A Time for the *Humanities*

Futurity and the Limits of Autonomy

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A Time for the Humanities

INTRODUCTION
Future, Heteronomy, Invention

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A Time for the Humanities: Futurity and the Limits of Autonomy brings together an interdisciplinary and international group of renowned theorists and scholars to reflect on the future of the humanities. Whereas many recent works have addressed this issue in primarily pragmatic terms, this book seeks to examine its conceptual foundations. What notions of futurity, of the human, and of finitude underlie recurring anxieties about the humanities' future in our current geopolitical situation? How can we think about the unpredictable and unthought dimensions of praxis implicit in the very notion of futurity? What kind of agency is implied by future-oriented praxis? In what sense is such agency linked to heteronomy rather than to the autonomy of the subject?

In popular and academic publications alike, the question of the future is becoming increasingly urgent because of growing anxiety about the status of the humanities. After an extraordinary period of institutional growth from the late 1940s through the mid 1970s, the humanities have confronted two challenges: external pressures exerted by economic difficulties, and an internal crisis over its intellectual self-definition and

public mission.[1] In addition to the decline of federal funding, a shrinking job market, and the new pressures of globalization, the most significant internal challenges confronting the humanities have emerged from the hegemony of technoscience, the impact of the "new media" revolution, the rise of expert cultures on the one hand and, on the other, the unprecedented democratic proliferation of new interdisciplinary fields, such as gender, ethnic, disability, and African-American studies, as well as studies of non-European cultures, all of which put the traditional canon and the "common" mission of the humanities into question.[2] More recently, academics have become concerned about whether the humanities— so intertwined with the democratic culture of free inquiry—still has a future in the current, increasingly conservative, political climate.

The necessity of responding to both the economic crisis and the crisis of legitimation is reflected, for instance, in the symptomatic title of a collection of essays on the status of the U.S. research university, *The Research University in a Time of Discontent*, a project organized jointly by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and Columbia University in 1993. More than ten years later, William Paulson warns readers in his 2005 study, *Literary Culture in a World Transformed: A Future for the Humanities*, that "The field of literary studies is in danger of being left behind in the twenty-first century."[3] In response to such pervasive sentiment, a forthcoming special issue of *SubStance*, a journal of interdisciplinary approaches to literature and literary theory, is devoted

to "discouragement." To alleviate these anxieties, intellectuals and journalists alike offer a range of diagnoses of current impasses, as well as propose various concrete recommendations for the transformation of the humanities as a field of knowledge, education, and action. While some of these recommendations focus on particular curricular reforms or more efficient political advocacy, other proposals contest the very autonomy of the humanities and call for its complete restructuring, suggesting that humanistic knowledge should no longer focus primarily on the study of culture, but on its interactions with sciences, technologies, and, increasingly, ecological concerns instead.[4] Still others call for the creation of "public humanities," oriented towards engagement with and accountability to "the diverse and multiple *publics* that constitute our society."[5]

Although such pragmatic proposals are an indispensable part of public debate on the status of the humanities, this collection argues that the urgent concern with the future cannot be limited to critical assessments of our situation or to practical projects for change. We need, first of all, to recognize that the worry about the humanities is not a new phenomenon. Here we encounter an uncanny companion of thought about the future, namely, the recurrent anticipation of death, whether Hegel's death of art, Freud's speculations on the death drive, the dark side of Bloch's hope, Fukuyama's end of history, or, as the emphatic title of Lee Edelman's *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* suggests, "death" and kinship. [6] We can also add to this list "the

end of the book." By taking into account the finitude implicit in such worries about the "end," a critical reflection on the future exceeds any and all pragmatic diagnoses. This necessary implication arises precisely because the very force of the "ought to"—on which the specific content of pragmatic prescriptions depends—opens the unknown and unforeseeable dimensions of temporality. Although always embedded in the historical situation, the relation to the future, whether theoretical or prescriptive, is counterfactual; it exceeds the present possibilities of thought and action. Consequently, the thought of the future places the categorical "ought to" of any prescription or pragmatic program in an unknown—literally utopian—interval between determination and indeterminacy, the known and the unknown, imagination and the radical alterity of the unimaginable. Paradoxically, if the force of prescription—that is, the performative power of what ought to be done—is not to be curtailed, it has to both include and exceed the power of human action, imagination, and thinking.

One of the most important implications of such unforeseeable futurity is to be found in the constitutive tension between human and nonhuman (or impersonal) aspects of agency and praxis. Already our own historical situation presents us daily with innumerable examples of human-nonhuman linkages, among them complex interfaces involving machinic assemblages of biological "wetware" and nonbiological "hardware." According to the numerous theorists working in science, technology, and media studies, we are far from even beginning to

grasp the transformative possibilities that the codependencies facilitated by still-emerging technological-biological-cultural environments might make possible in the near future.[7] As Katherine Hayles argues in this collection, the posthuman "agency" of digital technologies actively reshapes not only print culture but also our critical and interpretative practices.

Yet, this fundamental tension between human and nonhuman dimensions of agency and praxis cannot be limited to new technologies, digitality, or autopoietic systems alone; such tension stems from the "agency" of time itself, as well as from the register of unconscious sexuality elaborated by psychoanalysis. One aspect of the nonhuman "agency" of time manifests itself in the orientation of any praxis toward the unforeseeable future. In Fredric Jameson's words, such futural orientation of "the shaping power of human collective agency"—which includes the productive power of new technologies or the new technologies of power— inevitably discloses "an incomprehensible, unimaginable, utopian temporality beyond what thought or action can reach."[8] As Paola Marrati argues in this volume, the temporality of praxis requires a rethinking of "the ontological agency of time itself" vis-à-vis our notions of political agency and progress. In a similar vein, in his defense of the humanities, Christopher Fynsk argues elsewhere that critical and "vital" inquiries should move beyond the "applicable" knowledge already presupposed by established disciplines and modes of practice.[9] In yet another arena, that of Freudian and

Lacanian psychoanalysis, we encounter the "inhuman" and the "incomprehensible" primarily in the context of the conflicting agencies and temporalities of the drive and the "letter," or the Real and the Symbolic registers of praxis and subjectivity. It is one of the original contributions of this collection that it insists on the necessity of thinking together all three "inhuman" dimensions of human practice: digital technologies, utopian temporality, and "extimate" sexuality.[10] Only then can we avoid the common reduction of practice and pragmatics to the domain of the narcissistic Ego and the spatial captation characteristic of the structure of such an Ego.

The multiple senses of human and nonhuman agency elaborated in this collection—the agency of citizenship, power, kinship, gaze, time, the death drive, new technologies and media, sexuality, and finally, the agency of rhetoric and politics—imply that praxis and freedom are based on the heteronomy rather than the autonomy of the subject. The confrontation with such an ineluctable heteronomy is perhaps a cause of even greater anxieties than the known dangers of the present situation. Unlike related terms in contemporary theory—such as heterogeneity, otherness, or difference—the notion of heteronomy, in addition to maintaining the reference to differentiation and to the multiplicity of heterogeneous principles, more specifically links "otherness" to the questioning of subjective autonomy and agency as the principle of freedom. Indeed, the anxiety raised by the prospect of heteronomy largely

resides in its challenge to the autonomy of the free, self-legislating subject of the Enlightenment, as well as to the self-legislation of different spheres of activities of such a subject: knowledge, art, politics. Although it has frequently been questioned in abstract terms, the premise of autonomy as the basis of freedom remains unexamined at the heart of the myriad prescriptions advanced in the face of an uncertain future and efficacy of the humanities. Such proposals and prescriptions represent the programmatic response of "autonomous" individuals, groups, and, more typically, institutions to the future and to temporality that this collection challenges and reconfigures. Confronted with an as-yet-unimagined alterity of the future, such autonomous collectivities seek to recuperate the new and unforeseeable within strategies that confirm rather than challenge their capacities for self-legislation and self-production. At its most extreme, such instrumentality treats the future as a matter of engineering: of deploying ever proliferating social, genetic, and other yet-to-be-discovered techniques to devise solutions to new problems. In this respect, institutional or academic responses to the threatening novelty of the future unsurprisingly find their dialectical counter-image in those tamed and domesticated tropes of heterogeneity found in the banal utopian projections and formulaic visions of pulp, and even "serious," science fiction.

By contrast, this collection calls for an entirely different approach to heteronomy, treating it as an enabling rather than a threatening condition of agency.

By opening unknown and unforeseeable dimensions of temporality, it challenges the autonomy of the self-legislating subject as the premise of freedom and social action. Yet, rather than being a threatening prospect of subjection (as it has been postulated in moral philosophy at least since Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason)*, this ineluctable heteronomy that haunts our experience of temporality enables transformation, which exceeds subjective and collective capacities of legislation, prediction, and self-production. Thus, heteronomy implies a shift from recuperable difference (the fitting object of pragmatic changes imagined by autonomous institutions and agents) to unimaginable, not-yet-encountered potentialities. Consequently, by revisiting the problem of heteronomy specifically in the context of the future of the humanities, the essays in this collection confront two intimately intertwined tasks: First, they work out the effects of such temporality for different kinds of practices in the humanities, ranging from criticism and the production of knowledge to the arts and politics. Second, they reconceptualize the heteronomy of the future beyond the threat of subjugation that the term *heteronomy* still implies, approaching it instead as a source of transformation and creativity in the broadest possible sense of the word.

Examining different aspects of the future from diverse disciplinary perspectives, the essays in this collection explore the constitutive tension between human agency and its incomprehensible "beyond," and regard this tension as a source of new possibilities for the

fundamental practices in the humanities. The essays in Part I, "The New and Its Risks," assess the implications of the transformative "agency" of time for the concepts of history, invention, and becoming. Part I also opens two crucial questions that are developed throughout this book: The first question pertains to the relation between heteronomy and progressive politics; the second one addresses the manner in which transformative temporality enables us to revise the notion of the visual beyond the spatial captation of the imaginary Ego and beyond what Rey Chow calls the closure of the global world picture. Building on the critique of the coherent human agent secured by historical chronology initiated in the first part, Part II, "Rhetoric and the Future of the Political," focuses primarily on the heteronomy and the future of politics. Addressed by Jean-Luc Nancy in the context of writing, the problematic of heteronomy is then developed in the context of numerous tensions: between kinship and homelessness; between political affiliations and disposable populations; between global capital and democratic politics. Inflected by interpretations of sexuality, jouissance, the death drive, and aggressivity, Part III, "Heteronomy and Futurity in Psychoanalysis," examines heteronomies of the subject and the effects of such heteronomy for the politics of cosmopolitanism and queer becomings, on the one hand, and for the fundamental interpretative practices in the humanities, on the other. And finally, Part IV, "Inventions," raises complex questions about the transformative possibilities of heteronomy for the future of diverse artistic practices, ranging from architecture

and poetry to performative activism and digital textualities. At stake here is an aesthetic disclosure of liberating possibilities in participatory public culture.

Although we have divided this collection into discrete parts in order to underscore its main themes, there are numerous connections and conversations among the essays that go beyond such heuristic divisions. For instance, the question of the relation of the political to artistic practices runs across the entire collection, beginning with Paola Marrati's reflection on the political possibilities of Deleuze's work on cinema and ending with Sommer's support for interactive art in the public sphere. Similarly, there are strong resonances among a number of essays concerning the rethinking of visual space apart from the controlling gaze: the challenge of homelessness to the geopolitical space of globalization in Rey Chow's analysis of Chinese cinema; the discussion of the architectural space of poetry in Steve McCaffery's essay; and the city as the space of performative citizenship in Sommer's. Another ongoing preoccupation in several essays is the multiple types of agency and their limits, beginning with the more familiar notion of political agency and power, and ending with the more paradoxical "agency" of the death drive, digital technologies, and diverse media.

Part I: The New and Its Risks

Paola Marrati's, Andrew Benjamin's, and Martin Jay's essays underscore what is at stake in this collection as a whole: the claim that the affirmation of the

heteronomous temporality of the future contests the spatial closure of action and thought. According to Jameson, such closure manifests itself not merely as an intellectual impasse but as the political "colonization of reality by spatial forms, which is at one and the same time a commodification of that same intensively colonized reality on a world-wide scale." Intertwined with the closing down of frontiers and the decline of old-fashioned imperialist expansion, "these spatial dilemmas" characteristic of the age of globalization are "what immobilize our imaginative picture of global space today."[11] Rey Chow's contribution draws out the contemporary geopolitical dangers of such immobilization of the political. Consequently, in order to resist the spatial blockage of thought and action, it is important to release time itself from its traditional association with the interiority and the mastery of the subject. Yet, as the immobilization of the "global picture" of the world suggests, such a rethinking of heteronomous futurity is closely intertwined with an attempt to invent alternative visual practices that would resist the colonization of space by scopic regimes.

The first essay in this section, Paola Marrati's "Life and Event: Deleuze on Newness," contests the closure of spatial forms by developing "the ontological agency of time" in Gilles Deleuze's work on philosophy and film. In contrast to human agency, the new and creative effects of time cannot be known in advance since they emerge from a process of differentiation conforming to no pre-existing pattern. Consequently, she distinguishes what

Deleuze means by the new from both history and futurity, explaining that newness concerns neither progress nor any movement of teleology. In place of a philosophy of history, then, Deleuze offers a philosophy of the new, which knots together differentiation, event, and life. By extending Deleuze's work on cinema, Marrati explores the implications of such a heteronomous agency of time for emancipatory politics. Contending that emancipatory politics tend to remain inseparable from a belief in progress, she elaborates how "the 'politics of history'" entered an irreversible crisis around the middle of the twentieth century. Intriguingly, she maps this crisis of political action by tracing its manifestation in cinematic technique. Marrati's essay concludes by sketching the Deleuzean response to this crisis. As cause for neither pessimism nor hope, the differentiating process that characterizes modernity calls instead for a political belief in this world. This is a belief not in what transcends the material world or attains eternal existence, but in the "becoming" of the virtual through the creative action of time.

The unpredictable effects of temporality and irresolution are also at stake in Andrew Benjamin's formulation of the type of criticism that would respond adequately to the singularity of art. His essay, "A Precursor: Limiting the Future, Affirming Particularity," complicates the modernist concept of the new as the break from the past by investigating the enabling logic of the precursor. Although he shifts the discussion from the ontological register of "life" to aesthetics and criticism,

Benjamin, like Marrati, interprets the new not as a break but as a creative effect of repetition and differentiation. "What is the new once it can no longer be identified with novelty?" he asks. Warning against the naturalization of the new by subjective invention, or worse, by fashion, he investigates the new in relation to the precursor, who limits and opens the future of the work of art, allowing for affirmation of its particularity. Since the affirmation of the particular is an act of irresolution, it is linked to both the new and the process of repetition: The particularity of the work of art demands to be affirmed again and again, each time in a new way.

By switching the focus from the temporal to the visual, Martin Jay's essay, "Visual *Parrhesia?* Foucault and the Truth of the Gaze," examines the genealogy of scopic domination that begins with the shift from the premodern ascetic regimes of truth to the practices of modern science, based on visual evidence. In light of this shift, he asks how it is possible to conceive the future of the visual beyond the global "world picture" and its dominating gaze. In an answer to this question, Jay examines the relationship between truth and the visual in the work of Michel Foucault, who is often taken to exemplify French criticisms of the "ocularcentric" bias of Western thought. By critically revisiting his own claims in *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought*, Jay offers a fresh assessment of the argument that Foucault's critiques of scopic regimes—such as the panopticon and the medical gaze—do not extend to all visual practices.[12]

Consequently, his essay speculates on the possibility of alternative visual practices that would resist the "power of the eye to dominate what it viewed" and thereby dislodge the notion of truth as evidence or representation, embodying instead the risk of "truth-telling." Foucault's preoccupation with the Greek notion of *parrhesia*—"frankness in speaking the truth" that involves the individual's willingness "to take a risk . . . to speak truth to power, no matter the consequences"—is exemplary of the alternative "practice of truth-telling." Jay asks whether there might be a visual equivalent of *parrhesia*—visual practices that exemplify unpredictability and risk-taking rather than the power of visual domination. Through its inquiry into the possibilities of resistance within the register of the visible, Jay's essay provides an important extension of Marrati's and Benjamin's rethinking of heteronomous and creative temporalities.

Part II: Rhetoric and the Future of the Political

The essays in this section focus more explicitly on the future of emancipatory politics by contesting humanistic ideologies of kinship, agency, and nationality, and by examining instead heteronomies of responsibility, rhetoric, and human plurality. Interrogating the future of political praxis from various theoretical and cultural perspectives, all three essays not only propose heteronomous models of collectivity beyond the "human," but also perform such heteronomy by engaging those dimensions of culture— whether writing,

cinema, ontology, or rhetoric—that traditionally have been conceived as "other" to political autonomy.

In "Articulation and the Limits of Metaphor," Ernesto Laclau develops his well-known theory of hegemony in the rhetorical terms of metaphor and metonymy. As he shows in his comparison of Sorel's and Lenin's political theories, politics consists in the articulation of heterogeneous elements, and such articulations are structured tropologically. Building on Gérard Genette's analysis of metaphor and metonymy in Proust, as well as on Roman Jakobson's famous analysis of aphasia, Laclau demonstrates both the mutual implication of metaphor and metonymy, and the inseparability of these tropes from any signification and praxis. In the Marxist vision of history, Laclau argues, different stages of diachronic unfolding are conceived as teleological fulfillments; that is, they are conceived metaphorically in terms of essential analogies. Laclau's insistence on the inseparability of metaphor from metonymy recasts this vision of history and futurity by pointing to the ineluctably contingent elements that undermine any telos.

As if in response to a Marxist vision of the literary, Jean-Luc Nancy develops the consequences of his well-known political critique of community in *The Inoperative Community* in the context of writing.[13] He declares that "all writing is 'committed'"—though what he means by this notion of commitment exceeds the programmatic sense of "committed writing" that knows in advance how the future should look. In his rich philosophical

meditation on the senses of responsibility entailed by writing, Nancy argues that to write is always to respond to—and therefore to listen for—the voice of an other. This involves an ethical commitment prior to any particular political commitment, just as it involves a consciousness of the non-human agency that resonates through any writing. Revealing how there is no original voice that is not already a response to some prior response, Nancy discredits the notion of creative autonomy; he thereby brings out the ineluctable heteronomy of all writing and voicing, even as he enlarges our sense of what "writing" is. Finally, he too—like Laclau—indicates the role of contingency in this understanding of the responsiveness and responsibility entailed by writing: "In order to come from the outside, to respond to this outside and to answer for it, the incision [of writing] must owe something to chance, to surprise and to *kairos*, the favorable moment whose favor consists in offering itself to the one who exposes himself to the outside, and who consequently *no longer wills-to-mean*." Here, writing gives itself over to the heteronomy of an uncertain future.

The intertwined questions of heteronomy and the future of emancipatory politics are pursued further by Rey Chow in her essay, "'Human' in the Age of Disposable People: The Ambiguous Import of Kinship and Education in *Blind Shaft*." Situating her analysis of the political in the context of contemporary China, with a special focus on the controversial, award-winning Chinese film *Blind Shaft* (dir. Li Yang, 2003), Chow proceeds to diagnose the

ways that global biopolitical warfare disrupts the very notion of the "human" by producing "disposable populations" on an unprecedented scale. In the homelessness of the miners represented in the film, she reads both a biting indictment of "the bankruptcy of Chinese socialism at the turn of the twenty-first century" and a broader comment on the ontological homelessness produced by modern world politics. Resonating with Nancy's tacitly Heideggerian meditation in the preceding essay, Chow develops the Heideggerian implications of homelessness for cultural politics. Responding to the ruptures she has diagnosed so acutely, Chow claims that the possibilities for survival and emancipatory politics depend not on reclaiming outmoded "human" ideologies of kinship or nationality, but rather on an ethico-political confrontation with "our contemporary global condition of homelessness." Within the cinematic microcosm of *Blind Shaft*, she discerns a "sentimentalizing of kinship" that betokens not only fidelity to Chinese cultural tradition but also a particular conception of the future—one that imagines futurity exclusively through the survival of the next generation of kin. What makes the film so fascinating is how, in its violent disruption of this kinship-oriented future, *Blind Shaft* points to the possibility of a different conception of futurity—and thus to the queerer futures imagined in the next section of the volume.

Part III: Heteronomy and Futurity in Psychoanalysis

By taking into account the more intimate, unconscious heteronomy of the subject, the essays in this section develop the most risky aspects of the heteronomy of the political—namely, the tension between destruction and invention, between the agency of the death drive and collectivities, and between the impersonal and the foreigner. On the basis of psychoanalytical accounts of the hostility between the ego and its internal alienating otherness, Rudi Visker examines the effects of such uncanny heteronomy for the politics of cosmopolitanism. In "The Foreign, the Uncanny, and the Foreigner: Concepts of the Self and the Other in Psychoanalysis and Contemporary Philosophy," he takes issue with the common assumption that recognizing foreignness inside the self leads to improved relations among different races and ethnicities. According to Visker, the cosmopolitan ideal of mutual respect between self and foreigner misconstrues the constitutive hostility between the self and its own internal foreignness. In response to this dilemma, he proposes a psychoanalytic politics that would acknowledge the necessity of "framing" or "'stage-ing'" the self's relation to its own foreignness as a means of containing that destructiveness. Anticipating the arguments of contributors to the book's final section, Visker suggests that such "stage-ing" may occur through art.

The problematic of destructiveness raised by Visker is pursued by Tim Dean in his engagement with Lee Edelman's critique of futurity as ineluctably heteronormative. In *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death*

Drive, Edelman argues that the political response to what he calls "reproductive futurism" should be an embrace by queers of the radical negativity of the death drive. Developing Lacan's reconceptualization of Freudian drive theory, Dean argues contrariwise that the death drive, rather than a mere will to destruction, can also be a force of invention and creation. Showing how, as one of the drive's "vicissitudes," sublimation implies that the death drive is not always simply destructive, Dean's critique— like Visker's—anticipates the arguments in Part IV of this collection. In elaborating a psychoanalytic theory of drives by way of Deleuze's critique of the normalizing effects of Oedipus, Dean's essay also makes use of Marrati's discussion of Deleuze and the new. Finally, his emphasis on the creative yet impersonal agency of the drive contests the ideological alignment of the future with heteronormative kinship structures or reproductive politics, and thus resonates with Chow's critique of group formation based on kinship.

Following Visker's and Dean's critical interrogations of the relation of psychoanalysis to politics, Elizabeth Weed's concluding essay in this section brings psychoanalysis together with feminism to examine the possibilities of critique as such. In "Luce Irigaray and the Question of Critique," Weed takes some recurring hermeneutical questions posed by Irigaray's discursive practice as an occasion to reflect upon the unforeseeable effects of heteronomy, sexual difference, and jouissance for the fundamental interpretative practices in the humanities. She argues that the function of critique

cannot be limited to the production of knowledge, but must leave room for the unknown and for the erotic dimension of any encounter with a text. What Weed diagnoses as the waning of critique is bound up with the critical impulse to make sense, to retrieve meaning, and to convert the unknown into the known. In this endeavor, the unthought of sexual difference is too easily left behind or translated into more readily assimilable formulations. Although never completely severed from the production of meaning, a critique (in Weed's sense of the term) keeps open the gap between the known and the unknown, between the possibilities and impossibilities of sense.

Part IV: Inventions

Building on numerous references to different art forms in the preceding essays, the final section of this collection is explicitly devoted to the aesthetic disclosure of more liberating possibilities of thought, creativity, and action. Resisting the closure of thought and action implicit in prescriptive visions of the arts and humanities, the essays in this section insist upon the futural orientation of artistic practices, while exploring the transformative possibilities of heterogeneous genres, media, and spatial configurations. Steve McCaffery turns to the architectural as a space of experimentation and renewal for poetics, a turn that is at once a turn away from figurations of "endings," "ruptures," and the "death of poetics" and, alternatively, a turn toward Deleuzean "becomings." N. Katherine Hayles analyzes

how dynamic media ecologies—both print and digital—create their own possibilities for thought and action that transform the spatial experiences of textuality and reading, thereby challenging the "interiorized subjectivity" of autonomous readers and creating in its place a new form of cognitive engagement marked by the processing of "multiple data flows": "hyperattention." For her part, Doris Sommer paints a compelling picture of a future for the arts and interpretive humanities as reinventing participatory democratic public culture, communal ethos, and agency, starting with the transformation of public spaces into sites of progressive sociopolitical performativity and cultural *poiesis*.

Steve McCaffery's essay, "Parapoetics and the Architectural Leap," proposes a leap—a tropic turn—to the architectural. The leap into architecture is far from arbitrary, since language itself continues to be figured architecturally, while the human *—dasein—*dwells no less in language than in architectural habitations. McCaffery thus explores the linkages among language, architecture, and the human from the biblical myth of Babel to Derrida's grammatological explorations of writing, space, and architecture. In turning to the architectural, McCaffery seeks to "activate" the parapoetic—to evoke its transgressive, viral capacity to disturb the stability and unity of the proper. Thus, McCaffery's essay draws on architectural configurations and notions of "site," seeking to "rethink the concept of a poetic movement" and community. Yet it is as practices, rather than simply

as metaphoric resources, that he seeks to place architecture and poetics in dialogue with one another. Here, McCaffery points to those architectural practices that disavow traditional desires for stability and permanence—for "place" as "ground"—in favor of the making of place as, in Solà-Morales's words, the "production of an event." Diagrams—the diagrammatic dimension of not simply writing but architectural practice as well—become tactics for opening up possibilities, rather than occasions for exercising mastery and control and for the production of stability. Returning to Deleuze and the Deleuzean fold, McCaffery looks to the production of heterogeneous multiplicities and to the city as "the most fruitful target for parapoetic attention." In short, parapoetics seeks in architectural practices a "becoming" and thus an opening to the future.

N. Katherine Hayles dares to imagine an emerging future of literature by exploring how print media are being transformed through their interaction with electronic media. Given the ubiquity of electronic modes of production, Hayles insists that the "dynamic media ecology" within which writing's engagement with digitality occurs is transformative. Comparing the "interiorized subjectivity" of traditional narrative fiction to the immersive experience of electronic literature, she argues that "multiple data flows" stimulate a new mode of cognitive engagement that she terms "hyperattention." Hayles's claim is that such hyperattention has begun to transform the experience

and possibilities of print. Her essay thus conjures visions of a heteronomous future, one that raises questions of human and nonhuman agency and praxis yet also presents possibilities for transformation, for a creative *poiesis* working to shape a future for the novel.

For Doris Sommer the crisis of public support faced by the humanities presents an opportunity for reasserting the significance of practices nurtured by humanistic inquiry. Like McCaffery, Sommer urges a reorientation toward the city—toward the very ways in which we inhabit public space. Her chapter is, in fact, a manifesto for the transformative power of humanistic inquiry and of art—of artists and critics—to effect change and thus improve social systems through creative action. She argues that we must find ways of developing "best cultural practices," enabling the humanities and humanists to engage with and activate the public sphere, and thus move beyond the insight afforded by critical practices that, too often, offer critique while leading to inaction. Sommer draws on a number of concrete examples: Antanas Mockus, artist and mayor of Bogotá, and Augusto Boal, founder of "Theater of the Oppressed" and "Forum Theater" and twice councilman of Rio de Janeiro. Mockus sought to revive a city devastated by violence, corruption, and a dysfunctional economy by utilizing art to promote accountability and awaken a "democratizing desire for civility." Facing an unimaginable future, Mockus hired pantomime artists, replaced corrupt traffic police, and deployed similarly concrete artistic stratagems to transform chaotic public

spaces into a "stage for daily merriment." Envisioning thus a "humanities in action," Sommer challenges humanists to provide ordinary citizens with tools for acting, by showing how art can "build society," how the very act of making—*poiesis*—involves bridging differences, confronting resistances in one's subjects and one's materials, overcoming constraint not as "nemesis" or as intractable heterogeneity, but rather as "a condition of creativity."

Taken as a whole, this collection makes a strong argument that what is missing in too many debates over the future of the humanities is, surprisingly, an analysis of the future itself.[14] By addressing this crucial omission, the essays gathered here aim to approach the necessarily futural orientation of the humanities in terms of the tension between yet-to-be-imagined human capacities and unimaginable posthuman agency. Rather than increasing anxieties about the future, the unpredictable and unthought dimensions of praxis emphasize the role of becoming, heteronomy, and invention—or what Deleuze calls "the new in the making"—in art, politics, and intellectual inquiry. These closely intertwined dimensions of cultural *poiesis* allow us to question existing assumptions and to invent alternative possibilities for a whole range of practices in the humanities, from art and intellectual inquiry to emancipatory politics and ethics.

PART I
The New and Its Risks

CHAPTER 1
Life and Event: Deleuze on Newness

Paola Marrati

Whether cinema, as Deleuze claims, is Bergsonian, remains an open question; that Deleuze himself was a Bergsonian, however, is beyond doubt. Still, we should ask ourselves: What, exactly, does the Bergsonian inspiration to be found across Deleuze's *oeuvre* consist of? There are, to be sure, several ways to take on this question, but there is one that, to my mind, is decisive: the problem of the new. In *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, Deleuze writes, "Bergson transformed philosophy by asking the question of the new in the making instead of the question of eternity."[1]

This claim, for all its clarity, is no less enigmatic. What transformation of philosophy are we dealing with, according to Deleuze? Or, which amounts to the same, what does "asking the question of the new in the making" mean? What is the problem of the new, of newness, or novelty? Not only did Deleuze intimately know the history of philosophy and thus knew very well that the questions of time, of becoming, of history did not wait for Bergson to be asked—and that therefore it would appear paradoxical to speak of philosophy as having to wait for Bergson to stop asking the question of

eternity—Deleuze was also fully aware of what was going on around him when he published these lines in 1983, that is to say, at a moment when, in France and elsewhere, philosophical—and political—debates were centered around the concept of postmodernity. Jean-François Lyotard had published his famous book *The Postmodern Condition* in 1979.) This was not a time, therefore, in which the question of the new was "hot" in any possible sense; on the contrary, speaking about newness seemed to evoke an optimism, a confidence in progress and a happy tomorrow, that one had rather forgo, shelve next to the memories of a *belle époque* definitely gone by.

But if all of this is true, what could be the sense, and the implications, of Deleuze's claim? In what follows I would like to develop a hypothesis about what Deleuze understands by "new" and about the significance of such a concept for our contemporary politics and ethics.

1

Let me remark, first of all, that the question of the new in the making is situated at the intersection of three major themes in Bergson's philosophy, all of which are crucial for Deleuze's own thought: the themes of difference, of time (duration), and of life.

In Deleuze's interpretation, Bergson's thought is a philosophy of difference because it is not content with a description of differences between things as they are once they have been produced; rather, it aims at capturing the constitutive difference, which Deleuze

calls "internal" difference, that distinguishes a thing in itself, that makes a thing what it is in its own singular being. Such a difference is a process of production, of creation, of invention *of the new*. That is why, in Bergson, as read by Deleuze, difference and time, duration, necessarily coincide. Let me quote from the very first essay published by Deleuze on Bergson in 1956, "Bergson, 1859-1941," though analogous passages can be found in many later texts, and namely in *Cinema 1* and *2:*

> Bergson tells us, moreover, that his work consisted of reflecting on the fact that all is not given. But what does such a reality signify? Simultaneously that the given presupposes a movement that invents it or creates it, and that this movement must not be conceived in the image of the given. What Bergson critiques in the idea of the *possible* is that it presents us a simple copy of the product, projected or rather retrojected onto the movement of production, onto invention. But the virtual is not the same thing as the possible: the reality of time is finally the affirmation of a virtuality that is actualized, and for which to be actualized is to invent.[2]

Indeed, the opposition between the possible and the virtual, which Deleuze was to systematize in *Difference and Repetition*, is decisive if we want to understand the reality of time and its more than intimate link with a productive difference.

According to Bergson, assuming that the possibility of

a thing precedes its existence is a way of denying the reality of time, a denial that is all the more powerful for its not being explicit. In this regard, it is of little importance whether one thinks the possible, with Kant, as the set of transcendental conditions of experience; with Leibniz, as the worlds that God contemplates; or, with the Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus*, as a logical space —to give but a few examples. In all these cases, time is reduced to an exterior frame within which events take place, but this frame has no bearing on the events themselves since their possibility, be it logical or transcendental, precedes them. To put it into Bergson's terms: When we deny time a true power of invention, we take away all of its ontological reality, *we name it without thinking it*, and thereby assume that "all is given"—once and for all.

But in order not to fall prey to yet another form of the illusion of the possible, more is needed than just affirming an ontological agency of time. It is necessary to think the creative power of time as a process of *differentiation.* The possible and the real are made one in the image of the other; no conceptual difference separates them—for the simple reason, according to Bergson, that the possible is "a mirage of the present in the past"; it is constituted retrospectively by an act of the mind that projects backwards in time the possibility of an event that has already taken place. The power of time, however, its reality, what Deleuze calls the *virtual*, deploys itself in a completely different way. The actualization of a virtuality does not entail any

resemblance whatsoever: On the contrary, it implies the creation of lines of differentiation that neither existed—in a logical or transcendental form—nor could be foreseen in advance.

It is at this point that the third of Bergson's themes comes in: the theme of life or, more precisely, the concept of the *élan vital.* The conjunction of time and difference, of the creative power of time and processes of differentiation, is made possible by the concept of life. In *Creative Evolution*, Bergson, after a series of analyses too long to be recalled here, defines the "essence" of life, the unity of its *élan*, as a tendency towards change and differentiation. What makes life what it is would then be nothing but this tendency towards movement, change, the creation of new and unforeseeable forms of life. It is for this reason that Deleuze can write, in "Bergson's Conception of Difference": "When virtuality realizes itself, which is to say differentiates itself, it is through life and in a vital form; in this sense it is true that difference *is* vital," and, at the end of the same text, "Bergsonism is a philosophy of difference, and of difference's realization; there we find difference in itself, and it realizes itself as novelty."[3] What time *does* is create, bring about novelty and newness. This can be done only by processes of differentiation, the paradigm of which is the evolution of life. The notions of time, difference, and life cannot be separated. Deleuze's Bergsonian inspiration lies in this conceptual frame. One could speak of "vitalism," but we have to keep in mind that this is a vitalism of time and difference, and that

"life" is both organic and inorganic.[4]

We can now understand why Bergson, according to Deleuze, so profoundly transformed philosophy. Only when we begin with the question of the new in the making can we think the reality of time, since a universe in which nothing new comes about is a universe in which "all is given"—which is what, implicitly or explicitly, all sorts of otherwise very different philosophies as well as certain scientistic dreams assume.

But even if we now better understand the importance of the transformation of philosophy brought about by Bergson, the most pressing question remains: What, exactly, is the new? And why is it decisive to ask this question today? And why is it relevant for ethics and politics?

2

To try to understand why we are still concerned with the problem of the new, we must first emphasize that the new, for Bergson as much as for Deleuze, does not in any way coincide with the future. If that were the case, we would be dealing not with a transformation of philosophy but with some version of the idea of progress, be it in an Enlightenment manner or in the manner of a philosophy of history (and it would matter very little, in this regard, whether it would be of the Hegelian type, or the Marxist, or the phenomenological, as in the late Husserl). Now, while it is certain that the new in Bergson and Deleuze always has a positive

connotation—I will return to this point—it is just as certain that, for the one as for the other, not everything that will happen in a near or faraway future will be new. The future and the new do not necessarily overlap, and this for essential reasons.

The idea of progress or, for that matter, any version of a teleology of history, dialectic or not, is not only an illusion, but it is, to say it once more, an illusion whose function it is to make us believe that "all is given." To think that history follows laws that govern its course or, at least, that its movement despite halts and detours is oriented by a sense or towards an end, comes down to assuming that the time of human events does nothing but realize a possibility, an idea, a plan that preceded it. In a text that is entirely dedicated to the critique of the category of the possible, Bergson writes:

> How can we fail to see that if the event can always be explained afterward by an arbitrary choice of antecedent events, a completely different event could have been equally well explained in the same circumstances by another choice of antecedent— nay, by the same antecedents otherwise cut out, otherwise distributed, otherwise perceived by our retrospective attention?[5]

And in the most political of his books, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, he maintains that if one would like, one may call "progress" the moments of history in which something new opens up, and one may believe that these moments all go in the same direction.[6] But that would be

just another retrospective illusion of the possible since, in reality, there is no direction established in advance. It would also mean that there is no need for creating and producing moral and political renewals given that they preexist in some ideal form anyway, that they are always already given as possibilities that just wait for the right moment to come into being.

The new, on the contrary, anticipates neither the happy unfolding of history nor, for that matter, the certainty of a future apocalypse. Optimism and pessimism, in this regard, are equally inappropriate, since the new functions as a criterion of evaluation, not of foresight. It is not surprising to see Deleuze bring in, next to Bergson, another major reference of his *oeuvre:* Nietzsche. Let me quote from *Difference and Repetition:*

> Nietzsche's distinction between the creation of new values and the recognition of established values should not be understood in a historically relative manner, as though the established values were new in their time and the new values simply needed time to be established. In fact it concerns a difference which is both formal and in kind. The new, with its power of beginning and beginning again, remains forever new, just as the established was always established from the outset, even if a certain amount of empirical time was necessary for this to be recognized.[7]

What needs to be stressed in this quote is that the power of the new as the power of time is radically distinct from

history. In other words, be it in his reading of Bergson or of Nietzsche, the *question of the new, for Deleuze, takes the place of the question of history. The new, to be sure, is a category of time, but precisely not of history. To say the same thing otherwise, time takes the place of history.* This does not imply, however, that Deleuze subscribes to any discourse on the "end of history" whatsoever: He never did, and for good reasons. Any discourse about the end—of history, of modernity, of metaphysics, of philosophy, etc. — for him implies a teleology or a dialectics that is unable to think the reality of time (or the reality of the virtual, if you prefer a properly "Deleuzian" idiom).

This in turn, however, implies that the task of philosophy, as well as of ethics and politics, is to grasp the new in the making, the constitutive difference that makes something come into being, the singularity of any event, on the one hand, and, on the other, to discern the "old" and the "new" in what is given. And such a task is precisely what the philosophies of history, according to Deleuze, are incapable of achieving.

3

To maintain that the problem of the new comes up in the place of the problem of history is not a self-evident claim (not even for readers of Deleuze) and needs to be backed up. Let us begin by trying to understand its implications in the field of the political. Revolutionary or emancipatory politics, so often associated with the very idea of modernity, are inseparable from the belief in progress (let us think of American Revolution, or French

Revolution, of Rousseau or Marx). The denunciation of injustice and the very form of any political action to be taken in order to put an end to injustice are predicated on a confidence in the future of humanity. Yet the politics of progress not only falls prey to the retrospective illusion of the possible, as we have seen, it also introduces a form of transcendence that, to Deleuze's mind, is unacceptable. The future of the revolution or of a radical democracy as the horizon of political action and as a belief assumes the function of a doubling of the world. The present conditions of life may be intolerable, but the judgment of history, like the judgment of God, justifies them in the promise of a redemption to come. The future, taken in this sense, makes acceptable that which is not acceptable in the name of another world that, though not present, surely won't fail to come. When Deleuze repeats—as he does so often—that the question is not one of "the future of the revolution," or of the taking over of power, but one of becoming-revolutionary, he does not merely respond to the easy and widespread discourses that condemn any revolution in principle on the basis that revolutions always "go wrong"; it is also, and more profoundly, to stress that the ethical or political value of what is or what makes itself, in politics and elsewhere, is immanent to it.

But there is yet another aspect of the question that is, to my mind at least, even more decisive: It concerns the model of action, of human agency, political or otherwise. The forms of political action sustained, explicitly or

implicitly, by a thinking of history, by a belief in history, bring into play specific conceptions of the subject, community, human agency, and their relation to the natural and historical world. This model—in all its strengths and in its crisis, a crisis that, according to Deleuze, is irreversible—is described with precision in *Cinema 1* and *Cinema 2.* This is why these books, dedicated entirely to cinema, also contain an essential part of Deleuze's political philosophy—much like, if not more so than, the more explicitly political books such as *Anti-Oedipus* or *A Thousand Plateaus.*

The "politics of history" (if you will grant me the expression) correspond exactly to what Deleuze analyzes as the cinematographic model of the action-image that dominated cinema before the First World War, whose exemplary figures are Griffith and Eisenstein. But what does Deleuze mean by "action-image"? Without being able to enter into the details of Deleuze's analyses, let me recall that it is a film-form in which the composition of images is thought of as the composition of an organic unity. The greatness of Griffith is to have been the first to provide a powerful and coherent conception of editing, in which the parts of an organism, while differentiating themselves, stand in relation with one another. (This, according to Deleuze, is the function of parallel editing where shots of the different elements of the organism—whites and blacks, men and women, rich and poor, city and countryside, etc.—alternate according to a certain rhythm.) This is the first aspect. The second aspect concerns the life of the organism, the laws that

govern the relation between its elements. In Griffith, the actions that get started always take the form of a duel that opposes the villain to the good man, good to evil, since the unity of the organism is always threatened and its equilibrium must constantly be re-established. Confronted by danger, the other parts of the whole unite to bring aid to the good, the actions converge towards the place of the duel in order to reverse its result, to restore the compromised harmony. This aspect of the organism's life is brought out by convergent and accelerated editing. (The insertion of close-ups, in turn, shows the relation between a part and the whole, as is the case, for example, in the famous close-ups of soldiers that alternate with the shots of the battle in *Birth of a Nation*.) This conception of the composition of images constitutes, in Deleuze's words, "a powerful organic representation" and would become the paradigm for Hollywood movies:

> The American cinema draws from it its most solid form; from the general situation to the re-established or transformed situation through the intermediary of a duel, of a convergence of actions. American montage is organico-active.[8]

But organic editing is just as important for the Soviet school, and notably for Eisenstein. In his films as well as in his theoretical writings, Eisenstein places himself within Griffith's heritage; what he puts into question is not the organic conception of editing, but the idea Griffith has of an organism. The unity of an organism is

constituted by a juxtaposition of parts that are external one to another; rather, it is a unity of production. An organism produces its parts according to laws of genesis and growth, and the oppositions that threaten the organism are not due to chance or individual passions. Conflicts are the result of the internal force of the organism that breaks the unity in order to reproduce it at a higher level. Eisenstein subscribes to a conception of montage that leads from a situation to its modification through a series of actions, but the organism is a dialectical unity, and the composition and deployment of the images must therefore follow very different rules. (Opposition and attraction editing therefore take the place of parallel editing.)

Hollywood and Soviet cinema before World War II thus share the essential: an organic conception of montage whose power we should be careful not to underestimate. It is this power of representation that brought about the "universal triumph" of American cinema before the war for reasons, and this needs to be stressed, that are not simply the result of economic or commercial superiority.[9] Organic montage brings about a conception of individual and collective action from which it derives its power. The milieu and its forces act on the characters by creating a situation in which they are taken up and to which they must react. They must respond to the challenge of the situation and this response produces a different, modified situation. Milieu and character are like the two terms of a relation that is at the same time one of reciprocal dependency and of

antagonism. The action, in the strict sense of the term, has the form of a duel, or of a series of duels: with the milieu, with others, or with oneself. Deleuze suggests a formula to describe the structure of the action-image: "S—A—S," from the situation at the beginning to the situation transformed by the intermediary intervention of the action.[10]

Deleuze calls this cinematographic form "realism." However, he gives to the term a very peculiar meaning. As defined by Deleuze, realism by no means excludes the extraordinary, the fantastic, dreams; even less does it exclude melodrama, which is, on the contrary, one of its essential forms. It only requires that the space-times be determined geographically, historically, and socially, and that the emotions or drives of the characters be embodied in their behavior.[11]

A last thing to be noted is that, in Deleuze's analyses, the question of community and of the people is always present in the cinema of the action-image. Even when the action is centered on a hero figure, the hero can only become heroic, that is to say, be up to the situation and capable of responding to the challenge of the milieu, to the extent to which he or she represents the collectivity. It is only through the mediation of the community that an individual can become a leader and accomplish a great deed.[12] This allows Deleuze to write:

> Finally, the American cinema constantly shoots and reshoots a single fundamental film, which is the birth of a nation-civilization, whose first version

was provided by Griffith. It has in common with the Soviet cinema the belief in a finality of universal history; here the blossoming of the American nation, there the advent of the proletariat.[13]

There would be many things to say about the insistent parallel that Deleuze establishes between the American dream and the communist dream—in the context of this essay, I will limit myself to the following remark. In the century of the cinema, more precisely, of the "classic" cinema before the war, the American dream and the communist dream are—at least seen from Europe—the only two great political projects of universal emancipation and freedom, grounded in a thinking of history and of individual and collective action. The organic conception of editing expresses the belief in a finality of history and in a common becoming of humanity, where the belief in a transformation of the world by humans and the belief in the discovery of an internal spiritual world are intimately related.[14]

4

Yet, despite the success of the films that continue to be made according to this model, the action-form, for Deleuze, has entered into an irreversible crisis. "The soul of cinema" is no longer there, as he writes.[15] New forms of editing, new ways of composing images come about in the postwar period that Deleuze analyzes under the title of "time-image." Italian Neo-realism provides the first great example of this kind of cinema.

While I cannot analyze here the question of a cinema of time in itself, let me stress that these new forms of editing put into play a thinking of the relation between actions and situations that is nonorganic and nonrealistic (in the specific sense that Deleuze gives to these terms) as well as a conception of time that is nonchronological and nonteleological. Stated more clearly: For Deleuze, the crisis of classic cinema coincides exactly with the fact that we no longer believe in the coherence that the thinking of history gave to human agency. We no longer believe that individual or collective actions have any bearing on a situation taken as a whole, that they could modify it or reveal its meaning, that the success or defeat—in this regard it doesn't matter—of our actions are up to the situation we are confronted with. We no longer believe that our affects are embodied in behaviors that express them in a coherent manner. In short, what we are lacking now is the "realistic" assurance that an action has a bearing on the situation, the "vital illusion" of the health of a community that always reinvents itself anew. To say it with Stanley Cavell:

> We no longer grant, or take it for granted, that men doing the work of the world together are working for the world's good, or if they are working for the world's harm they can be stopped. These beliefs flowered last in our films about the imminence and experience of the Second World War, then began withering in its aftermath—in the knowledge, and refusal of knowledge, that while we had rescued our

European allies, we could not preserve them; that our enemies have prospered; that we are obsessed with the ally who prospered and prepared to enter any pact so long as it is against him; that the stain of the atomic blood will not wash and that its fallout is nauseating us beyond medicine, aging us very rapidly. It is the knowledge, and refusal to know, that we are ceding Stalin and Hitler the permanent victories of the war (if one of them lost the old world battle, he shares the spoils of the present war of the worlds), letting them dictate what shall be meant by communism and socialism and totalitarianism, in particular that they are to be equated.[16]

This analysis of "our present"—whose pertinence is of course debatable—describes exactly the modern condition. If there is a modern fact, for Deleuze, this fact is not some kind of death of God, according to a certain Nietzschean or Heideggerian doxa, nor is it a "return of the religious"; the "modern fact" is that we no longer believe in the links that bind us to the world. What is lost is the world, not in itself or as an object of knowledge, but for us. "We no longer even believe in what happens to us, in love or death."[17]

Certainly, modernity thus understood has no easily assignable and unique date of birth, the postwar period, for instance. But that is not the question, since, for Deleuze as for Bergson, what defines the essence of a thing or an event is always a tendency towards

differentiation, a movement, a process or a becoming and never a fixed state. Modernity, like everything else, is a tendency one can only hope to grasp—taking the risk of failing—in its becoming.

5

While we should not regret the loss of the transcendence of the future and of the teleology of history that revolutionary politics—in the widest sense of the term— put to work, we can certainly not be content with the mere acknowledgment of a broken link to the world, of the fact that the world is lost (to us). Disenchanted cynicism was never an option for Deleuze. If the modern problem is the one I have just described, it interpellates us, it calls for a response. Deleuze did not avoid the task. As far as possible new forms of political agency—of an immanent politics, if you like—are concerned, the major text remains *A Thousand Plateaus* with its analysis of the concepts of majority, segmentarity, becoming-minoritarian, etc. In turn, it is *Cinema 2* and *What is Philosophy?* that sketch a response to the problem of the world. What could take the place of the old "realism" with its "vital illusion," and the revolutionary hope for a better future? Yet another belief, another hope, but a belief that has changed objects:

> The link between man and the world is broken. Henceforth, this link must become an object of belief: it is the impossible which can only be restored within a faith. Belief is no longer addressed

to a different or transformed world. Man is in the world as if in a pure optical and sound situation. The reaction of which man has been dispossessed can be replaced only by belief. Only belief in the world can reconnect man to what he sees and hears. The cinema must film, not the world, but belief in this world, our only link. The nature of the cinematographic illusion has often been considered. *Restoring our belief in the world—this is the power of modern cinema (when it stops being bad).* Whether we are Christians or atheists, in our universal schizophrenia, we need reasons to believe in this world. It is a whole transformation of belief. It was already a great turning-point in philosophy, from Pascal to Nietzsche: to replace the model of knowledge with belief. But belief replaces knowledge only when it becomes belief in this world, as it is. . . . We need an ethic or a faith, which makes fools laugh; it is not a need to believe in something else, but a need to believe in this world, of which fools are a part.[18]

This power, or this necessity, concerns not only the cinema, and *What is Philosophy?* dedicates to the theme of an immanent conversion of faith important passages that take up and continue the analyses of *The Image-Time:*

It is possible that the problem now concerns the one who believes in the world, and not even in the existence of the world but in its possibilities of movements and intensities, so as once again to give

birth to new modes of existence, closer to animals and rocks. 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.[19]

The transformation that Bergson had philosophy undergo by asking the question of the new in the making thus acquires yet another facet. Perhaps time, in its essence, is the invention of the new and, certainly, "all is not given." But precisely because not everything is given, nothing guarantees the new forms of life, nothing assures us that other modes of political and social organization will come to "liberate life wherever it is oppressed."[20] As Bergson writes in *The Two Sources*, in human societies as elsewhere, the new is always an invention, a creation.[21] But in order to discover other forms of existence, we must first believe in them. We must believe in life and in this world, we must believe in the new of which life is the power, or the secret, and in this world in which the new may trace itself.

Nobody will deny that the task is, in fact, difficult. But is there another? Whether we agree with the outcome of Deleuze's analyses of what constitutes "the modern fact" or not, we must grant that he asked a question, an ethical and political one, which it would be illusory to try to avoid.

CHAPTER 2

A Precursor: Limiting the Future, Affirming Particularity

Andrew Benjamin

The possibility of the future, linked though perhaps too often to the unacknowledged positing of the new, endures as a continuing refrain.[1] Hence, there is the inevitable repetition of the problem posed by the need to begin again and anew. Starting with what could have been an epigram—a note taken and recorded during a voyage—allows for an opening to be staged. "The smallest circumstances awaken in the depths of the heart childhood emotions, though always with a new attraction." (*Les plus petites circonstances réveillent au fond du coeur les emotions du premier age, et toujours avec un attrait nouveau.*)[2]

The choice of these lines is far from arbitrary. What they indicate is that here in Chateaubriand, the "new" will have been other than mere novelty. (As such, his formulation would seem to gesture towards the acknowledged truth that accompanies any sustained encounter with the state of affairs opened up by the new's evocation.) This initial articulation finds the new positioned within a form of repetition. As such a different question arises, and it should be noted that the question is not adduced, it emerges from the formulation

itself. The question is straightforward: What is the new once it can no longer be identified with novelty? If a conclusion can be drawn from the possibility of posing this question, then it involves the need to return, continually, to the question of the new. A return occasioned by the impossibility of conflating a concern with the new with mere invention. Allowing for the continuity of the return to the new as a question is already to link a questioning of the new to the ineliminability of a form of repetition. Indeed, the question of the new may have arisen from a structure of repetition. Moreover, it has to be understood as that structure's enactment.

This is the setting in which the central concerns of this paper—namely the relationship between the future and the new—will be taken up. As always, it is vital to begin with questions. The opening ones are straightforward: *And the future, what if it weren't new? And the new, what if it were simply part of the past?* Not that there would not be anything new but that *newness, past, future*, etc., would all then be terms demanding forms of thinking that might resist the description "new" or "futural." If any thought of the new had to be incorporated into a framework that has, at the very least, a history, then in terms of a mode of philosophical inquiry there would not have been anything other than a structure in which the new as gesture demanded to be thought. Once it can be positioned in this way—a positioning that undoes the hold of the naturalization of chronological time over the new—then the new would

have reemerged subsequently as a question.

What must be allowed—allowing, as a taking place without automatic delimitation—is the pursuit of the new as a question. This will be an undertaking that, by definition, cannot naturalize its object. Consequently, holding that object, the "new," though in the end also the "past" and the "future," apart from their absorption into natural time, also occasions the temporality of all of these terms to be the site of investigation; perhaps, continual investigation. Though it will only remerge in the guise of a conclusion, the interplay of continuity and the place of a transformed, if not transfigured sense of the new within it, hence the continual interplay of continuity and discontinuity needs to be understood as a description of criticism. At this stage, however, what matters is the new. Taking up the new as a possibility within philosophical and literary thinking will occur, in this context, in relation to the precursor.

Opening

If the predicament of poetry—poetry in the modern period and once it is poetry then there is the real possibility that such a concern might extend to writing—has a precursor, a body of work that grounds the current predicament, then the question to be addressed is, what would identify that precursor? Would its presence have been effective? The possibility of this sense of a precursor informs Nathalie Sarraute's 1965 engagement with "le roman moderne."[3] Raising, thereby, the question of whether there is a logic of the precursor.

While the answer to the question of the precursor bears, for Sarraute, a proper name, in this instance the name in question is not central. The name is of course Flaubert. What matters, however, is the use of this "Flaubert."[4] What form of argumentation stems from its evocation?

Sarraute uses one of Flaubert's own observations. As always with his most acute reflections, it is advanced in a letter to Louise Colet. While by no means dominating their correspondence, he often wrote to her of writing; the latter—writing—is to be understood as an act, as a strategy and more emphatically as literature. The passage cited by Sarraute circulates around the "nothing." Flaubert proposes, "What seems to me good, what I would like to do, is a book on nothing, a book without attachments to the exterior." (*Ce qui me semble beau, ce que je voudrais faire, c'est un livre sur rien, un livre sans attaché extérieure.*)[5]

While the passage from the letter is well-known, for Sarraute the "nothing" marks the abstract to which the modern novel tends. The important element in this presentation does not concern the abandoning of character or plot but their incorporation into a form of abstraction and thus with the way they would then comprise part of the "nothing." They are integral to "a book on nothing" (*un livre sur rien*), to its presence and thus to its style. Even though Sarraute only quotes the lines cited above, the letter itself goes on to link the "nothing" to "style." The latter is not mere ornamentation. Rather, style in Flaubert's sense dissolves the distinction between surface and depth and

thus demands to be understood as the work's internal economy and thus as that which holds its work—as a work—in play.

Sarraute wrote "Flaubert le precursor" in 1965. Dates, of course, mark time. The nature of the mark and the conception of time at work within the dates—the time dated—may be the subject of contestation if not discovery. Indeed, precisely because a date has a form of singularity, the date's reiteration, a movement in which the initial singularity is revealed as itself the mark of an ineliminable plurality, forms an integral part of the founding date. With any date, time as a complex is automatically involved. Precisely because 1965 is not the "now"—where the now is no more than a conception of the now that identifies it (the now) with the date of the time of writing, thus 1965 is explicitly not now—a series of questions emerge. This "nothing" is after all both a temporal as well as an ontological term. Perhaps, therefore, the opening question needs to take the following form: What, now, of this "nothing?" If part of the answer involved a separation occurring presently of the link between the modern and this nothing, what then, now, of the nothing and what moreover of the modern? Again, if this possible separation were maintained, will a concern with the nothing, with Flaubert's possible "book on nothing" (*livre sur rien*) have been overcome and, as a consequence, Flaubert would then not be a precursor, except perhaps only for a past. A past recognized as such though only because nothing would no longer be part of the modern: nothing would

no longer be new, even though it had been once. A state of affairs within which designations such as "past," "now," and "modern" derived what meaning they have from the slide between the present (now) and its immediate dating.

While the problems posed by the precursor mean having to consider concerns central to a philosophical understanding of historical time, it remains the case that fundamental to developing a sense of the precursor, though more aptly described as a logic of the precursor, is the interplay of the reworked presence of nothing and abstraction. The latter—abstraction—when won from its initial context, a winning in which the marks of that original setting remain, is then present in terms of its generative capacity and not its having been withdrawn and thus only ever present as an aftereffect. In the end, this sense of abstraction and nothing are knitted together. Separating them, therefore, would involve failing to see the complexity that they stage. To be clear, for Sarraute, Flaubert is a precursor. In other words, the modernity that is associated with Joyce amongst others does not pertain, or at least not fully, in this instance. Moreover, Flaubert can be read as though all that is offered is a literary presentation of manners—one that does no more than provide insight into a specific historical period. And yet, what is opened up on the level of style—style in the sense that is broader than the conception of it found in Flaubert—allows a way through that reduction. The way in question involves a reorientation of approach in which the nothing, rather

than a simple counter-position either to form or to presence, becomes a concern in itself. Indeed, if there is a way of opening up this nothing—perhaps, even, for it to become more than a precursor, though it will be important to return, as was noted above, to the precursor—then the possibilities that it opens up have to be pursued.

Nothing, as a trope if not as an organizing principle within philosophical and literary concerns, already figures. Nothing, however, in order that it come into consideration, thus continue to hold itself in place, needs to be opened up beyond a Hegelian concern with negation, i.e., beyond a sense of negation linked either to completion or finality. In the end, what this will open up is an important connection between the impossible of a completing negation and repetition. Examples here are essential since they delimit the scope of inquiry. An important instance of this move, one in which what occurs is the positioned centrality of the negative, can be found in Blanchot's attempt to rescue Mallarmé from Mallarmé's own Hegelianism.[6] The significance of this type of rescue lies in the way Blanchot develops a conception of the nothing (*rien*) that retains its insistent quality, insisting without the possibility of its own negation (where the latter is understood as the negation that completes). Blanchot, in this move, reiterates that which is central to Bataille's emphatic response to Kojève on the question of Hegel.[7] A response in which a conception of a productive negativity, one that is not subject to its own negation, becomes the operative

element within philosophical thinking. Again, what is at work is negation as an insistent presence.[8] Returning to this sense of insistence will be important. Insistence as both a literary and philosophical possibility once coupled to the work of a productive negativity will reemerge as a form of affirmation. (Affirmation and criticism are in the end bound together, precisely because affirmation needs to be understood as the ascription of identity.) Moving towards that relation involves staying, not so much with the presence of a precursor, as with the recognition of having to engage with what the precursor will always have brought into play. Engagement, therefore, as the need to retain relationality, marks the complex presence of the logic of the precursor.

While any attempt to take up affirmation demands such an approach, the ineliminable presence of the logic of the precursor means that caution is necessary. Within that logic are the very terms whose clarification defines the project at hand. In other words, the logic of the precursor will bring to the fore a mode of thinking that is surrounded by terms such as the "new." A term whose simplistic evocation, as has been suggested, can only ever obfuscate, at the best, or at worst let thinking slip into the temporality of fashion. In sum, while the logic concerns time, the complex defining the conception(s) of time at work within it has a different exigency. What is needed is an oblique approach, perhaps this time, uniquely, one with its own precursors.

If Not Beauty

Gathered together under the title *L'usage de la parole* are a series of texts written by Sarraute that resist the classification novel (*roman*) or even essay *(essai);* perhaps they are only ever pieces. The question of their status— perhaps more accurately, their status existing as a question—allows their classification to be a concern. What is classified, the terms and concepts of classification, bring time into play. The importance of having to note an already present link between temporality (understood as an inherently plural determination) and forms of classification is that it provides the context in which it is possible to locate the effective presence of the logic of the precursor. On one level, at work in this formulation of the question of the precursor is an array of conceptual possibilities. Holding them in play does not involve providing their detail, as though identifying discreet elements would sustain that play. Indeed, definitions may have the opposite effect. What has to be considered is how a matrix of concerns— a locus of continually produced relations—is to be understood. Pure conceptual identity is, it will be argued, as impossible and as untenable as the apparent relativism that emerges with the undoing of purity. Working through the logic of the precursor, allowing the complexity of its detail to unfold, is the way into this matrix. In sum, the weave set up by a concern with time comprises the interplay of nothing (initially Flaubert's *rien)* as literature's possible topos, then Sarraute's repositioning this nothing as that which tends towards

abstraction, and lastly their connection to the nothing as insistent and productive and therefore as bound up with affirmation.

Staged by any concern with nothing and the weave of concerns within which it forms an essential component, especially that approach that begins to define those elements in terms that reach beyond their traditional determinations, is the need to situate those concerns in relation to a specific structure of thought. Beginning with nothing—nothing as an opening—demands a point of departure, perhaps beginning anew.

> The gaze of the other scrutinizes the one who, with a tantalizing, guilty smile, placed sideways on his/her face, miserably tries . . . but what is the good? . . . the word "aesthetic," one can try to turn it round, yet it is identical on all its sides . . . what is the good of dissimulating one of them by plating it with it the word "beauty."
>
> [Le *regard de l'autre scrute celui qui, un sourire fautif, aguicheur, posé de travers sur son visage, piteusement s'efforce . . . mais à quoi bon? . . . le mot "esthétique," on a beau le retourner, il est identique sur toutes ses faces. . . à quoi bon de dissimuler l'une d'elles en plaquant sur elle le mot "beauté."*]

Sarraute wrote these lines within a short text whose title is "Aesthetic" *(Esthétique).*[9] A text within which forms of traversal and the complex determinations that movement brings to the question of identity are central

both as a thematic presence, as well as in terms of an operational logic. The question within them concerns what would be at work in the effacing of a plurality of forms of presentation if over them were to be placed "the word 'beauty'." What needs to be distanced therefore is the enforcing hold of beauty. And yet, as always, a preliminary form of questioning is necessary. What conception or conceptions of beauty are envisaged? There are, after all, many ways to refuse beauty. In addition, this also means that the question of what is being refused will also need to be taken into consideration. In sum, what is the beauty whose hold is not be countenanced and whose presence is not to be encountered? In this context, there are two specific senses of beauty that need to be countered in order that the force of what Sarraute has termed *esthétique* can emerge. These two forms of beauty can be productively described as beauty as the recovery of loss, in the first instance, and beauty as the overcoming of discord in the second. Countering them will introduce the temporal and ontological elements that allow for a sustained encounter with the logic of the precursor.

While it is necessary to identify the two forms of beauty that should be distanced, a distancing occurring in the name of the aesthetic, it needs to be noted that precisely because they are defined in terms of the interplay of absence and presence, they overlap at certain crucial moments. The two possibilities reside in the oscillation between loss—a loss that defines the present—and forms of eventual plenitude. In the first

instance there is loss. Either beauty is not at hand and has to be recovered—a clear example of which is the philosophical strategy of Plato's *Symposium*—or beauty is simply lost and thus the absence of this guarantor occasions longing and thus differing forms of melancholia.[10] Indeed, such would be basis for beginning to interpret Dürer's *Melancholia.*[11] In the second there is the possibility of plenitude, understood in philosophical terms as the recovery of beauty (beauty within the Platonic configuration; that is, beauty that has an essential quality [an *ousia*], the search for which defines the nature of the philosophical). This set-up has its corollary within a conception of historical time in which the present as a site of loss opens itself up to the possibility of an eventual reconciliation, if not self-reconciliation. In this instance reconciliation is the overcoming of the dissensus marking and defining the present. Arguments for a form of plenitude that need to be defined in relation to the future will, as a consequence, have to be understood in terms of a projected reconciliation or completion to come. The "to come" identified in the present and that defines the present grounds such a definition of the future on a conception of an incomplete present that is to be completed. A completion that, in its occurring, structures the now of this future. The to come, this now, and thus this future are defined, in differing ways, by a disjunction between their realization and the condition of the present. For example, within this set-up the future is not a condition of the present; rather, the future

occurs—it is to come—in overcoming the present as a site of loss.[12]

The differing conceptions of beauty that are structured by this complex of concerns are themselves marked by a form of impossibility. Beauty's impossibility involves the question of its presence. Beauty is either longed for or given as a projected outcome. Impossibility should either become a possibility (as is made clear by the structure of progress outlined in Diotima's speech) or it is only ever held as a determining absence—held, for example, in the stern gaze of *Melancholia*. Beauty is therefore present in terms of the impossibility of its presence. What this opens up, however, is another question, perhaps even another track through the continuity of the encounter with the question of beauty. Plato's question, the question that will always seek the universal in its radical differentiation from particulars and thus the one that comes to dominate any sustained thinking of the relationship between universals and particulars and that in turn informs conceptions of historical time, starts from the necessarily disjunctive relationship between universal and particular. The disjunction is such that one approach, as has already been indicated, is to maintain the disjunction's presence. Such an approach would concede the disjunction's inevitability. Hence, it is a position dominated by the aporetic, within which loss is present as the melancholic concession to presence's impossibility. The other possibility, which in the end has the same point of origination, namely, the movement between loss and

plenitude, is the literary critical or philosophical project that works with the assumption of beauty's actual or eventual presence. Within such a project, completion is an ever-present possibility. The recovery of presence is, after all, the implicit intention within the Socratic response to the Platonic question.

Within the lines cited above from Sarraute, however, there is the suggestion of another way through. A way that emerges once neither of these possibilities is to pertain. What this would mean is that the reality of presentation—the presence of particulars—would have been repositioned. Hence, what will have opened up is a setting that demands a different mode of thinking. A mode of thought no longer dominated by an oscillation between the discordant and the reconciled, nor articulated in terms of either loss or mourning or, moreover, by the failure of plenitude. Distanced at the same time would be the use of the language of impossibility or the aporetic to describe the positioning of what is given. At this point, a return to Sarraute's text becomes necessary, a return deferring the new (by providing it with another location). As has already been noted, the passage from Sarraute contains the following line: "the word 'aesthetic,' one can try to turn it round, yet it is identical on all its sides." The question to be pursued here is the nature of the identity in question. Returning therefore to the aesthetic—a return guided not by any form of necessity since beauty will always remain a possibility, but because it is opportune and thus a return to be encouraged—demands not just that the

identity of the aesthetic be taken up as a concern, but also that the identity in question be disassociated from the way the identity of the beautiful would be understood. The disassociation in question is from a conception of identity that is conceived uniquely in terms of the relationship between universal and particular. Equally, therefore, identity is disassociated from its location within a relationship defined by the interplay of impossibility and possibility.

Whatever force beauty has—understood as Sarraute indicates that, if only as a beginning, "beauty" is a "word"—it inheres in the ontological and temporal determinations that the word brings with it. Beauty, in this precise sense, would work to dissipate the hold of an original sense of plurality. What would have vanished, therefore, is the possibility of working with a sense of particularity that held itself apart from an explication in terms of either the pragmatic or the empirical. Though equally it is held apart from a conception of the particular in which particularity is defined in relation to a transcendent universal. What is still reattained, however—and the retention occurs precisely because of the distancing, thus refusal, of these possibilities—is another way into the question of the identity of particulars. While the term *ésthetique* would usually refer to the experiential, here in its counter-positioning to "the word 'beauty,'" it needs to be understood as announcing the demand of particularity. Thus, it should be noted that what is needed is a sense of opposition that would be significantly different to one given by a simple

counter-positioning of the experiential and the conceptual. Moreover, aesthetics would, as a consequence of this difference, then be defined as the response to the demand of particularity. That demand is the latter's insistence. Once there is a concern with beauty, to the exclusion of the aesthetic, then the specificity of any one particular would begin to lose its capacity to insist. Individuality, and thus the identity of the particular, would, as a consequence, no longer exert any hold. Differing versions of subsumption would begin to delimit the particular's particularity. Beauty, in the sense in which it has been presented here, the sense given by the way beauty and the aesthetic are positioned by Sarraute, demands either the excision of the particular's own insistent presence, or, what would amount to the same thing, namely the incorporation of particularity within the identity determining relation between universal and particular.[13] Countering beauty therefore allows not just for particularity. More exactly, what is occasioned is the particular's self-presentation.

Posed in these terms, the demand of the particular remains evident. To take up the formulation of the passage, what is identical in every instance cannot be equated, however, with simple appearance. That would be a position that was still trapped within an opposition between universal and particular. Rather, what is always the same is the particular's insistence. What that means is that attention should be given to each and every particular, and it is on this level, a level positioned beyond a simple reduction of presence to literal

appearance, that all particulars are "identical." However, the addition and thus defining position is that in every instance what follows from this identity is the actual appearance, thus, also the reality, of differences. Moreover, it is only by turning from the work attributed to beauty and which results in the leveling and dissipation of particularity, that there can be the identification of the particular. With that identification a new avenue of approach will have been pursued. The use of the term "new" here is of course deliberate. What it marks out, however, is of course a question that needs to be addressed. Particularity—in this context *l'ésthetique*—is not just present. At every moment that presence is under threat. Of immediate concern is the threat of a vanishing caused by the imposition of a concern with "beauty" (with the "word"). As a consequence, what matters is the affirmation of the particular. Not its mere presence but its presence as a particular. A presence that eschews the threat of having been subsumed by "beauty."

The immediate question, therefore, concerns what it means to affirm particularity. The problem of the given returns. A return signaled by the reiteration of the problem of the pragmatic or the empirical. Since it could be that affirming particularity, the particular as given, would be no more than a form of pragmatism. Or, as significantly, it would be the result of the identification of particularity with literal presence. This is the equivalent, within interpretation, to a form of empiricism. If either of these possibilities—pragmatism

or empiricism—held sway, then affirmation would amount to no more than a type of description. Presentation, therefore, would be a description articulated with, and as, representation.

To work through these possibilities necessitates a return to the negative. The negative arises because particularity is bound up with what can be described as the necessity for "irresolution." This term does not designate a failure, that is, the impossibility of the particular to have resolved itself and thus to be the enacted adoption of a determinant and final form.Rather, irresolution points to another quality of particularity, one, as will be noted, that is explicable in terms of a return to negativity. A quality that allows for an opening—a sense of a holding apart—such that what is then given is the presence of the particular as that which comes to the fore through the act of affirmation. The object of affirmation is the particular. And, even though it involves a reiteration of the tautological formulation already used, it remains the case that, as a beginning, what is affirmed is the presence of the particular's particularity: a state of affairs in which particularity, as has been suggested, cannot be reduced to either the pragmatic instance or to the content of a literal description. In other words, once irresolution is taken as defining an approach allowing for that set-up in which what is—"is" in the sense of a-being-present—can never be resolved in any absolute sense (and here resolution means having acquired a singular determination that could as a consequence be

represented absolutely), then this entails that emphasis needs to be given to particularity precisely because the demand of the particular falls outside that which can be more generally described as the identity-determining relation between universal and particular. Irresolution becomes a conception of negativity that is inherently generative.

Precision is essential here. The claim that a particular remains without resolution, a claim in which particularity as irresolution can be equated with finitude, concerns the ontological status of the particular. Moreover, it is that ontological status that underpins the necessary impossibility of any form of coextensivity between the particular and its identification. In addition, to the extent that it can be argued that that relation does not establish the identity of a particular, nor equally by the act of description, then the question of how that identity is established or secured emerges as a genuine concern. What this means is that if the opposition between universal and particular is no longer operative, then the question of identity, as has been argued, endures as that which is to be established. The process in question takes the form of the always-to-be-established. The ineliminability of this form, one arising because of the disassociation from the conventions of universal/particular relations, indicates the presence of a dynamic quality: a quality that must acknowledge that what determines particularity is potentiality, with determination understood in the sense of that which identifies the mode of being proper to

particularity, specifically to its insistent presence. Understanding the force of potentiality involves noting the inherent connection between irresolution as in part descriptive of the active nature of work—work as an activity rather that as an already-illustrative object—and the demand of the particular.

Identity on the level of particulars, which is a state of affairs allowed for under the rubric of the aesthetic, though only in its counter-positioning to beauty, is therefore necessarily present once necessity is equated with a potentiality for presence. That presence is, however, circumscribed by what was identified above as the always-to-be-established. The significance of this formulation is that it attests to the original relation between potentiality and the particular, a relation in which their inherent disjunction functions as the particular's condition of possibility. This weave of concerns provides the setting in which it becomes possible to continue with particularity.

As a prelude to continuing, some of the threads introduced thus far can be brought together. The particular's insistence is an ontological claim. The rearticulation of that position in terms of negativity is as much implicated in the relationship between the finite particular and what was identified earlier as irresolution. The complex nature of these relations—a complexity that will in the end only be accounted for adequately by the introduction of the notion of "heterology"—is that potentiality figures in terms of an account of the particular. This is an account that

formally can never exhaust the particular's potentiality. Such is the limit of finitude. In addition, the response to particularity, the one in which the presence and the content of the particular's finitude, a state of affairs that is the affirmation of particularity, is equally marked by irresolution. However, the irresolution in question, precisely because it is present in terms of the negative, in the sense that what cannot be effaced is completion's impossibility, is also the ground of responsibility.

Being Particular

Emerging from the way in which Sarraute positions the aesthetic is, in the first instance, the structuring distinction between a generalizable concern with insistence and the inscription of particularity within an ontology in which potentiality plays not just an essential role but a determining one.[14] As such, and in lieu of both stasis and the essential, itself a state of affairs in which particulars appear within and as representations, becoming and potentiality have centrality. The correlate of which is that appearance (thus particularity) can no longer be circumscribed either by the structure of representation or, as has already been noted, by the structuring opposition between universal and particular. Related to this complex of concerns is the other element arising from what has been identified, following Sarraute, as the aesthetic. That element is the question of appearance. Appearance is a question precisely because the particular and its appearance are no longer effects of the universal. What this means is that the

particular is finite, and therefore particularity is a version of finitude. Once no longer circumscribed by the universal/particular relation, then, finitude, understood as the ontological status of the particular, is that which comes to presence within a process in which its identity is established. Process in this instance defines a practice. Moreover, as shall be suggested, it is a process that can be named. (In addition, it is a process that names.) This preliminary definition of naming particularity as a process allows two specific themes to be drawn together. The attribution of identity to a particular, an attribution that will have entailed responding to the particular's insistence, is the process in which the identity of a particular, its particularity, is affirmed. The next question is then the relationship between this affirmation and appearance.

The particular's insistence delimits an essential quality of all particulars. This quality emerges in the move from beauty to the aesthetic, accepting the sense (historic and semantic) in which the two words have been used thus far. However, there has to be the move from insistence to the ascription of a specific identity to a given particular, recognizing from the start that such a move will always be an act of irresolution. An instance of what that entails is not found, for example, in the identification of a work of art as a work of art, but in the more significant move in which its—the particular's—presence as art is identified. The latter aspect is concerned with how the work of art is a work of art. As a point of departure, attention would then move to detail

and technique and thus to the particular's appearance. The move from the fact of existence, the given-ness of a poem functions as a clear example, to the explication of the poem's work as a poem. This is a move that accepts the insistence of particularity as the point of origination. What is accepted, in other words, is an ontological configuration defined by the continuity of the object's becoming and thus its potentiality—continuity and potentiality are interrupted by finitude. The finite as appearance. There is an allowing, what could also be described, as the opening of a space, in which there is the appearance of the particular as the particular. No longer would there be a possible identification of appearance with the given, an appearance would have been repositioned. Henceforth, it is the affirmation of the particular's particularity. The affirmation is grounded in the interplay of finitude and irresolution. This accounts for why, ontologically, finitude is not identical with its appearance.

Taking these aspects of the particular into consideration means that the particular's presence is not a delimited and closed domain. The particular, to continue with one of the examples already used, is only ever poetry's individuated presence. The essentialist position would have necessitated recourse to the question—what is poetry? As though this question harbored the approach to poetry. The task delimited by that question would, as a consequence, only concern the particular to the extent that it opened up or made present the specific philosophical project the question

demands. The move from beauty to the aesthetic necessitates working within a domain opened by the abeyance of this mode of questioning (and its enjoined task). The move means that the project at hand is importantly different. The difference exists both on the level of the object—that is, as it concerns the quality of particularity—and in regards to the task demanded by a different form of questioning. Drawing on the formulation within the example already noted, the question would be—how is the poem a poem? This question allows for the process of individuation to be registered within and as part of the particular's particularity. It is as though the individuated, thus the particular's presence, is from the start folded into a field that individuates. That field, or network of concerns, while formal, is the construct through which dominant and counter traditions are articulated. In other words, the field is not merely context, but the interplay of forces that work through and as such are always implicated in the particular. Adumbrating the field's operative quality is to sketch vital elements within the logic of the precursor. In the sense that taken together the activity of place—an activity, which is in part already being made evident through the process of allowing—is interarticulated with the operation of time. The latter—time—has both an interpretive dimension as well as a historical one.

The field, however, is neither smooth nor continuous, and rather than a site of variety it is the locus of the heterological. Particularity, while part of a field,

introduces the heterological on two interrelated levels. The heterological forms an integral part of the logic's operation without being identical with it. In the first instance the field is present as a set of infinite possibilities such that finitude and with it particularity, as has been intimated, is only ever positioned disjunctively in relation to its conditions of possibility. The second is that accounting for a particular's presence as a particular is of necessity situated within the "always-to-be-established," where the latter is understood as a process of continual irresolution. The locus of heterology therefore is a site that will have already incorporated the quality that it situates.

Conceived as only ever occurring within a site of individuation, not only positions particulars within a set of relations such that any particular will already have, if only as an ineliminable potentiality, lines of relations drawn through them, it is also the case that these lines bring a complex array of temporal possibilities into play. The logic of the precursor, while undoing conceptions of time that are determined as the run of chronology in which precedent and influence mark the naturalization of chronology, also refuses to allow the new—as a form of alterity—any position within such a set-up. The new, however, rather than being abandoned, is repositioned within a relationship between a field of concerns, understood as the locus of individuation, and the logic of the precursor—a logic in which sequence cedes its place to forms of repetition. It is not just that the question of the new continues to return, more significantly it is that

the insistent presence of the particulars—an insistence in which finitude and irresolution are at work together—brings the particular within the ambit of repetition. To argue that the affirmation of particularity, a situation that is always more than a description of the particular's appearance while, at the same time, arguing that the particular is delimited by finitude and irresolution, entails that the particular's potential is to be repeated. (It remains within irresolution.) Iterability is therefore an ontological consideration even if its consequence concerns meaning. This repetition becomes a future affirmation—the future made possible by the ontological formulation of particularity. In other words, it is made possible by what can be described as "being particular."

What occurs with particularity—with "being particular"—is the move from that being to its affirmation. Affirmation becomes the ascription of a specific identity to the particular. That affirmation is delimited as much by finitude and irresolution as it is by the identification of the particular with a universal. The identification, however, does not entail that the particular derives its identity from its relation to the universal. The contrary is the case, since it is the particular that discloses a form of universality by allowing for its (the universal's) repetition without the entailed presence either of an essence or a philosophical or interpretive task whose project is the recovery of the essential. If the argument concerns the way in which a particular poem works as a poem, then while this involves a repetition of poetry, that repetition falls

beyond the hold of the essential. In addition, precisely because a response to the question, in what way is a given poem a poem, is itself delimited by the relationship between finitude and irresolution, what can never be precluded are future repetitions. Again, it must be noted that this not an argument involving semantic overdetermination. The continuity of repetition, one that founds discontinuities and which is itself dependent upon the heterological set-up defining the relationship between finitude and potentiality, is ontological.

The logic of the precursor brings the complex of time into a productive connection with a form of negativity. That connection, which is to be understood as a site of activity, and thus the setting for individuation, provides the location (and possibility) for affirmation. It should be remembered that affirmation is not linked directly to value. Rather, what is affirmed is the particular's particularity. The move from the given to affirmation is a move in which attention is given to the recognition of the particular as individuated within a weave or network of concerns. The role of the negative within this domain precludes absolute finality. Thus, what this situation involves is twofold. In the first instance it is the continuity of an activity that establishes the particular's presence (present as the particular). In the second, it is that an intrinsic part of this setting is the ineliminability of conflict. Irresolution's necessity demands it. Nonetheless, what the activity in question does is name. It names the particular by accounting for its presence. Within the realm comprised of artwork and works of

literature, the process that names is criticism. The project of criticism is the appearance of particularity, noting that the particular is folded within a field or network within which it comes to be individuated. The field, thus the lines drawn in and through the particular, is established, in part (though only ever in part) by a form of universality and a conception of temporality that has to take repetition as fundamental.

If there is a conclusion that can be drawn, an end that is already an allowing, then it is simply that the logic of the precursor is no longer situated within, or as, a simple positing of the new. The logic has an operative quality and even though the detail will always need to be spelt out, it remains the case that in every instance criticism identifies another—as opposed to the Same—particular. Criticism is inextricably bound up with the process of repetition. That identification therefore—the emergence of singularity—is the life of work. Equally, of course, it is the afterlife of a work.

CHAPTER 3
Visual *Parrhesia?:* Foucault and the Truth of the Gaze

Martin Jay

The task of telling the truth is an endless labor: to respect it in all its complexity is an obligation which no power can do without—except by imposing the silence of slavery.[1]

MICHEL FOUCAULT

Cezanne's famous assertion in a letter to a friend in 1905, "I owe you the truth in painting and I will tell it to you," was first brought into prominence by the French art historian Hubert Damisch in his 1978 *Huit thèses pour (ou contre?) une sémiologie de la peinture* and then made into the occasion for a widely discussed book by Jacques Derrida, *La verité en peinture* later the same year.[2] In that work, Derrida challenged the distinction between work and frame, *ergon* and *parergon*, that had allowed philosophers like Kant to establish an autonomous, disinterested realm for art, distinct from all surrounding discourses and institutions. Instead, Derrida insisted, the frame was always permeable, allowing the external world to invade the artwork. Apparent ornamental excrescences like columns in front of buildings or

clothing on a statue cannot be fully detached from the object itself. In fact, the founding notions of artistic value—beauty or sublimity or form—came themselves, as it were, from the outside. So the truth of a painting could never be established by looking within the painting itself.

Similarly, the debate over the actual model for Vincent Van Gogh's *Old Shoes with Laces* between Meyer Schapiro and Martin Heidegger, a debate that saw the American critic accuse Heidegger of projecting his own philosophical investments onto the work by calling them a pair of peasant shoes rather than those of the artist himself, could not be easily decided one way or another. Derrida sought to undermine Schapiro's claim to having corrected Heidegger's attribution by showing that his own argument was not disinterested, that it was impossible to know for sure what the painting depicted. In other words, the truth of painting could not be established outside it either. A third example Derrida explored concerned the status of writing in the paintings of Valerio Adami, which incorporated literal examples of writing in his canvases, signatures, letters, even texts from Derrida's own book *Glas*, but which were hard to read exclusively in formal, semiotic, or mimetic terms. Here the implication was that Cezanne's promise of telling the truth was very hard to keep because radical undecidability undermined any clear-cut search for veracity in painting either inside or outside the frame.

There is no reason to go further into Derrida's complicated argument now. I have introduced it only as

a prolegomenon to the question I want to address in this paper, which concerns the relationship between truth and not merely painting, but visual experience itself, in the work of Michel Foucault. Was there in Foucault as well as Derrida a deep suspicion of the ability of the eye to verify truth claims or produce warranted assertions about the truth? What was his tacit response to Cezanne's assertion of the painter's obligation to tell the truth on his canvas? What would it mean for visual truth to be "told?"

There has, of course, been a long-standing, often vexed, relationship between visuality and veracity. In juridical settings, eyewitness testimony often prevails over mere hearsay, and the very word "evidence," as has often been noted, is derived from the Latin "videre," to see. Whether metaphorically or literally, many philosophies, idealist as well as empiricist, have privileged illumination, enlightenment, transparency, clarity, and distinctness in their search for truth. Theory, rooted in the Greek word *theoria*, has often been related to the visual experience of looking at a theatrical performance. Of all the senses, vision has seemed the most disinterested because most distanced from what it perceives.

And yet, as we know, the hegemony of the eye has become a topic of persistent suspicion in many different discursive contexts. In a book published a dozen years ago called *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought*.[3] I attempted to trace a variety of criticisms of what can be called the

time. . . . Neither the visible nor the articulable (in contrast to a Kantian transcendental aesthetic) would be an eternal given; each mode would be susceptible of a historical, or speaking more precisely for Foucault, an archaeological analysis, that would disclose its specific character in varying contexts. Vision would not be generally suspect or denigrated; rather, every situation would be open to visual analysis.[7]

In all of these instances, the claim is made that rather than being consistently suspicious of the hegemony of the eye in all its manifestations, Foucault discriminated among scopic regimes or at least visual practices, finding some more benign than others. Thus, the implication that his analysis of the medical gaze or evocation of Bentham's Panopticon as typical of the modern disciplinary order of surveillance could be extended to visuality in general is wrong. While acknowledging that Foucault did read the Panopticon as "the analysis of an 'evil eye' transformed into architecture," Shapiro contends that Foucault has "no arguments that vision is generally dangerous; he is an archaeologist of the visual, alert to the differential character of various visual regimes. And within the space of a certain epoch or culture, he is alert to disparate and possibly conflicting visual practices."[8] He finds in a wide variety of painters—Shapiro lists Manet, Kandinsky, Klee, Magritte, Warhol, Michals, and Fromanger—alternatives to the sinister scopic regime based on surveillance and the Panopticon. Foucault, Shapiro claims, took great pleasure in painting,

whose entire substance is nothing but the transparency of its vision. This inner movement is finally resolved in a nonmaterial center where the intangible forms of truth are created and combined, in this heart of things which is the sovereign subject.[11]

It was Bataille's great achievement, Foucault insisted, to undermine the speculative philosophical grounding of truth in a subject produced by the fantasy of pure, immaterial vision, putting in its place a violently enucleated eye, an upturned eye that can no longer see at all. The result was to disentangle philosophy from its dependence on visual metaphors of clarity, transparency, and distinctness. According to Foucault's gloss on Bataille, "We do not experience the end of philosophy, but a philosophy which regains its speech and finds itself again only in the marginal region which borders its limits: that is, which finds itself either in a purified metalanguage or in the thickness of words enclosed by their darkness, by their blind truth."[12]

Because truth was blind, however, it could not claim to reflect a world of external realities that it adequately represented. In fact, the issue of truthfulness to the outside world had to be discarded as irrelevant. As Foucault put it in his 1977 interview "Truth and Power," "the problem does not consist in drawing the line between that in a discourse which falls under the category of scientificity or truth, and that which comes under some other category, but in seeing historically

the depositary and source of clarity; it has the power to bring a truth to light that it receives only to the extent that it has brought it to light; as it opens, the eye first opens the truth."[24]

Recent research—I am thinking in particular of the work of the sociologist of science Steven Shapin in *A Social History of Truth*[25]—has shown that this idea of a complete rupture between the premodern and modern scientific regimes of truth is in fact exaggerated. Examining the discursive regime supporting the scientific community in seventeenth-century Britain epitomized by the chemist Robert Boyle, Shapin shows that it relied heavily on trusting in the truth-telling virtues of certain types of people, in particular Christian gentlemen whose word was taken to be honest and disinterested. Although the ideology of the new science was to question authority and distrust textual in favor of direct sensual testimony, in practice it also respected the civil conversation of those with the cultural capital to engage in the language game of science. In other words, the earlier reliance on *parrhesia* survived well into the era when Foucault thought it had been replaced by a disembodied and disinterested knowledge based on the unimpeachable testimony of the senses and instruments alone. "Nullius in verba" was an ideal never fully realized.

Be that as it may, it is clear that Foucault had little sympathy with the latter ideology, especially when it privileged visual evidence, which is of a piece with the types of suspicion of panoptical surveillance and the

scientific gaze he developed in other contexts in his writing. As we have noted, he eschewed pursuing a history of the "analytics of truth" for a critical examination of the legitimating underpinnings of truth-telling. That there is a political dimension to all of this is evident in his oft-cited remark in *The Birth of the Clinic* on the French Revolution: "The ideological theme that guides all structural reforms from 1789 to Thermidor Year II is that of the sovereign liberty of truth; the majestic violence of light, which is itself supreme, brings to an end the bounded, dark kingdom of privileged knowledge and establishes the unimpeded empire of the gaze."[26]

Lest there be any doubt that he linked the hegemony of the eye with violence, even in nonpolitical contexts, he added that "the clinician's gaze becomes the functional equivalent of fire in chemical combustion; it is through it that the essential purity of phenomena can emerge; it is the separating agent of truth. . . . The clinical gaze is a gaze that burns things to their furthest truth."[27]

We can now answer our first set of questions—did Foucault understand certain discursive regimes to single out visually ascertained knowledge, the evidence of the eyes or of their prosthetic extensions, as a privileged source of valid knowledge? And if so, how did he evaluate them?—in the following manner. Yes, he did identify certain discursive regimes as privileging visuality as the source of truth, those, for instance, exemplified by Aristotle and Descartes. The modern

practices to destabilize hegemonic regimes of either discourse or visibility, although he has to do so largely by juxtaposing different texts in Foucault's *oeuvre*. He contrasts, for example, Foucault's unfinished work on the painter Manet, abandoned in 1968, with the influential description of the Panopticon in *Discipline and Punish*, written around the same time. In a section of his book entitled "Shutters and Mirrors: Manet Closes the Panopticon Window," Shapiro writes: "In the Panopticon the gaze is mobilized and fixed on each individual; it is a floating or functional gaze that need not appear as the look of anyone in particular. In Manet looks meet no object, no person, even though we see their source. What we see, then, is an eye disconnected from a content of vision."[33]

By stressing the flat canvas against the ideal of an open window on the world, Manet disrupts the traditional perspectivalist visual regime of Western painting. Borrowing explicitly from Derrida's analysis in *The Truth in Painting*, to which we have alluded earlier, Shapiro characterizes Foucault's conclusion in the following way: "Manet, then, has brought the frame into the work; the *parergon* has become the *ergon*. And the frame's function is not to make an interior visible, as in the Panopticon, but to produce an uncanny space in which figures hover between life and death."[34]

But if Manet disconnects the eye from the content of vision and introduces the undecidability of the *ergon* and *parergon* into the uncanny space of the modernist canvas, can we claim that he is offering us a variety of visual

parrhesia, of truth-showing rather than truth-telling? Clearly, Foucault intended his analysis of Manet, and here I would agree with Shapiro, to disrupt the problematic and perhaps even ideological—if we can apply the vocabulary of ideology critique about which Foucault had his doubts—scopic regime of what I have called elsewhere "Cartesian per-spectivalism."[35] But is it disruption of a false system in the service of defending a truer one, either in terms of truth as epistemological adequation to a real world or truth as a function of the legitimate truth-teller? Are Manet's canvases able to provide what Cezanne promised his friend, the truth in painting?

Foucault's examination of René Magritte's *This Is Not a Pipe* provides us with more evidence to address this question. In that remarkable and much discussed little book, Foucault calls Magritte's painting an "unraveled calligram," thwarting the time-honored desire of the calligram to combine words and images in a single, isotropic meaning. But even though in tension, the image and text in this painting are not, strictly speaking, in contradiction because contradictions are only between two statements in language. Moreover, the image of the pipe above the words "ceci n'est pas une pipe" cannot contradict the words because what the canvas shows is not a real pipe, but only a drawing of one. "What misleads us," Foucault concludes, "is the inevitability of connecting the text to the drawing (as the demonstrative pronoun, the meaning of the word *pipe*, and the likeness of the image all invites us to do

here)—and the impossibility of defining a perspective that would let us say that the assertion is true, false, or contradictory."[36]

We are no longer in the realm of painting based on resemblance to the world of external objects seen through a window-like canvas—Foucault says "we are farthest from trompe-l'oeil"[37]—and therefore we have left behind the visually privileged episteme associated with Cartesian perspectivalism. This is clearly not a painting based on mimetic representation of an object realm on the other side of the window. But we have not entered an alternative scopic regime that can be understood as the visual equivalent of *parrhesia*, for Magritte has given us a series of similitudes without any objective correlative. "Resemblance predicated itself upon a model it must return to and reveal; similitude circulates the simulacrum as an indefinite and reversible relation of the similar to the similar."[38] What we get in a Magritte painting is the infinite play of transferences and metamorphoses that represent nothing outside of themselves, that reveal a decomposed calligram with no hope of bringing discourse and figure together into a meaningful whole.

What Manet and Magritte—as well as other artists admired by Foucault like Warhol or Gerard Fromanger—do is undermine the pretension to tell the truth in the hegemonic tradition of Western painting based on mimesis, resemblance, and representation. As Foucault puts it in the passage from *This Is Not a Pipe* cited above, they demonstrate "the impossibility of defining a

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Rhetoric and the Future of the Political

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