do it for himself. The trick is, in principle, repeatable, its concept isolable and applicable in countless contexts. What is not repeatable, however, is *this*

performance of the trick, the unique instance composed of so many particular variables that charts its own course, that is self-differentiating. We need to remember that the narrator's admiring shock at having witnessed "the miracle" (52), indeed, his memorializing of it, comes from his having witnessed it for the first time: "the discovery is the crucial thing, not its repeated later applications" (16). The event itself has an impact on his *brain*, and it is in this sense, ultimately, that the T-shirt trick is made fully eventful: the concept becomes *sensational*. The physical movements themselves might be *based* on a leap of mind, but they in no way resemble one or contain it: the *leap of mind* must be felt, undergone, as its own component of the event. And it is properly a leap *because* it is felt, because it constitutes a revolutionary thinking to the young narrator's mind that could not intuit or dream its logic. It may be that each and every time the trick is performed in its "repeated later applications," the attentive narrator will experience a new leap of the mind, not the same leap repeated ad infinitum, but one that is perforce different from itself because it internalizes transformation in its processual unfolding: he would have to follow not necessarily the same "inversion" that was first felt, but the connective potentials inhering within the event that lead it elsewhere. He would have to create an assemblage, a life, casting the event in a new light with new connections being made. The line drawn between cause and effect is ultimately experienced by a subjectivity in the throes of sensation, a subjectivity whose sensitive surface unfolds as a singularity in the midst of the world's becoming.

The effects of surfaces held in relation are, in fact, Baker's preeminent concern, since it is at the surface that all interaction and becoming occurs. In one of *The Mezzanine*'s many astute narrative devices, the event that sets Howie upon his epic journey through a world of the everyday involves the breaking of his shoelace, advancing the plot quite literally through the

fraying of a surface that leaves things open and unbound. He must set out to find new shoelaces, to tie up loose ends, perhaps, thus suggesting a movement toward conventional closure. Yet in Baker's hands, narrative closure is made possible only through its compossibility with diffraction, divergence, and digression. Indeed, if the broken shoelace is an analogue for the narrative layering the novel demonstrates, then the way it's introduced in the text serves only to reinforce its symbolic function. We find in the first chapter's final line, as if as an aside, that the narrator is carrying in his bag a pair of replacement shoelaces, only to discover at the outset of chapter two that he had broken a shoelace earlier that day, "just before lunch" (11). We move into the bag to find what's inside, repeating a crossing of the boundary between inside and out, then immediately move forward and across chapters, not to hear about these new shoelaces themselves, but to learn why they were needed, and thus to fill in events that will *approach* where we already are. In other words, the narrative proceeds by involution, moving forward temporally only to get caught on a new narrative thread that takes it in any number of temporal directions, usually into the past, but occasionally into the future. Linearity is always revived, though we never find ourselves exactly where we started: from an involution springs an evolution that may eventually connect with the original moment of departure, but does so always from another angle, having traversed a new narrative path replete with its own digressive eddies. Because of the *relations themselves* between objects and between thoughts, the narrative continually leaps in and out of its separate but connected planes—actualized states of affairs—just like the revolving door that leads both in and out of the narrator's workplace, thus presenting multiple entryways and exits that are always opening up new lines of flight.

Beyond this narrative function, the shoelaces are submitted to a protracted meditation detailing the possible explanations for their demise. The narrator is stunned to recall that only

one day earlier his *other* shoelace snapped: “I was surprised—more than surprised—to think that after almost two years my right and left shoelaces could fail less than two days apart.... The near simultaneity was very exciting—it made the variables of private life seem suddenly graspable and law-abiding” (15). Howie thus begins a search for an intelligible cause, a coherent physical model that could explain the breaking shoelaces. Like any good detective, he begins by assembling a set of propositions, noting first of all that the coincidence of both laces breaking on nearly the same day would suggest that they were tied “almost exactly the same number of times” (16). But because laces become untied separately throughout the course of a day, he speculates that possibly thirty percent of his tyings involved an individual shoe, “And how could I be positive that this thirty percent was equally distributed—that right and left shoes had come randomly undone over the last two years with the same frequency?” (16) The possibility of an asymmetrical relation between the shoelaces, that is, the possibility that they have come under the influence of different forces and thus *cannot be conceived* as repetitions of the same, suggests that the near simultaneity of their breaking is indeed odd, a grand coincidence. He hasn’t “a single engram of tying a shoe... that dated from any later than when I was four or five years old.... Over twenty years of empirical data were lost forever, a complete blank” (16). Without this empirical data, he is left to rely on a model divorced from the variables specific to his own life.

However, another model occurs to him, and it doesn’t involve the tying of laces at all: “What about the variety of tiny stretchings and pullings that the shoe itself exerted on its laces as I walked around?.... Even if the shoelace’s fabric moved only millimetrically against its eyelet with each step, that sawing back and forth might eventually cut through the outer fibers” (26). He thus proposes two competing models that might explain the breaking of his shoelaces, the

“walking-flexion” model and the “pulling-and-fraying” model (26). The problem involves a shared breaking point that seems to implicate both models simultaneously:

Possibly the stress of walking fell most forcefully on the lace bent around the top eyelets, just as the stress of pulling the laces tight to tie them did. It was conceivable, though scary to imagine, that the pull-fray model and the walk-flex model mingled their coefficients so subtly that human agency would never accurately apportion cause. (28)

As descriptive models of forces in relation, the two hypotheses are separate *while* interactive; they resist synthesis, but exhibit a complementarity that corrupts their descriptive prowess. Ultimately, what frightens the narrator is the problem’s sheer complexity, stymieing all human effort to quantify and determine its nature. The event seems somehow to escape the models designed to describe it, throwing those models into a chaotic relation that no longer holds any descriptive value. What we need, then, is a better understanding of this chaos, of what is at work *between* the models and in the midst of their interaction.

In a later but related footnote, the problem becomes clearer when the narrator considers the interaction between the blade of an ice-skate and the ice surface it glides upon: “ice was slippery because it momentarily melted under the pressure of the blade’s edge, then refroze when the blade was gone.... [The] dark gleams [left in the ice] would prove, as we drew closer and bent to inspect them, to be small sheared pieces of metal—skate-blade wear” (65-66). Here we have a clue as to why the narrator’s models governing shoelace wear do not hold, though it will take some unpacking. Deleuze writes that with respect to an encounter, “Capture is always a double-capture,... and it is that which creates not something mutual, but an asymmetrical block [*sic.*], an a-parallel evolution, nuptials, always ‘outside’ and ‘between’” (*Dialogues II* 7). Likewise, in the middle of the encounter between ice and blade, *both* are altered simultaneously

along their own lines of transformation, thus demonstrating this double-capture. More precisely, it is not simply an encounter between ice and blade, but between *their changes themselves*, an encounter between becomings. It is a matter of not envisioning the process as beginning with one object affecting the other, and then charting reaction upon reaction in a sequential play of back-and-forth between the two. Instead, we are thrown in the middle of change itself between the two, in the midst of an abstract, absolutely contracted present with becomings *in two directions at once*, an immanence of pure effect.

Accordingly, we should amend an earlier phrase: the ice does not serve as the skate's surface, nor even are they each other's surfaces, but their changeful interaction itself is the virtual surface through which the event plays out. What precisely the ice and blade encounter, then, is a change to their encountering. A pure difference lurks at the heart of all interaction, in the middle of an aleatoric point, a present that is nothing other than the power of becoming-other. In this respect, the skate and ice enter into a differential, asymmetrical relation with each other *and* with themselves: the changes to each do indeed affect the other, but only insofar as each becomes different from itself. This is why Deleuze writes that an encounter does not create something mutual. The *way* the two terms interact, or the relation between the two, changes *concurrently with but differently than* the changes that the terms actualize: the relation between the two is its own multiplicitous becoming that is not shared or possessed by either because it is constituted as a potential, an event, and concerns the terms' interactive capacities for affecting each other.

Let us return, then, to the narrator's descriptive models for shoelace wear, what he calls "shoelace theory" (70). Howie notes that "what I wanted here was tribology: detailed knowledge of the interaction between the surfaces inflicting the wear and the surfaces receiving

it” (66). He wants to know *how* things interact and affect each other. But as the blade-and-ice example shows, all encountering works in two directions at once; the terms involved both inflict and receive wear *at the same time* since the surface is precisely what they *do not* share, the surface of the encounter itself that is nothing other than an event of transformation. It would be best to think of the surface not as the lining of a thing, but as an activity of the threshold *between* things, the happening of change itself always between two: a multiplicity, always in the middle of its becomings, its changes always protean. In its final pages, *The Mezzanine* returns to shoelace theory only to send it along another direction, when Howie finds an entry in *World Textile Abstracts* entitled “Methods for evaluating the abrasion resistance and knot slippage of shoe laces,” by Z. Czaplicki (132). Howie’s elation at finding the article is matched only by his conviction that Czaplicki

was not going to abandon the problem with some sigh about complexity and human limitation after a minute’s thought... —*he was going to make it his life’s work....* [He was making] a passionate effort to get some subtler idea of the forces at work.... A great man! Progress was being made. Someone was looking into the problem. Mr. Czaplicki, in Poland, would take it from here. (132-33)

The forces at work demand further experimentation, their expressivity still rife with potential, though all explanatory progress will remain couched in generic terms, with “hundreds of shoelaces of all kinds” being tested and documented (133). Even Czaplicki’s work will never address the forces specific to *Howie’s* shoelaces, with their innumerable, unique variables. More than this, we need to acknowledge the connections that the event makes in Howie’s life. In a word, his very theorizing—indeed, the general course of the novel itself—takes up the shorn

threads of the laces, leading him from one encounter to the next; the event, in a grand effusion of connective potential, elaborates a life and proliferates its contact points.

Like so many other things in *The Mezzanine*, too many to examine in detail, the shoelaces demonstrate a principle of the in-between, both through their dual narrative function and through the play of physical forces they express, initiating a great part of the novel's action while opening that action up to multiple textual trajectories. This principle appears at work in intersubjective relations as well. The narrator's ride up to the mezzanine provides a vantage for observing the hive-like activity of the office building's lobby. Gliding up on the escalator, Howie notes that "From this height, the height of sociology and statistics, foreshortened employees moved in visible patterns: they were propelled one by one at a fixed speed into the lobby by the revolving door; they renewed the permanent four-person line at the cash machine" (99). As with his speculations on shoelace theory, the narrator here posits a law-like behaviour governing an action, his fellow employees moving with machinic regularity. Howie's perspective, however, involves crucially a break from the action, establishing itself from the outside by objectifying and quantifying what it witnesses: his pattern recognition is made possible only by establishing a perspective apart from the very process under consideration. Interestingly, Howie is on his way to the mezzanine, in mid-transit to a middle-space which allows him momentarily to disengage from being in the middle of what he observes. Or in other words, he is able to connect in a new way to the processes at work in the lobby, with an admitted distortion of the "foreshortened employees," because he is now in the middle of a transformative process in its own right, on the way to a different circuitry that amounts to a shifting of perspective. His disengagement is thus configured as an engagement under different terms—he never stands completely apart from what he observes, taking up a statistical vantage that operates

only by actively altering the object of study. Any break from a process is made possible, it would seem, only by differentiating that process from itself.

Howie, however, qualifies his observations of the employees in the lobby at the novel's close. Having concocted a "thought-frequency chart" for himself, detailing the periodicity of topics that he attends to throughout the course of a year, he becomes dissatisfied with his earlier conclusions about the nameless and faceless people he observed earlier (129). (To be exact, and because *The Mezzanine* leaps in and out of many temporal registers by way of commentary, when we hear of Howie's qualifications *he has not yet arrived* at the escalator that will grant him his panoptical vision. He thus qualifies observations that appear *earlier in the text* but *later in diegetic time*. Caught in the middle of any event, he may comment on any other, precisely because their connections are not bound by temporal contiguity but by sense itself.) The narrator writes that

People seemed so alike when you imagined their daily schedules, or watched them walk toward the revolving door..., yet if you imagined a detailed thought-frequency chart compiled for each of them, and you tried comparing one chart with another, you would feel suddenly as if you were comparing beings as different from each other as an extension cord and a grape-leaf roll. (129)

We are thus treated to a modification of his objective, pattern-producing perspective by being thrown in the middle of each person's unique contemplative becomings where the individual constitutes a class unto itself. Each subjectivity mobilizes a particular series of thoughts and affections which, as Deleuze contends, "makes people be grasped as so many combinations and so many unique chances from which such a combination has been drawn" (*Dialogues II* 5). Howie raises suspicions about the value of his thought-frequency charts nearly as soon as he

creates them, noting that “thoughts were too fluid, too difficult to name, and once named to classify, for my estimate of their relative frequency to mean very much. And there were way, way too many of them” (128). The problem of classification and representation is beset on all sides by the pure profligacy of thinking that maintains a connective potential *between* thoughts. Thoughts are never objects in this regard since they’re always invested with the process of thinking itself that works through them as an operation, always spilling over their own edges to take up new connections and new combinations.

It remains, nevertheless, to show how subjectivities do make their connections despite being constituted as determinate singularities, as events in and of themselves. Baker’s insight into this problem is, like the novel as a whole, rich and complex. “Above the periodicity of solitary, internal thought,” the narrator muses, “dependent upon it yet existing on a separate plane, was the periodicity of conversation, on the phone and in person” (130). Topics that circulate among people are submitted to the same admittedly dubious classification process that Howie uses to appreciate differences between subjectivities. But here, we enter yet another plane of interaction, one that enters into a relation with that plane mapped out by “solitary” subjectivities while preserving difference on both sides. The two planes are both interdependent and separate. Howie describes this process more precisely:

When a subject recurred, we felt it as familiar, but indistinct: almost always it came up (that is, felt worth discussing again) only after we could no longer remember exactly what our previous respective opinions had been—we remembered vaguely, unattributively, the telling points that had been made the last time, but often reversed our positions, each of us more enthusiastic now about the fresher-feeling arguments the other had made the last time, and less convinced by our own earlier ones. (130)

When viewed from within the conversations themselves, the recurrence of topics, a repetition of sorts that accounts for a sense of familiarity, is shot through with difference. We should note, first of all, that the examples Howie gives for these topics are missing entirely from the thought-frequency chart he provides for himself, suggesting that a topic arrives because the participants, each with his or her own unique thoughts, together create something that neither could create alone. The conversation, again, represents a plane separate from each individual, predicated not on the particular thoughts that they might share, but on a resonance *between* the two that is not internal to either. These topics never emerge as a course of habit, with a repetition of one's position as a rote exercise; rather, they proceed only because each individual responds fully invested in his or her position as if it were new. And, indeed, it *is* new. The telling points of the argument, like singularities or turning points emitted within the dialogue, must be adopted and moved through without attributing them to any particular subject. That is, one never identifies with or takes possession of one's position, but only experiences a shift in intensity accruing from the new potentials that the position offers. The conversation is an eminently creative event, replete with transformation. We therefore need to qualify Deleuze's assertion that a subjectivity is to be grasped as so many unique combinations and chances from which a particular combination is drawn, since any particular combination is always arising as a unique relation *between* combinations, that is, *between* subjectivities in the midst of their interaction. Subjectivities are thus *processes* of construction, labile and open to their affective potentials. Reversing one's position is a matter of redefining the subjectivity itself and what it is capable of feeling and thinking: the birth of new intensities and enthusiasms, new ways of connecting with thoughts themselves, and always in the middle of one's becomings.

The narrator does not stop here. “[S]uperimposed on the plane of conversation,” too, are periodicities along other planes, including, for example, “resurgencies and subsidings of interest in some avenue of enquiry or style of thinking from one century to the next, restatings of mislaid truths in new vernaculars” (130). Howie concludes that, “On all these planes,... the alternation of neglect and attention paid to an idea was like the cycle of waxing and buffing, dulling down and raising the shine higher, sanding between coats and then applying another—things happened to it during the long unsupervised stretches” (131). We have here, therefore, a theory of difference and repetition reminiscent of that developed by Deleuze in his work on Nietzsche’s eternal return. Deleuze writes that “very small linguistic shifts express upheavals and reversals in the concept.... *It is not the same which returns, it is not the similar which returns*; rather, the Same is the returning of that which returns, - *in other words, of the Different*” (*Difference and Repetition* 300). In this light, a restatement in a new vernacular is always inclusive and expressive of difference in the concept. Likewise, the similes Howie uses to describe the ebb and flow of ideas involve difference, and always this difference occurs at the surface, where new connections can be made: change itself is essentially in and of potential. Everything happens to ideas *in the meantime*, in-between their periods of use and neglect, because they themselves are not resolved, finite quantities, but are instead always becoming-determinate as responsive interactions within changeful contexts. The “renewing of newness,” the narrator declares, “...was for me then, and is still, one of the greatest sources of happiness that the man-made world can offer” (93): the returning not of the same or the similar, but of the new, the different. The new or the different, then, should not be confused with a thing detached from processes of becoming, as if we could say, “yes, it has arrived; here is the new,” since it is always charged with a self-differentiating power: it is always open to its being otherwise, always a process or

verb, never a noun. We could conclude that not only are ideas transformed between their periods of dormancy and use, but that they remain expressive of their “meantime” *at all times*. Their arrival is the return of the singularity from within its own processes of transformation. What we do with them remains to be thought, felt, and created.

Howie’s reference to the coming and going of ideas as a process of waxing and buffing a surface recalls an episode earlier in the novel, one that he returns to on the novel’s final page. Involving once again his escalator ride up to the mezzanine, I believe it’s central to any treatment of the text, and I would like to give a detailed reading of it by way of conclusion. Entering the office building’s lobby on his way back from lunch, the narrator meets a maintenance person fulfilling one of his janitorial duties, polishing the handrails of the escalator. “Imagine working in a building,” Howie exclaims, “where one of the standard weekly jobs of a maintenance person was to polish the handrail of the escalator! The comprehensiveness of this, the all-embracing definition of what a clean office building really was, was thrilling! (62). Howie’s excitement derives from an appreciation of the total working machinery of the building, the interplay of hundreds of people, each with his or her own affairs productive of different effects, that ensures the further productivity of the whole. An attention to detail is required so that no process, say, for example, the dirt and grime accumulating on the escalator’s handrails, could develop to the point of threatening substantially the mechanics of any other process. All processes are interrelated, each measured in terms of each in an effort to create a kind of equilibrium that remains productive. It is, Howie suggests at this point, a comprehensive and totalizing operation with no stone left unturned. The handrail is shined “by leaning motionlessly on a white cotton rag, *using* the technology, yet using it so casually that [the maintenance people] appeared to us all as if they were lounging against their Camaros at a beach” (63). Hence, while contributing to

the efficient operation of the office building as a whole, cleaning the handrails takes up its own principle of efficiency, blurring the line between work and leisure through the invention of a new practice, “something that maintenance men had not been doing for hundreds of years” (62).

Here, the escalator, as a technology only recently entering into relation with maintenance people everywhere, brings with it its own relations of force that direct but do not determine the ways in which people will use it. Learning how best to clean it thus requires experimentation and invention, a practiced interpretation of the relative affective capacities between the human body and the machine itself.

Understandably, the maintenance man in the novel has become very well-acquainted with this particular escalator, and apparently, so too has Howie:

This guy probably knew every landmark of that rubber handrail as it circled around—the chip in it where it looked as if someone had tried vandalizing it with a knife, and the section where it warped outward, and the little fusion scar where the two ends had been spliced together to close the loop. One of these landmarks was what he no doubt was using to be sure that he held the rag to the handrail long enough to have polished all of it. (63)

As Howie pays attention to the way in which the handrails are cleaned, becoming attuned to an other’s perspective, he uncovers the various minutiae involved in the process. The surface of the handrail reveals an entire geography, bearing the traces of its history like so many signposts that might be used to complete the task at hand. But it is this very notion of completion that *The Mezzanine* finally interrogates, since, like its footnotes that gesture toward narrative comprehensiveness while always leading the narrative farther afield, the interrelation between processes and their transformation from one to another keeps the whole open and changeable.

Howie does his part, however, to ensure the cleanliness of the building, taking hold of the handrail that is not currently being polished, for to grab the one on which the maintenance man was now working would be “like walking on a newly mopped floor: it would have heightened the always nearby sense of the futility of building maintenance” (64). Building maintenance is a precarious business: it seeks to repair and redress the cumulative effects of all the activities coalescing under one roof. It constitutes its own plane of activity, taking as its points of reference the circumstantial and collective by-products of all *other* planes of activity. Again, we have multiple, co-present planes that are both separate and interactive. When the narrator returns to this image in the novel’s last lines, having finally arrived at the mezzanine, the plateau in the middle, and thus ending the ride up the escalator and the narrative’s own *gradus*, we should pay notice:

At the very end of the ride, I caught sight of a cigarette butt rolling and hopping against the comb plate where the grooves disappeared. I stepped onto the mezzanine and turned to watch it for a few seconds. Its movement was a faster version of the rotation of mayonnaise or peanut butter or olive jars, or cans of orange juice or soup, when they are caught at the end of supermarket conveyor belts, their labels circling around and around—Hellman’s! Hellman’s! Hellman’s!—something I had loved to see when I was little. I looked down the great silver glacier to the lobby. The maintenance man was at the bottom. I waved to him. He held up his white rag for a second, then put it back down on the rubber handrail. (135)

I have quoted *The Mezzanine*’s short, final chapter in full here. It concerns the ways in which endings operate, and appropriately enough in this novel, it makes several references to details buried in the text’s earlier pages. The cigarette butt recalls his observation of and admiration for

the way that cigarettes jump and spark when they're thrown out of moving cars at night, for "the farewell explosions of such intimate items, still warm from people's lips and lungs, appearing just beyond your headlights and then washed out by them, as you passed the still wildly spinning and tumbling butt that was traveling at forty miles an hour to your sixty five" (58). These sparking cigarettes unfurl their own associations for the narrator, recalling the way that apple or pear cores, when thrown from the windows of moving cars, "shrink away into the perspective of the road behind the car,... suddenly changed from something I held in my hand to something not mine that would come to rest on a stretch of highway which had no particular distinguishing feature, a place between human places, as litter" (58). In Baker's novel, it's hard not to make the connections between these images and reading processes themselves. As a public artifact, the text is not unlike the discarded cigarette; the author needn't let the novel go, but once he has, it exists in a middle-space that awaits its enlivening through other individuals, processing its myriad interconnectivity. As readers of *The Mezzanine*, we too must leave the text behind, with lives heading out in other directions, but not without having traveled its narrative thoroughfares and by-ways. Our critical practice holds the potential to invest the novel with distinguishing features by making our own connections with it, by wresting it from one place between human places, as a closed book on a shelf, perhaps, and then later, constructing for it a *new* in-between space, a space made subjective, that keeps its connective potential open and operative.

The cigarette butt that Howie sees caught at the foot of the mezzanine, at the division between two separate planes, provides for his connection to other events, again to *other* planes of activity. And even though it recalls things the narrator once loved to see, we can assume that he no longer loves them, given his earlier admonition against disingenuously claiming to like things only when one was young if one still likes them now: he has moved into new affective territories,

having entered a new plane of affection separate from and yet interwoven with its precursor, the middle plane of the mezzanine itself. The cigarette butt also represents a detail looming on the maintenance man's futural horizon. Even while he cleans the escalator's handrails, there are processes at work preparing for his movement into other events. But it's the handrails themselves that are most important here. With Howie finally atop the escalator, planted as firmly as he can be on the mezzanine at the novel's end, and the maintenance man still at ground level in the lobby, all that remains between them is the escalator: three planes of interaction. And while Howie himself may have to move sequentially from one plane to the other, his goodbye wave *creates its own plane* as an interactive surface between subjectivities. The maintenance man, quite literally and physically connected to the lobby, waves back with his white rag, thus connecting with Howie and by extension with the mezzanine, leaping across and between all the planes at once, with the effect of leaving a small section of the handrail uncleaned. What transpires between Howie and the maintenance man, separated spatially by the in-between space of the escalator, thus *affects* this in-between space in a way that prevents it from becoming uniform: it creates an asymmetry, a unique effect, in the very plane neither subject occupies. "[T]he all-embracing definition of what a clean office building really was" is left unrealized because the interaction *itself* between separate planes keeps each of them differentiated with respect to itself and the others (62). It's interesting to note, finally, that the gesture mobilizing this interaction is nothing other than a farewell, marking not simply the end of one process and the beginning of another, but a *transformational event* in its own right that puts all of the processes on all of the planes into a changeful relation: two waves emanate from separate planes, from the lobby and the mezzanine, putting into operation the effects of the surface between them, a third plane of pure interactivity.

Søren Pold argues that *The Mezzanine*'s "narrative coherence lies in the smallest details and how they connect to other small details" (146). By following some of the text's narrative threads, I have tried to demonstrate how its rhizomatic structure and strategy always throws it into new expressive territories, with connective potentials proliferating in multiple directions by virtue of an always operating, interactive surface of effects. One final detail suggests that Baker, too, was wise to this process. In choosing his narrator's name, *Howie*, Baker puts at the centre of the text's narration a question, a problem, not about who, what, when, where, or even why things occur, but *how* they occur, *how* they interact, and *how* anything might be conceived. Answering these questions requires an attention to a multiplicity of becomings, to processes themselves in relation, such that we are always thrown in the middle of an event overflowing its own boundaries.

Chapter Six

“Becoming-Outside”: The Event of Death in Don DeLillo’s *Cosmopolis* and Paul Auster’s *The Music of Chance*

To die: as if we only died in the infinitive. To die: the reflection in the mirror perhaps, the mirroring of an absence of figure, less the image of someone or something that was not there than an effect of invisibility, touching on nothing profound and only too superficial to let itself be grasped or even recognized. As if the invisible distributed itself in filigree, without the distribution of points of visibility being there for anything, thus not in the intimacy of the design, but too much on the outside, in an exteriority of being of which being bears no marks.

—Maurice Blanchot

I left Chapters Two and Three, treating works by Don DeLillo and Paul Auster, respectively, with one pressing subject held in reserve: the event of death. In this final chapter, I want to return to these works, situating my interests in subjectivity in relation to this quintessential encounter with the limit. I will discuss *Cosmopolis* and *The Music of Chance* independently, since each novel attends to its representations of death with particular emphases upon my three titular concepts, chance, choice, and change. But before going further, it will be helpful to lay a theoretical foundation for our thinking about death. Of course, as Jeff Malpas and Robert C. Solomon note, “There is an ancient tradition that says that philosophy is essentially concerned with death—whether with understanding it, reconciling oneself to it or preparing oneself for its inevitable arrival” (1). Writing about death means lending one’s voice to an unfathomably large and diverse chorus. I hope, then, to make some sense of the issue by limiting my work to a consideration of the concept of the event as I have developed it over my preceding chapters.

I will turn again to Deleuze as a springboard for my thinking. For even though his work has been called a “philosophy of life” (Baugh 78), death does play a pivotal role in his theory of

the event. He writes in *The Logic of Sense*, for example, that “death and its wound are not simply events among other events. Every event is like death, double and impersonal in its double” (152). There is something about death that crystallizes the operation of the event, that expresses its operation in a kind of pure form. Deleuze defines this “something,” asking first, “Why is every event a kind of plague, war, wound, or death? Is this simply to say that there are more unfortunate than fortunate events? No, this is not the case, since the question here is about the double structure of every event” (*Logic of Sense* 151). All events are constituted and constitutive of this double structure, but it is in death that we might see it most forcefully displayed. As André Pierre Colombat asserts, “Deleuze’s theory of the event... makes of death the Event par excellence.... [However, his] philosophy is not centered on the concept of death.... [but is instead] the product of a vitalism of the force” (240). We might add that in Deleuze’s hands, and in the midst of any event, all vitalism takes up the problematic of a double structure.

Inspired particularly by Blanchot’s work in *The Space of Literature*, Deleuze contends that there are always two sides to the event of death or dying:

In one case, it is my life, which seems too weak for me and slips away at a point which, in a determined relation to me, has become present. In the other case, it is I who am too weak for life, it is life which overwhelms me, scattering its singularities all about, in no relation to me, nor to a moment determinable as the present, except an impersonal instant which is divided into still-future and already-past. (*Logic of Sense* 151)

The problem is, of course, that we are speaking here about a singular death with multiple dimensionality, its two cases forming an open problematic, an instantiation of the double structure of the event itself. In the first case, death is understood as a state made actual,

grounded in the body of a subjectivity. This dimension of the event of dying concerns a subjectivity seen from the perspective of its corporeality, as a body determined through its causal relations with other bodies. Indeed, it is primarily death's power *to determine* a subjectivity that most strikingly informs this first reading: its function is to delimit and define, fixing the terms under which a subjectivity itself might be understood. We say that there is a subjectivity one moment, and then it is no longer, the moment of death resolved not as a process of transformation that a subjectivity undergoes, but as "something which I can confront in a struggle or meet at a limit, or in any case encounter in a present which causes everything to pass" (*Difference and Repetition* 112). The "I" cannot die without ceasing to be an "I"; or in other words, because death arrives "in a determined relation to me," at a moment made present in a state of affairs concerning the ego, it is made absolutely personal. That there is properly no "person" there to greet it, however, necessitates the second case or reading of death.

This second reading denies the strictly corporeal nature of the event: death also "has no relation to me at all—it is incorporeal and infinitive, impersonal, grounded only in itself" (*Logic of Sense* 151). We leave our understanding of death as an embodied state of affairs to consider it among powers, capacities, potentials, and intensities *in and of themselves*:

If the infinitives 'to die', 'to love', 'to move', 'to smile', etc., are events, it is because there is a part of them which their accomplishment is not enough to realize, a becoming in itself which constantly both awaits us and precedes us, like a third person of the infinitive, a fourth person singular. Yes, dying is engendered in our bodies, comes about in our bodies, but it comes from the Outside, singularly incorporeal. (*Dialogues II* 65)

Dying becomes expressive of a *way* of being rather than a state of being; it too becomes one of the infinitive verbs, those pure and definitive potentials, along whose surface the event plays out.

Accordingly, one's death is never one's own since there is nothing here to possess nor anyone to possess it, but merely a mode of expressivity that inheres and subsists apart from anything determinable as an individual or person: there is only the event, with no relation to a self, as such—with everything occurring in a relation of exteriority, as the exposure to the outside that marks the real. This outside is nothing other than the insubstantial and contracted effectuation of the event itself where nothing exists or remains, where only infinitive powers and capacities swarm. More than once, Deleuze admiringly quotes Joe Bousquet's line, "My wound existed before me, I was born to embody it" (*Dialogues II* 65, *Logic of Sense* 148). At the level of the surface effect, all of our events can be seen to await us and thus to arrive from the outside, since our becomings traverse those effects that are the potentials resonating among events themselves. "Everything was in order with the events of my life before I made them mine," Bousquet proclaims (qtd. in *Logic of Sense* 148), and it is here that we see the power of infinitive becomings: even as we engender the event in our own bodies, it retains its own power as *a way of being* independent from us, never fully exhausted by its actualization. This side of the event cannot be realized or manifest corporeally because it is fundamentally in and of potential, a communication of pure surface effects. Death, in this reading, does not enter into relation with the individual, but is instead "grounded only in itself" as an effect immanent within the event (*Logic of Sense* 151). People themselves, then, do indeed die, but only insofar as they become expressive of the impersonal power *to die*. It is a matter of always seeing subjectivity fundamentally as an expressivity of effects. "We're not at all sure we're persons," Deleuze notes in one interview: "a draft, a wind, a day, a time of day, a stream, a place, a battle, an illness all have a nonpersonal individuality" (*Negotiations* 141). Likewise, because a subjectivity is always becoming with and as an effect of the world, never severing itself from an effusion of surface

effects, death itself assumes its nonpersonal dimension. In the event of dying, a subjectivity gives expression to and is expressive of the very potentials of the world.

Deleuze cites Blanchot with regards to the event of dying and its implications for subjectivity: “‘It is the abyss of the present, the time without present with which I have no relation, toward which I am unable to project myself. For in it *I* do not die. I forfeit the power of dying. In this abyss they (*on*) die—they never cease to die, and they never succeed in dying’” (qtd. in *Logic of Sense* 152). Blanchot appears to invoke a time of pure becoming in the middle of an instant made ideal, real, but not actual. Curiously, the pure instant itself is abyssal, a time indistinguishable from eternity, precisely because it is *without* present: it is difference itself, a vital operation or becoming as a surface effect. The moment of death *is not* since the infinitely contracted instant concerns change itself, always dividing the present in two directions at once. No expressive effect is grounded *within* anything else, as if my death, for example, were my own, made sensual with relation to myself as its point of reference and origin, but rather all effects co-mingle in their own relations: what I am, then, is an event giving expression to the surface refulgence of so many singularities, so many pure effects. Taking up Blanchot’s reference to “they” in the event of dying, Deleuze writes, “It is the ‘they’ of impersonal and pre-individual singularities, the ‘they’ of the pure event wherein *it* dies in the same way that *it* rains” (*Logic of Sense* 152). The “they” of pre-individual singularities does not itself die, for “It’s organisms that die, not life” (*Negotiations* 143). Singularities are expressive, never to be confused with things. So long as we remain fixed to our conception of subjectivity as an identifiable thing and not as an expressive capacity or zone of affectivity, we will acknowledge only the first reading of death.

But as soon as we pay witness to subjectivity as an aggregate collection of potentials in and of themselves, as so many sensations and affections *giving* expression to the body itself, no longer can we regard death as something merely personal. This is why Deleuze, for his part, echoes Blanchot, insisting that “The event is that no one ever dies, but has always just died or is always going to die, in the empty present of the Aion, that is, in eternity” (*Logic of Sense* 63). One does not have the capacity to die since this capacity is *its own effect*, its own infinitive becoming that bodies may express but with which they may never be made identical. The empty present of the Aion, or Blanchot’s “time without present,” is nothing other than the power of virtual becomings, always distinct from but taken up by states of affairs or bodily mixtures. To say that the instant is without present is to forward an ontology of change, where encountering involves a becoming-determinate of things themselves. In the midst of the empty present, then, in the instant made ideal, “the impersonality of dying no longer indicates only the moment when I disappear outside of myself, but rather the moment when death loses itself in itself, and also the figure which the most singular life takes on in order to substitute itself for me” (*Logic of Sense* 153). Death is a transformative event of the surface, of effects in relation, that never resides; “it is always and at the same time something which has just happened and something about to happen” (*Logic of Sense* 63). That is, the moment of death itself is not something to be lived, nor something with any tangible presence, since it is essentially an expressive transformation of affective potentials themselves. In a word, in the event of dying we become an anonymous, changeful expressivity of the real where no proper self subsides. Our death arrives only once, but in its most contracted effectuation, *we have no perspective with which to encounter it*. A process of encountering replaces us as an operation of the event at its surface, where the moment exists only through and as its division and diffraction from itself, from both sides of its

becomings. “The moment of death is ungraspable,” Brian Massumi writes; “[in it there is] no present, only the scintillating abyss of a future-past” (*User’s Guide* 20).

The Event of Death in Cosmopolis

In DeLillo’s *Cosmopolis*, we are told at the conclusion of the novel’s first section that its protagonist, Eric Packer, was “trying to summon the will to speak the single word that would turn off the lights. Nothing existed around him. There was only the noise in his head, the mind in time. When he died he would not end. The world would end” (6). Immediately, the novel raises the event of dying as a problematic for our understanding of subjectivity. The idiomatic expression, “trying to summon the will,” is germane to my reading. Eric’s relation to his own will, placing it at some distance from himself, speaks to the fracturing implicit to any subjectivity made eventful, a point I raised in Chapter Two. The very power to make an event unfold remains outside of him, and it is only by opening himself to this outside, that is, by aligning himself with a force with which he cannot identify but to which he lends expression, that any action becomes possible; a fissuring is effected, replete with hesitations, gaps, and delays within subjectivity itself. We should note, however, that Eric actively *tries* to become agential, that a certain will operates even as it attempts to give birth, as it were, to itself. It is not a simple matter of attributing the will to a person as a self-sufficient, self-determining agent: the will is instead layered, a self-differentiating process, enfolding on itself, at once deferred and perfectly immanent with respect to its multiple dimensions. Deleuze notes this complex operation when he writes that “It is not easy to think in terms of the event. All the harder since thought itself then becomes an event” (*Dialogues II* 66). Again, the event betrays a double structure, with

transformational becomings on both sides: *what* we think constructs the event just as *the event of thinking itself* ramifies what must be thought.

For Eric, the very existence of *things* around him dissolves as this drama of the event unfolds. There's only "the noise in his head," a disruptive white noise, perhaps, "the mind in time." We see a last glimmer of the event's solidity here, as if the mind alone remains substantial, with the power to say "it is." We might contend, however, that the mind represents the rising to the surface of the incorporeal dimension of the event—it never ceases to distinguish itself from the *brain* as its spectral effect, as the *way* through which the brain itself becomes along the line between an embodied state of affairs and a pure expressivity, along the line of thinking. The novel then asserts that Eric will be *excluded* from his own death insofar as he might be that "thing" which dies. There is indeed an ending of sorts here. As Massumi says, "In itself, the event has only extinction. Its accomplishment is its evaporation in the infinite play of its seething components. The uniqueness of the event means that its happening is always also its undoing" (*User's Guide* 20). In other words, the singularity of the event not only substitutes a play of expressive potentials, of verbs in the infinitive, for what we might conventionally call a "person," but it does so in a way that allows nothing to remain. Seen from the perspective of its singularity, the event's effectuation is always also its annihilation; this is why it is not quite a substance but a pure effect, a unique expressivity. It "is" only the perfectly singular becomings that it unleashes, the potentials for change that it mobilizes, never a thing itself since it is not of its nature to fully arrive, to become merely actual. We might finally say that its simultaneous accomplishment and evaporation is nothing other than the scene of change it produces. "Eric Packer," the self, ceases to make sense at this crossing of the threshold. Indeed, the world's particular range of expressivity effected through its connections with a living, breathing Eric will

shift at the moment of death, but seen in this light, every death, every end is suffused with a power of nonpersonal transformation. The end is shot through with all the vitalism proper to change itself.

Between the first and second chapters of *Cosmopolis*, we're given a brief interlude entitled "The Confessions of Benno Levin," a tract written by Eric's assassin, that begins with the following declaration: "He is dead, word for word" (55). Later in the novel, a second installment of the confessions is made, but it precedes the first in terms of diegetic time, with Eric still alive and Levin planning his attack, with the event of their confrontation still awaiting them. The layout of the novel, that is, does not follow a strict linear progression, highlighting its complicated treatment of time. The confessions, for their part, move toward the past while the primary narrative proceeds chronologically, albeit with temporal paradoxes punctuated here and there. The work's playful approach to time, and its two narrative registers, one in the third-person, the other in the first, become important in light of its interest in the event of dying: the double structure of *Cosmopolis* should give us pause. From Levin's confession we learn of Eric's categorical death; the moment has arrived when death becomes present in his person, *though the novel never represents it as something happening*. The two confessions stand on either side of Eric's death, where Eric is either already dead or still alive. Levin concludes the first confession, post-encounter, with a commentary on representation:

I thought I would spend whatever number of years it takes to write ten thousand pages and then you would have the record, the literature of a life awake and asleep, because dreams too, and little stabs of memory, and all the pitiful habits and concealments, and all the things around me would be included, noises in the street, but I understand for the first time, now, this minute, that all the thinking and writing in the world will not describe

what I felt in the awful moment when I fired the gun and saw him fall. So what is left that's worth the telling? (61)

Here we see an interest in providing a comprehensive account of a life, a totalized, textual representation of Levin's life that would include even those things around him. The moment of Eric's death, however, frustrates the effort, and even though Levin himself does not die in that moment, something akin to death takes place for him. An infinity of description holds no purchase when confronted by the affective singularity of the moment itself, in whose grasp Levin is transported beyond thinking, writing, and all representation. It would appear that *Cosmopolis* does not merely focus upon Eric's death as an event for him to confront, but that Levin, too, becomes enmeshed in its singular expression; it is Eric who dies, and it is Levin who kills him, but the event of their encounter occurs *between* them, with a becoming-unlimited that affects the one as much as the other, albeit in two entirely distinct ways.

The novel takes special pains to present the encounter between Eric and Levin as something directed by chance no less than destiny. Levin makes a threat by phone to "the intelligence unit of [Eric's] firm" (58), a company with which he was until recently employed. "They took the threat to be credible," Levin writes, "which I knew they had to do, considering my knowledge of the firm and the personnel. But I didn't know how to track him down. He moved about the city without pattern" (56). Having made this threat but not knowing how to make good on it, Levin simply retires to his derelict apartment. His phone-call, however, is enough to set things in motion. The novel then plays out like a self-fulfilling prophecy, with Eric's haphazard decisions leading him right to Levin's doorstep. It is crucial to note that when Levin makes his threat it is entirely innocuous, but because it is interpreted as credible, it becomes effective. To rephrase, the way the threat is treated, received, and interpreted produces

effects that lead to its eventual fruition; the threat itself has no reality outside the communicating relations that effect its actualization. Eric himself wants to confront the threat, to feel the sense of urgency it provides, but he has no better idea of how to produce it than Levin has. He merely moves from one disconnected episode to another, cruising the streets of New York and severing his attachments to colleagues, friends, and family until “He’d been emptied of everything but a sense of surpassing stillness, a fatedness that felt disinterested and free” (136). Eric’s confrontation with Levin, then, along with the event of dying itself, asks us to conceptualize this counterintuitive fatedness that is *itself* free and disinterested, that is, open, *selfless*, and impersonal.

We can start by looking at the moment just preceding the novel’s climax. Eric finds himself, finally, in Hell’s Kitchen:

He stood in the street. There was nothing to do. He hadn’t realized this could happen to him. The moment was empty of urgency and purpose. He hadn’t planned on this.

Where was the life he’d always led? There was nowhere he wanted to go, nothing to think about, no one waiting. How could he take a step in any direction if all directions were the same?

Then there was a shot. (180)

The moment has arrived: Eric is under attack. But not before an utter passivity takes hold, a passivity marked by his having become unmoored from the things that made his life sensible, from the connections that identified him as someone representable to himself. The moment is bereft of urgency and purpose precisely because Eric is unable to *act* so as to manifest the threat as something imminent; *as an event*, the threat bears no relation to him since it occurs “in accordance with the laws of an obscure, humourous conformity” (*Logic of Sense* 149), through

the relations between events themselves and not through anything reducible to a purposive will or subject. He has merely prepared for the event, but it is the event alone that awaits him as much as it awaits Levin, the event toward which both are powerless to move. We might protest that, in all of his acts, thoughts, and feelings, in all of his capricious movements throughout the day, Eric has unwittingly and in some way *caused* this confrontation with Levin, as if the event were something explainable, in principle, with reference to only its causal components. We would then fall back into a purely deterministic reading. The event, again, certainly “results from bodies, their mixtures, their actions, and their passions. But it differs in nature from that of which it is the result” (*Logic of Sense* 182). This difference between the event and its causes is one of expressive potential, and it is, too, the mark of a disinterested freedom proper to fate. When Eric is seized by a kind of immobility of the will, incapable of taking a step in any direction because all directions have become the same, the event arrives from the outside with its own directionality. Indeed, all directions become the same only when the moment has become perfectly eventful, an open *question* (how could he take a step?) that is no sooner asked than it is already taking up its connections in some *other* direction. In the midst of the event, there is no vantage from which to judge any action, since everything takes place as a torsion of vantage itself, as an autonomous process. Eric is thus no longer the point of reference from which directions might be measured or even made measurable, but expresses a power of becoming-other *as* an event, as part of the event’s multiplicitous unfolding. Levin calls out Eric’s name from his apartment, reinforcing the intimate, personal nature of the conflict, but the event of their meeting *itself* remains impersonal. Eric enters Levin’s apartment, his own gun blazing without aim, repeating to himself his doctor’s advice with regards to his asymmetrical prostate: “Let it express itself” (186).

We might wish to echo Levin's first words to Eric: "What are you doing here?" (187). For even though Levin has wished for nothing else but to kill Eric, and even though Eric has done all he can to precipitate this meeting, their confrontation arrives with all the impenetrability of fate: neither man has known where the other is, but here they now stand, face to face. Neither Eric nor Levin has acted in any purposive way to create *this* event as if it could have been foreseen or intended, as if it were something personal. With respect to the event itself, both men are entirely anonymous, as it charts its own meandering course as a relation *between* its terms.

The novel's final, tragicomic scene finds the two men sitting across from each other, discussing everything from the forces at work in bringing them together, to the correspondences between patterns in nature and stock market fluctuations, to the causes and reasons for violence. Not surprisingly, the event of Eric's death itself is problematic. Levin attributes his desire to kill Eric to his own sense of meaninglessness, as if through this murder he might finally "count for something" (187); his last words to Eric express his desperate need: "I wanted you to save me" (204). Levin thus invokes a morality of salvation, as if his life were not something to be lived, but something to be saved. In a word, he acts through *ressentiment*, out of a repugnance for his own life. Eric is unable to reciprocate the "nearness of feeling and experience" he hears in Levin's voice, and realizes that "even the death [Levin] felt so necessary to his deliverance would do nothing, change nothing" (204). All that remains for Eric is the event of his own death.

DeLillo then introduces the last of four episodes in which Eric witnesses a digitized reproduction of an event *before* it occurs as a bodily state of affairs. In the three previous cases, Eric has seen himself as he will be in the future, and this case is no different. He turns to look at his watch and notices it is no longer showing the time, but instead shows an image of his own

face: the watch doubles as an “electron camera,.... a device so microscopically refined it was almost pure information. It was almost metaphysics” (204). It is supposed to relay “live” images of its immediate environment, and it appears to be in working order, showing on its crystal face the image of a beetle crawling on a wire overhead as Eric moves his wrist:

Then something changed around him. He didn’t know what this could mean. What could this mean? He realized he’d known this feeling before, tenuously, not nearly so dense and textured, and the image on the screen was a body now, facedown on the floor. He felt a blood hush, a pause in midbeing. There were no bodies in plain sight....

Whose body and when? Have all the worlds conflated, all possible states become present at once? (205)

Wherever Eric directs the watch, its face shows only this lifeless body. Interestingly, the “something” that changes arrives like a shift in the atmosphere: it comes from the outside, it is *of* the outside, but Eric feels it all the same, having no idea how to represent it to himself. The shift strikes him in a way similar to the experience of *déjà vu*, but here it is vivified and rich, a kind of middle space where time becomes utterly chaotic: he appears to be looking back upon his own death even while he still lives. The novel thus represents the event of his death as a destiny, as something perfectly unavoidable, and yet it is his *living* of that destiny that keeps it mobile and open, as an event that is nothing other than its own unfolding.

Inside his watch, Eric’s body is whisked away to a morgue and identified by a tag on its wrist reading “Male Z,” “the designation for the bodies of unidentified men” (206), as if in death he has become perfectly anonymous. He recognizes himself in this image, comically and paradoxically announcing, “Oh shit I’m dead” (206). “He’d always wanted to become quantum dust,” we’re told, “transcending his body mass, the soft tissue over the bones, the muscle and fat.

The idea was to live outside the given limits, in a chip, on a disk, as data, in whirl, in radiant spin, a consciousness saved from void” (206). His desire here is to identify himself as pure information, as if he were translatable, representable, and thus *equivalent to* other terms, perhaps a complex series of zeroes and ones in binary code. In a word, he had always wanted to stave off the singularity of his subjectivity itself, to render it the same as something else. Contrariwise, DeLillo clearly insists upon the eventfulness of subjectivity. In one particularly rich passage, he writes:

But [Eric’s] pain interfered with his immortality. It was crucial to his distinctiveness, too vital to be bypassed and not susceptible, he didn’t think, to computer emulation. The things that made him who he was could hardly be identified much less converted to data, the things that lived and milled in his body, everywhere, random, riotous, billions of trillions, in the neurons and peptides, the throbbing temple vein, in the veer of his libidinous intellect. So much come and gone, this is who he was, the lost taste of milk licked from his mother’s breast, the stuff he sneezes when he sneezes, this is him, and how a person becomes the reflection he sees in a dusty window when he walks by. He’d come to know himself, untranslatably, through his pain. (207)

As a subjectivity made eventful, Eric is a vital and unique process of sensation, something distinctive while random: the expressive singularities that comprise his subjectivity cannot even be identified since they remain perfectly themselves *as events*, without representation. He is also the process by which *a* person, any person, becomes as an immanence of the world; he becomes a surface effect confusing the categories of inside and outside, seeing himself as an event of the outside, reflected in and by the environment that surrounds him as much as it creates him. It is the sensation of pain itself, finally, that operates as the surface through which he becomes a

fractured multiplicity, a unique *relation* between subject and object, between a knowing and that which is known.

Deleuze writes that “One... acts in order to have done all that which depended on one in order to attain the end.... The sage waits for the event, that is to say, *understands the pure event* in its eternal truth, independently of its spatio-temporal actualization, as something eternally yet-to-come and always already passed according to the line of the Aion” (*Logic of Sense* 146). Indeed, as Eric is caught up in the middle of the event, his very witnessing of what goes on around him plays out along this double structure: watching his own corpse on-screen becomes something that must *have been done* in order for him to die, just as it remains precisely that which keeps his death *on a futural horizon*. Even as the event falls from the outside as a figure of fate, it remains perfectly changeful and bifurcated, traversing its two sides at once. The chance or freedom proper to the event is thus never that which might be determined in opposition to a particular end, as a measure of difference between two possible outcomes, but is the pure expressivity spinning out from *within the middle* of its own operation: “The event,” again, “is not what occurs (an accident), it is rather inside what occurs, the purely expressed” (*Logic of Sense* 149). The last paragraph of the novel shifts into the present tense, and in this tensile present, forever split into an already-past and a yet-to-come, Eric awaits the arrival of the event: “he closes his eyes one more time. This is not the end. He is dead inside the crystal of his watch but still alive in original space, waiting for the shot to sound” (209). Death, finally, is not even *something* for which Eric can wait—he waits, instead, for the sound of Levin’s gun, without the power to die, since the encounter with death is a subjectless and singular expressivity. Of all four of the novel’s episodes in which Eric observes events that have yet to occur “in original space,” his death is the only one he never catches up with, the only one he does not *live*. It is an

event torn forever in two directions, a becoming that inheres only from the perspective of a future-past, an impersonal instant without present, arriving from an absolute outside. Eric does in fact expire, we know, in a moment of unrepresentable actualization to which Levin is a witness. But the event of death nevertheless maintains its virtual dimension to which there may be no witness; in its midst is released only the purely expressed. As Deleuze claims, this second side to death “refers to the state of free differences when they are no longer subject to the form imposed upon them by an I or an ego, when they assume a shape which excludes *my* own coherence no less than that of any identity whatsoever” (*Difference and Repetition* 113). It is the unfolding of the event, where only the event subsists as an emanation and play of pure singularities. And even as everything plays out as if it were perfectly predetermined, this does not mean it happens all at once. The difference proper to the event involves its singular unfolding, or in Eric’s case, the difference between an original space and its ghostly double.

The Event of Death in The Music of Chance

In Chapter Three, I made reference to an intriguing line in Auster’s novel describing its protagonist, Nashe, and the attitude he brings to severing those connections that keep him tied to an image of himself: “He felt like a man who had finally found the courage to put a bullet through his head—but in this case the bullet was not death, it was life, it was the explosion that triggers the birth of new worlds” (10). The “life” that is unleashed here is a creative and connective potential that elaborates new forms with their own forever shifting connective contours. This event is opposed to death precisely because it is not constituted with reference to any particular form, but instead involves only transformation *between* forms, always concerning

their changeful capacities for expression. In our first reading of death, we find that someone has died only by resolving him or her with reference to an identity, by suggesting that it is “*this* difference represented by the I or the ego” that dies (*Difference and Repetition* 113). But in the midst of a death that involves no proper person, or rather, that involves differences *themselves* as opposed to the difference we designate by the ego, only an impersonal event unfolds, irreducible to any form with which we might attempt to delimit it. In Nashe’s case, his bullet triggers the birth not of a new self, but of *new worlds*, of new expressive dimensions proper to the real: in other words, he appreciates himself here as an event and not as a subject.

Commentators on *The Music of Chance* have variously interpreted its ending. It does indeed appear that Nashe confronts death in the novel’s final pages, driving his car directly into an on-coming headlight, but we need to attend closely to how this confrontation plays out, to *think through* the event of death, even if it means thinking about a moment in which all thought is suspended. It seems wholly inadequate to suggest, as Ilana Shiloh does, that “at the end of *The Music of Chance*, no hope is left” (505). Nor should we echo Laura Moss’s laconic assumption that “Finally Nashe dies” (707). In this instance, we would do much better to listen to what Auster has to say about his own novel:

The book had to end before the end, so to speak. I mean, there is no conclusion—something is about to happen, but you don’t know what the result is going to be.

Whether Nashe lives or dies is almost unimportant. The important thing is that he has triumphed. By the end of the book, he has transcended everything he had been—he’s become, I think, a great figure—a truly powerful human being who understands himself and what he’s capable of... and what this means is that he’s willing to take the world as it comes to him. If death is what’s coming, he’s willing to face that, too. He’s not afraid

anymore, he's not afraid of anything. So whether the car crashes or whether he manages to elude the on-coming headlights, whether he dies or whether he lives is much less important than the inner victory he's won at that moment. (Irwin 116)

Auster is after something extraordinarily similar to what DeLillo offers in *Cosmopolis*: both novels complicate their endings by presenting an event from which there appears no escape, that has in some sense already occurred under the influence of an unshakable determinism or a coexistence between separate levels of the present, and yet at the same time remains open and emergent as something always "about to happen." Auster also dismisses the importance of the result, as if the life or death of Nashe as a resulting state of affairs pales next to the way in which the event is confronted. But in what sense is Nashe empowered here? Does he become a "truly powerful human being" because, in the event's uttermost contraction, he assumes a perfect passivity that amounts to the elision of agency? We can't help but notice the Nietzschean ring here: Nashe's power is effected by superseding judgment with an affirmation for whatever occurs. He is no longer a figure of *ressentiment*. Understanding how *The Music of Chance* represents this affirmation will require a close look at its final scene, and we will clearly have to grapple once again with, among other things, the function of choice.

Having worked to erect a stone wall for three and a half months, Nashe finally pays off his and Pozzi's gambling debts to Flower and Stone on the afternoon of his thirty-fourth birthday. He has "[brought] himself back to zero" (204), with no outstanding obligations to anyone. As Murks, supervisor of Nashe's work in the meadow, says, "*You're a free man now!*" (205). Nashe wants only to continue the work on the wall, to earn enough money to afford transportation from the compound, and most importantly, to learn the truth about what has happened to his friend Pozzi, whose failed escape from the estate left him beaten within an inch

of his life. In order to celebrate this new-found freedom, Murks invites Nashe out to drinks with himself and his son-in-law, Floyd, offering even to cover the cost of the evening. For Nashe, who has laboured under an exacting system of exchange whereby nothing is given or taken without registering an outstanding payment, Murks's offer is met initially with suspicion, though he eventually relents. The novel, however, is not quite finished with its interrogation of exchange, with how it creates relations of power between people that influence a course of events.

The three men ride to town in what once was Nashe's car, the red Saab in which he began his aimless journey across the United States nearly a year and a half ago and which he lost to Flower and Stone in the poker game that spawned "the real story of his life" (215). The car now belongs to Murks, with Nashe a passenger in its backseat. As they make their way to the bar, Nashe hears the voices of Murks and Floyd blur "with the sound of the engine, producing a low, continuous hum that vibrated in his ears, a lulling music that sang along his skin and dug down into the depths of his body" (208). The reference to music here, developed as a recurring theme throughout the novel and repeated still later in its final pages, sets the stage for what is to follow. I have argued elsewhere that subjectivity can be usefully conceived as a zone of affectivity, and for Nashe, that zone appears to split into two, with one dimension traversing the surface of his skin, the lining between inner and outer, and the other dimension taking root in the depths of his body. This multi-dimensionality roughly approximates the very fracturing that the event of death itself inspires in Deleuze's analysis, with its one side turned always toward an incorporeal, surface activity and its other toward an actualization in a bodily mixture.

Nashe becomes relatively unconcerned with trying to define what's going on around him. He realizes that "[He] had no idea where he was. They could still be in Pennsylvania, he

thought, but then again, they could have crossed the river and gone into New Jersey. For a brief moment, he considered asking Murks which state they were in, but then decided that he didn't care" (208). He recognizes for the first time, too, that he knows next to nothing about Murks, a man with whom he's spent nearly every day for the past few months: "Murks was a creature who existed wholly in the present for him, and beyond that present he was nothing, a being as insubstantial as a shadow or a thought" (209). Nashe, we might say, begins to open up to a present divorced from any context that would render it identifiable; he knows where he is no more than he knows whom he is with, and this is "precisely how [he] wanted it," to keep up with a fluxional present in which his perspective is left undefined (210).

Nevertheless, Nashe develops an opinion about his company. Floyd, in particular, becomes more odious as their conversation goes on. Nashe senses in him a "desperate desire to please," a "fawning timidity," and a "lostness in the eyes," all of which suggests that he may have been involved in the beating of Pozzi: "To look at him, you would never think he would harm a soul—but he had harmed Jack that night, Nashe was sure of it, and it was precisely that emptiness inside him that had made it possible, that immense chasm of want. It wasn't that Floyd was a cruel or violent person, but he was big and strong and ever so willing" (211). Every time Floyd "turned his eyes in Murks's direction, it was as though he were looking at a god," and Nashe surmises that Floyd would follow unquestioningly his father-in-law's every request, even if it meant nearly killing a man (211). Floyd's "emptiness," it appears, defines his desire in terms of a fundamental and internal lack; like Benno Levin in *Cosmopolis*, he demonstrates a need to be redeemed in the eyes of an other. Even in committing acts of violence or cruelty, Floyd is essentially *reactive*, his every gesture predicated on a willingness to be led, on an obedience to a god to whom his "immense chasm of want" attributes the power to validate. It

remains to be seen how Nashe, on the other hand, takes a becoming-active to its extremities in the event of his own death, but we can anticipate that it will pay little heed to a functioning of lack or any form of judgment.

The Music of Chance returns to its gambling motif when Floyd challenges Nashe to a game of pool. Nashe suggests that they play for ten dollars a game, the very amount of his hourly wage while working on the wall in the meadow, thereby risking to fall back into debt just when he's freed himself from his contractual obligations. He doesn't stop taking risks even when he has nothing left to wager. We're reminded of Auster's claim that Nashe is no longer afraid of anything. If he falls back into the red, he will simply live accordingly, without resentment, following the path that opens before him. He no longer acts with a clear attachment to any particular and prospective outcome, but instead lends expression to occurring itself. Perhaps he does, in fact, have something with which to wager, namely, the willingness to continue becoming-other. In the pool games themselves, Nashe plays

with a skill and precision that surpassed anything he had done before. He felt utterly happy and loose, and once he fell into the rhythm of the clicking, tumbling balls, the stick began to glide through his fingers as if it were moving on its own. He won the first four games by steadily increasing margins..., and then won the fifth game before Floyd could even take a turn. (212)

Nashe's play here recalls Pozzi's description of a good night at the poker tables, a passage I commented on in my earlier chapter: "It's like the whole world suddenly falls into place. You're kind of outside your body, and for the rest of the night you sit there watching yourself perform miracles. It doesn't really have anything to do with you anymore" (136-37). Likewise for Nashe, he merges with a process or a rhythm all its own in which he is no longer determinable as

an active agent. As it begins to gather force, the event itself excludes him as much as it finally excludes Floyd, until Nashe offers an explanation: “Just luck.... I’m generally pretty feeble. Things just kept falling my way tonight” (213). It were as though the event assumes its own trajectory, operating under its own power, and thus appears as the combination of so many chances owing little to the participants involved.

And when Floyd offers to pay his fifty dollar debt, Nashe refuses, asking instead for a payment in other terms: he wants to drive the car he used to own. He now finds himself in the position of creditor, and by altering the terms of exchange, he sets the event along a new path. Murks, the current owner of the car, is willing to play along, for “As long as they got where they were going, what difference did it make?” (214) They happen to be in a town called “Billings,” underscoring the fact that everything takes place as a series of transactions that keeps changing the nature of the relation between those involved (214). But the exchange here is a curious one. It allows for a sort of repetition to emerge as Nashe begins to imagine that he is back where he started, driving across America once again: “This was the only chance he would have, and he wanted to savor what had been given to him, to push the memory of who he had once been as far as it would go” (215). Taking his cue from the work of Pierre Klossowski, Deleuze makes a special point of distinguishing between exchange and true repetition in the following terms:

[E]xchange implies only resemblance, even if the resemblance is extreme. Exactness is its criterion, along with the equivalence of the exchanged products.... True repetition, on the other hand, appears as a singular behavior that we display in relation to that which cannot be exchanged, replaced, or substituted—like a poem that is repeated on the condition that no word may be changed. It is no longer a matter of an equivalence between similar things, it is not even a matter of an identity of the Same. True repetition

addresses something singular, unchangeable, and different, without ‘identity.’ Instead of exchanging the similar and identifying the Same, *it authenticates the different*. (*Logic of Sense* 287-88)

Indeed, it is a system of exchange, drawing equivalence at every turn, that puts Nashe in the driver’s seat. What was a debt of fifty dollars is exchanged for Floyd’s consent to allow Nashe to drive, and to Murks, it *makes no difference* who drives the car. What Nashe gets in settling behind the wheel, however, is something that is not within the power of either Murks or Floyd to give, nor is it something that can be exchanged: he is given a unique chance, a pure gift, perhaps, untied to any mercantile system, that reveals him as an absolute singularity. He pushes his memory of who he had once been to its utter limit, across whose threshold he surges as a difference in itself, as something expressing an internal inequality. Ultimately, then, it is not that Nashe enacts a true repetition by merely driving his Saab once again, pretending to be back where everything began. Instead, the true repetition here involves the irreducible differences between who he once was and who he is now: for Nashe, that which can be said to repeat is the becoming-different in itself proper to a pre-individual singularity, that which renders him as a relation between a plurality of selves.

Auster pushes this notion of repetition further when Nashe tunes in to a classical radio station, revisiting his earlier days on the road and marking the novel’s final return to its musical motif. What Nashe hears over the airwaves is familiar, an “andante from an eighteenth-century string quartet,... [but] the name of the composer kept eluding him” (215). “Andante,” the present participle of the Italian verb *andare*, “to go,” quite literally means “going,” thus reinforcing the pure movement to which Nashe’s subjectivity begins to lend expression in these

final pages. Identifying the composer, that is, attributing this movement to a particular person becomes impossible:

[Nashe] quickly narrowed it down to Mozart or Haydn, but after that he felt stuck. For several moments it would sound like the work of one, and then, almost immediately, it would begin to sound like something by the other. It might have been one of the quartets that Mozart dedicated to Haydn, Nashe thought, but it might have been the other way around. At a certain point, the music of both men seemed to touch, and it was no longer possible to tell them apart. And yet Haydn had lived to a ripe old age, honored with commissions and court appointments and every advantage the world of that time could offer. And Mozart had died young and poor, and his body had been thrown into a common grave. (215-16)

This passage speaks forcefully to those very dynamics at work in Nashe's subjectivity. It involves, again, a bifurcation, with repeated stops and starts across a surface that draws a relation between two. What seems to be most confused here is a concept of identity. For even if Nashe could finally determine the composer of the piece, the piece itself functions as an assemblage of *styles*, and these styles have their own impersonal ways of connecting with one another. Thus, the quartet is seen as a movement between two positions, without an identifiable point of origin. The composer of the piece is replaced by a "going" of the in-between, where Mozart moves toward Haydn as much as Haydn moves toward Mozart: an intensional movement itself with multiple directionality. A crucial zone of indeterminacy emerges where "the music of both men seemed to touch," and this zone is, indeed, what makes it a music of chance. In this middle space there is only a pure potential for connection, a touching at the surface between two sides that takes no form, but instead merely operates, mingling and scattering its variable component

parts in a virtual chaos. The beauty and wonder of this chance-inflected encounter is in how it retains difference everywhere, on both sides of the event, even as it creates a connection. Insofar as they connect in a moment that renders each imperceptible, where “it was no longer possible to tell them apart,” Haydn and Mozart become expressive as pre-individual singularities, as ways of being, and yet it is not at all the case that they become the same. Like Nashe in the present and the person he was before, the two composers themselves could not be more separate, more singular, more differentiated: each remains a singularity related through difference. We should say, then, that the andante Nashe listens to, probably the last piece of music he will ever hear, properly has no author, but instead unfolds as a singular resonance between styles of authorship.

Murks eventually turns off the radio when Nashe continues to accelerate the car, as if in contradistinction to the moderate pace of the music. Distracted from the road for a moment, Nashe turns “automatically” to tell Murks to mind his own business, and when he resumes his focus on driving “a moment later, he could already see the headlight looming up at him. It seemed to come out of nowhere, a cyclops star hurtling straight for his eyes, and in the sudden panic that engulfed him, his only thought was that this was the last thought he would ever have” (216). Everything proceeds here as if of its own accord, as if passively, without any room for agency. The brief interaction between Nashe and Murks spills onto an event from which there is no escape, an encounter made utterly imminent. In the confrontation with an absolute limit, Nashe’s thought turns upon itself: it is a thought about the end of thought, but even this keeps things from cessation. At the limit there is a positivity raging, forever confronting the limit as that which pushes it further in two directions—towards the past from the perspective of the event’s necessity, as if it were already passed, and towards the future from the perspective of the

event's expressivity, as if it were always yet to come. "There was no time to stop," Auster writes,

no time to prevent what was going to happen, and so instead of slamming his foot on the brakes, [Nashe] pressed down even harder on the gas. He could hear Murks and his son-in-law howling in the distance, but their voices were muffled, drowned by the roar of blood in his head. And then the light was upon him, and Nashe shut his eyes, unable to look at it anymore. (217)

Here we have a profound commentary on the nature of agency and willed action. As it turns out, the limit is not so absolute at all. In his interview with Mark Irwin, Auster himself sets a perfect stage for our explication: "there's a curious paradox embedded in [my work]: when the characters in my books are most confined, they seem to be most free. And when they are free to wander, they are most lost and confused" (111). For Nashe, his confinement is configured in an event he cannot avoid *but from which he still maintains a distance*. There is something like choice at this limit, but it is admittedly peculiar. It can be better conceived, I think, as a pure affirmation. Nashe is faced with something, an event, that removes from him the power to say "no," but *at the same time* creates in him the space of a will to merge with whatever is occurring, to spur it along, and thus to give it a body. It is not a choice that takes the form of an either/or proposition: the end is perfectly ineluctable, a matter of fate and destiny in its uttermost and immanent contraction. It is quite simply a divesting of all vestiges of *ressentiment*, where the subjectivity operates so as to become at once the offspring and creator of its own events; it becomes a fold in which difference itself plays out. The event thus dismantles the opposition between "yes" and "no," replacing this binary with a singular moment of affirmation, a releasing of the world. A moment of chance opens that allows Nashe to move forward, even if that gesture

means moving into the already given. In-between the already and the not-yet coincide the differential operations of chance, choice, *and* change.

Would it be correct, then, to call Nashe's encounter at the limit a suicide? Blanchot raises the intriguing problem of a subjectivity in relation with its own death: "Suicide doubtless asks life a question—is life possible? But it is more essentially a questioning of itself: *Is suicide possible?*" (*Space of Literature* 102). Again, we need to ask, is it within one's power to die, or is death, and by extension life, an effect independent of the bodies that express it? Is one identical with one's ways of being, does one choose or *cause* one's ways of being, or rather are those ways of being always in a relationship of exteriority to the subjectivity that gives them expression? We might say that one can commit suicide, as indeed Deleuze himself did on November 4, 1995, throwing himself from a third floor window, but only insofar as the incorporeal dimension of the event is actualized along its own lines of transformation. One can only act directly, for example, *on* life by merging with it, that is, with the powers it makes possible. The choice and act of committing suicide must take the form of an affirmation, an expression of force, saying "yes" to something that remains irreducibly other: death is always somewhere else, unfolding in the event itself. It is "an impersonal event provided with an always open problematic structure (where and when?)" (*Logic of Sense* 145). Life and death as coextensive ways of being, it would seem, may have little to do with purposive action or choice; they are perfectly impassive, incorporeal expressions of our capacities to affect and be affected. When Nashe closes his eyes for the last time, overwhelmed by and unable to face the light upon him, we get the sense that in the event's extremity, he forfeits the power to die: it is something that must arrive from an always outside, something toward which he may go no more than from which he may flee, "An acceleration, one might also say, that makes it impossible to distinguish

death and suicide” (*Negotiations* 111). Even as he rushes headlong into the event of his own death, overwhelmed by a light and not a darkness, he opens onto an impersonal becoming never quite his own.

Conclusion

Expressing the Ineffable

In her seminal study, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, Linda Hutcheon writes that in postmodernity, “We are not witnessing a degeneration into the hyperreal without origin or reality, but a questioning of what ‘real’ can mean and how we can *know* it” (223). By staging a creative encounter between a Deleuzian theory of the event and postmodern fictional narratives, my dissertation has tried to map out some of the trajectories this questioning can take insofar as they relate primarily to subjectivity. We might question what “real” can mean and how we can know it, but then through our questioning itself, through our contemplative searching, we express the real, we join with it as an inflective power in its open construction. All of our questions are shot through with an immanence or vitalism. When we ask the question “what is real?” we aren’t looking for a descriptive answer, and perhaps we’re not looking for anything at all. We instead take part in processes forming an open problematic, in the elaboration of a situation, and in the inventive confrontation the real plays out with itself. There is nothing we have with which to compare the real, as if in attempting to represent or describe it, we might oppose it to something else. This is why the concept of difference *in itself* becomes so indispensable, because the real does not countenance the categories of the particular and the general, putting in their place the absolutely singular, the unique—an immanence of chance that is expressive and yet ineffable.

It is probably true that we are not done with the question “what is postmodernism?” We might wonder with Fredric Jameson how postmodernism’s “fundamental characteristics are to be described, whether it even exists in the first place, whether the very *concept* is of any use, or is,

on the contrary, a mystification” (21). The critical practice that Deleuzian philosophy endorses, however, takes a different approach:

The aim is not to answer questions, it's to get out, to get out of it. Many people think that it is only by going back over the question that it's possible to get out of it. 'What is the position with philosophy? Is it dead? Are we going beyond it?' It's very trying. They won't stop returning to the question in order to get out of it. But getting out never happens like that. Movement always happens behind the thinker's back, or in the moment when he blinks. Getting out is already achieved, or else it never will be....

[D]uring this time, while you turn in circles among these questions, there are becomings which are silently at work, which are almost imperceptible. (*Dialogues II* 1-2)

It is an odd and tiresome state of affairs when, after Jean-François Lyotard broadly defines the postmodern as “incredulity toward metanarratives” (xxiv), Hutcheon can then assert the existence of “those Lyotardian master narratives about our loss of faith in master narratives” (229). Turning in circles, indeed. What Deleuze's philosophy accomplishes, and what I have attempted to show to be at work in the postmodern novel, is an engagement with becoming itself, an affirmation of vitalistic force. Hence the importance of the surface or the in-between in relation to subjectivity. In trying to think alongside a theory of the event, I have, of course, returned to central questions throughout my dissertation. What, for example, is the relation between chance and processes of actualization? How must we conceive of the encounter itself, and what does it mean to say that subjectivities are open to the outside? What, finally, *is* the event? If these questions continue to arrive, it is because the event forms a problematic structure within which I have worked, one that asks insistently how we can account for thought when we are forced to think. In the texts I have examined, the subject is repeatedly configured as a

dynamic construction at its own limits, not only with respect to those boundaries delineating the inside and outside, the body and the external world, but with respect to its temporal actualization. At its uttermost limit, the subject is expressive of an affective power in an instant without durational depth, an instant that is nothing other than the teeming of new relations and the unfolding of a compound of sensation as a surface effect, the operation of an incorporeal “meantime,” always between the already and the not-yet.

Of course, we get nihilistic proclamations about postmodernism that make us wonder if reality has somehow disappeared. Arthur Kroker and David Cook write, for example, “Ours is a *fin-de-millennium* consciousness which, existing at the end of history in the twilight time of ultramodernism (of technology) and hyperprimitivism (of public moods), uncovers a great arc of disintegration and decay against the background radiation of parody, kitsch, and burnout” (8). It were as though we had entered a veritable heat-death of the universe. Or we have Baudrillard claiming that “The very definition of the real becomes: *that of which it is possible to give an equivalent reproduction....* There is no more fiction that life could possibly confront, even victoriously—it is reality itself that disappears utterly in the game of reality” (*Simulations* 146, 148). It is indeed a totalizing “culture of the code” that is appealed to here, where everything, every event, is understood through a law of equivalence that pays no heed to the singular. Baudrillard establishes arbitrary limits on every process, as if an event were reproducible in principle, that is, *as if two separate events could be expressions of the same*. His position is one of profound absurdism and abstraction. Because reality does not abut on something unreal or “fictional,” because it is not *isolable* or even *provable*, it is simply lost completely. In other words, the Baudrillardian thesis turns on a rather vapid logic reliant upon a level of transcendence or negative opposition: we need to find an other *outside* the real in order to make

it real. Deleuze, to the contrary, proposes a difference within immanence, a problematic reality in which we partake as a singular expression. Accordingly, he always insists upon the uniqueness and chance of all events (“the whole of chance is... in each throw” [*Difference and Repetition* 198]) because events constitute their own expression and unfold in a perfectly singular and open world. These two philosophical programmes, it would seem, could not be more diametrically opposed. For Baudrillard, it is always the identical that repeats, whereas for Deleuze, that which repeats is always difference itself. “Oh, the poverty of the imaginary and the symbolic,” we can imagine Deleuze saying to Baudrillard, “the real always being put off until tomorrow” (*Dialogues II* 51).

In a passage I quoted in Chapter Three, Deleuze and Guattari write, “It may be that believing in this world, in this life, becomes our most difficult task, or the task of a mode of existence still to be discovered on our plane of immanence today” (*What Is Philosophy* 75). Believing in the world, of course, will not bring the world itself into existence as if it were not already there. However, in developing a feel for the real and its possibilities of expression, we become expressive of and instrumental to its own intensive novelty, charting new affective territories for ourselves. If we need a concept of void, let it be an operative “nothing” that is fully a part of the real, a positivity that never ceases to be caught up within an expressive network of relations. Again, we have nothing with which to oppose the real. We do not need recourse to any transcendent value, as if the real needed that value in order to become real. Perhaps we’re sent adrift, then, in a groundlessness of becoming, intensity, sensation, and singularity, but that’s just how astounding things happen to be. It may be that the world itself is not assimilable to thought, and for that very reason, perhaps lies at the heart of thought itself as nonsense. Nonetheless, the real becomes that surfacial groundlessness which paradoxically

grounds thought in its perpetual confrontation with chaos. As this thesis has attempted to show in Don DeLillo's *Cosmopolis*, Paul Auster's *The Music of Chance*, Edmund White's *Forgetting Elena*, and Nicholson Baker's *The Mezzanine*, postmodern subjectivities exhibit a potentiality inherent to difference itself that keeps them open as processes of change.

I anticipate the arrival of my defense of this dissertation. There is a chance it may never come, of course—anything might happen in the interim—but I anticipate it all the same. I imagine we will be seated around a large table, you, my faithful examiners, and I, not knowing exactly what to expect. Maybe one of us will have a touch of the flu that day, maybe one of us, most likely myself, will not have slept very well the night before, and everything will have been set in motion. It's not so much your questions that I anticipate, though those, too, but the way in which your questions will change what I become, the way my listening will change those questions by allowing them to become what they are. In-between us, a conversation will unfold because of our openness to the in-between itself along whose surface *we* will become, each in our own ways. In any event, we have this much to look forward to—an event, indeed, that awaits each and everyone of us as a perfectly singular expression.

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