The (Un-)eventful: a Transdisciplinary Journey

edited by Paul Kaletsch and Quintus Immisch

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windpark books (publisher)

windpark books, an independent publishing group for contemporary art, was founded in Darmstadt, Germany, in 2017 by Leonhard Fuchs, Felix Hofmann-Wissner, and Jana Matejka, later joined by Paul Jürgens in 2023. Born from a quest for intellectual exchange, the project evolved into an "open park" for collaborative development and publication of genre-fluid and independent printed matter in close collaboration with artists, writers, and scientists. Publications are understood as holistic artistic creations, with realization, production, and edition essentially based on individual concepts and therefore not necessarily pursuing economic added value. As publishers, curators, and editors, they foster collaborative creativity, mutual knowledge exchange, and insight into diverse realms of work, life, and interests, adhering to an ideology of the printed publication as a higher medium.
windpark books' catalog includes over 50 publications, with editions ranging from 50 to 250 copies. From participating in small zine fairs in Frankfurt to hosting their own events for each release, windpark books is dedicated to cultivating a vibrant cultural exchange. Their books can be found at Buchhandlung Walther König (Berlin & Frankfurt am Main), Salt and Pepper (Tokyo), CORNER BOOKS (Setagaya), and Printed Matter (New York). For more information, visit www.windparkbooks.de.

Daniela Sonnabend (contributing artist)

Daniela Sonnabend is an artist with a background in graphic design. She is currently doing her Master's in Art at Ecole nationale supérieure des beaux-arts de Lyon, where she is working with (auto)fictional narratives, anecdotes and observations in language and spatialisation.

Welcome: An Introduction-Machine
Paul Kaletsch

Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari, this decidedly normative epistemic intervention proposes an eventful practice of writing introductions that does not reduce an introduction's function to what it *should do* but explores what else it *can do*. Similarly, the process of making this book allowed contributors to do what they wanted to do and how they wanted to do it. That being said, these contributions indulge neither in art for the sake of art nor transgressiveness. Academic standards define that an introduction of an edited volume originating from a conference *should* narrate the emergence of such a volume, introduce the contributions, and develop their shared common ground in terms of method, topics, and research questions and arguments. Early career researchers internalize such notions of what constitutes genuine academic knowledge and how one can correctly produce such science in institutionalized higher education. This internalization accomplishes the self-disciplining of young scholars, while the strong causality between publishability and citability, on the one hand, and job security and career opportunities, on the other hand, externally disciplines the writing of early career scholars into compliance with such epistemic norms. In contrast to that, the transdisciplinary and collaborative process of making this book served undisciplining as finding a different way of making a book, a shield against internalized self-disciplining and disciplinary imperatives, and (at least temporarily) unlearning disciplinary norms. While during the book-making the contributors practiced their craft in order to undiscipline themselves from disciplinary imperatives, the book shall afford you, dear reader, the luxury to treat yourself to the event of reading as a process of exploring your untapped potential to read differently or to do something altogether differently with the book and your world out there.

Keywords: Eventful Epistemic Practices, Disciplining, Undisciplining, Deleuze and Guattari

Paul Kaletsch (he/him) is a Politics PhD student at SOAS University of London. Currently, he is working on the post-viva corrections of his thesis. In his thesis, Paul reconceptualizes 'failed and ended' political resistance, specifically the 2014 protests in Hong Kong, as a Deleuzian event. He is also a guest researcher with the Graduate Center for the Study of Culture (GCSC) of the University of Giessen (JLU), where he serves as the speaker of the Research Area 3: Performativity. At JLU's Faculty of Social Sciences and Cultural Studies, Paul teaches a class on theories of resistance. Recently, he published a review on the concept of negativity and negative critiques of joy and submitted a forthcoming essay on the productivity of students' unsuccessful engagements with difficult theory. With regards to a postdoc project, Paul is interested in conversations about the epistemic (in)-commensurability of political, psychoanalytical, literary, and physical conceptualizations of resistance. Similarly, he welcomes exchanges about the role of desire in the rise of the German right and how a political response to this threat can combine micro- and macro-political labor.

First Chapter:
Specters of the Haitian Revolution
Taylor Borowetz

What does it mean to be responsible to spirits? This chapter is not an exercise to exorcise, but a conjuration of co-conspirators; the dead are not simply at rest but can enact a new world through us. Visible in debates on the politics of memory and the archive, the question of how we convene with ghosts is implicit in our construction of a 'past' and its necessity to the present. Writing historically conjures the limits of communication, language, and knowing; our desire to represent the fullness of being is mediated by our ability to access mere archival traces. Choosing to paper over these cracks necessarily sacrifices complexity. Instead of unfounded narrative coherence, this chapter aims to sit with contradictions and fragments at the core of historical inquiry. Inspired by Derrida's insistence on the proliferation of specters, it proposes an epistemological posture that posits the decomposition of its object of analysis into apparitions, partial echoes, and uncanny reflections. It reads this method of spectralization through the Haitian Revolution in four ways. First, it decomposes larger historical events and processes into complex, partial, and inexhaustible threads. Second, it fractures ethical systems into contradictory and contingent evaluations rather than assuming a coherent whole. Third, it allows the researcher to reach toward individuals excluded from traditional archives and historical legibility. Fourth, specters gaze at us from beyond the limits of our epistemic practices, a reminder that we can know and live otherwise. When we convene with the specters of the Haitian Revolution, their struggle continues to affect us: haunting precludes an 'end'.

Keywords: Specters, Haitian Revolution, Vodou

Taylor Borowetz (she/her) is a PhD Candidate in the Department of Politics and International Studies at SOAS, University of London. She is a theorist, writing recursive analyses of the concept of liberation through the Haitian Revolution and contemporary abolitionist thought. Her scholarship aims to witness liberatory praxis and its crystallization in history. Taylor has published in *The International Journal of Human Rights*, *Political Studies Review*, and *E-International Relations*. She hopes to do politically meaningful work in different forms and forums as an opportunity to build coalitions with other scholar-activists. Part-time, Taylor teaches chess in prison.

Second Chapter:
A Character Study
D. M. Braid

Other people's lives are their own, most of them stay hidden from those who remain relative strangers (and conversely), some things – doubts and dreams – even from those closest to them; and even where and when, in a moment of carelessness – a scrap of a conversation between friends overheard by chance –, flashes of an other life shine through – by way of an unexpected habit or an unseasonal haircut –, they offer little more than an occasion to fabricate, to put together all sorts of observations and memories into something somebody could actually live, and to reflect on one's own life thus cast in relief, on one's preoccupations and oneself; on the irremediability of the past and getting older and further from an ideal state of youth where everything still seemed possible. Yet no one can live that ever alluring other life. But, maybe, no one can do any more, even about their own life, than to imagine and continuously re-imagine it, without getting any closer to what it may be or should be.

Keywords: selective perception, objectification, (re-)constructing an Other, memory, youth, aging

"D.M. Braid" is a nom de plume. The author holds a Ph.D. in philosophy and writes, apart from literary prose of different length, also academic texts mainly on the history of philosophy and the exact sciences in the 19th and early 20th century.

Third Chapter:
A Metaphysics of the Stump Spengler's Thousand Plateaus
Arnaud Miranda

Spengler's *Decline of the West* and Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* have apparently nothing in common. This contribution aims to explore what happens if one tries to intertwine them together. This unexpected encounter may shed light on each of the two works, but also create a whole new philosophical object. My hypothesis is that, besides the apparent distance between their thoughts, these thinkers share common reflections on the notions of rooting and territorialization. Spengler's conception of cultural rooting helps us to understand the meaning of the concept of deterritorialization in *A Thousand Plateaus*. Conversely, Deleuze and Guattari's views on territoriality set a new tone for Spengler's description of civilizational uprooting.
The contribution will first focus on the reasonable connections one can establish between Spengler and Deleuze and Guattari. I will demonstrate that, despite their undeniable ideological distance, there are several reasons to connect them together (I). After these necessary preliminaries, I will describe Spengler's conception of territoriality in the *Decline of the West*, and what can be considered as its theoretical limits (II). As a response, we will see that Deleuze and Guattari's conception of deterritorialization can shed new light on these limits (III). Finally, because *A Thousand Plateaus* cannot be considered a mere response to the *Decline of the West*, I will rather defend the idea that reading them together opens the way for conceptual invention. The metaphysics of the stump, a philosophical story that can be told about civilizational decay, is what I will propose to draw from such a hybrid reading of Spengler and Deleuze and Guattari (IV).

Keywords: deterritorialization; rooting; stump (metaphysics of); territory ; tree (metaphysics of); uprooting

Arnaud Miranda is a PhD candidate in Political Theory at Sciences Po (CEVIPOF, Law School). He is currently working on his dissertation under the supervision of Pr. Julie Saada (Sciences Po) and Pr. Jean-Yves Pranchère (ULB). His dissertation studies the metaphors of decadence in contemporary political thought and shows how this imaginary exceeds the boundaries of the reactionary tradition.

Fourth Chapter:
Beyond the Madeleine: Experience, Temporality, and the Queer Event in Proust
Quintus Immisch

This paper explores the concept of queer events by looking at Proust's novel *In Search of Lost Time* (in particular vol. 1, *Swann's World*). The first section situates the novel in the context of modernity and the discourse of acceleration, drawing on the concepts of *chrononormativity*, which imposes time orders on subjects, and *queer temporality*, that eludes normative time. The contribution then explores this opposition of hegemonic and individual time in Proust's *Recherche*, focusing on the narrator's seclusion and loneliness, as well as his untimely sexuality marked by oedipality. A rereading of the famous madeleine episode then reveals its sexual symbolism and raises the question of whether queer events are possible in this novel or not. The final section discusses if the queer temporality of the novel follows hegemonic discourse or allows for a 'time of its own' and generalizes these considerations in the idea that the event can be seen as a usable infrastructure. From this perspective, the rereading of Proust's *Recherche* can direct the discussion of queerness from debatable 'identities' to ephemeral contexts and settings.

Keywords: allochronism, body, chrononormativity, consciousness, desire, decentered event, fin de siècle, fluidity, gay, heteronormativity, homosexuality, infrastructure, literature, memory, modernism, modernity, mother, narration, novel, oedipal, othering, peripheral, productivity, queer, queer studies, queer temporality, queer theory, subjectivity, synchronization, temporality, time, sex, sexuality

Quintus Immisch is a doctoral candidate in comparative literature at the Universities of Tübingen and Aix-Marseille (cotutelle) and is currently finishing his dissertation on nakedness/nudity in modern literature and culture. He studied in Tübingen, Rome and Paris, was a research assistant in Tübingen (2020–24) and is currently a visiting scholar at the Université libre de Bruxelles. Trained in and working across German, Romance and Ancient Literature as well as Literary and Cultural Theory, his research interests include the (naked) body, questions of living-together, the concept of similarity, as well as queer and decolonial theory.

Fifth Chapter:
Penelope Unravelling
Mrunmayee Sathye

Shifting between a diary entry, literary non-fiction, and academic prose, "Penelope Unravelling" is an "autotheoretical reflection on autotheory", written by someone who would very much prefer to read other people's lives rather than write one honest sentence about her own. In an attempt to dive into the memories of a child and bring them to a grown-up's page, the text struggles to confine a self to the page which is quite determined not to find out who it is.
Navigating very personal experiences with notions of identity, embodiment, gender, emancipation, and (post) coloniality on the one hand, but also critical interludes on canons of literature, and patriarchal and (post)colonial constellations on the other hand, the text interlaces the personal with the political and the political with the poetical, rather loosely weaving a narrative out of unconnected musings only to unravel it the moment it starts to seem coherent. The author/narrator frolics from one thought to the next, jumping from deliberations on academia to experiences of art, from a struggle for identity to a desire for invisibility, trying to locate the beginnings of the author's tedious relationship with emancipatory theory. Eventful, to say the least.
"Penelope Unravelling" is in some ways the exasperated rant of a restless self, entangled with episodes of distant nostalgia coming to life; moments of undiluted affect intermingling with moments of abstraction and diffused with miscellaneous witticisms. This a love letter to reading, and a declaration of loneliness, deliberately lost among the words with which it was written.

Keywords: academia, autotheory, body, canon, canon critique, colonialism, emancipatory theory, identity, postcolonialism, reading, theory

Mrunmayee Sathye is a PhD candidate at the University of Tübingen in the field of Literary and Cultural Theory and a scholar of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung. In her dissertation, she is engaging with contemporary autobiographical narrative techniques and attempting to trace the ways in which the subject of the narrative, the autobiographical I constructed in literary texts, navigates and negotiates between multiple dynamic and intersecting identities.

Sixth Chapter:
Much too Much—A Dialogue on Watching *Lost Highway*
Paul Kaletsch & Saskia Schomber

This contribution is a dialogue on our viewing experience of David Lynch's *Lost Highway* (1997) and the effects and affects of the movie's 'too much'. We start from our different perceptions of a central scene of the movie in which one protagonist is apparently transformed into another. After the introduction, Saskia proposes a narratological reading of *Lost Highway*, before Paul turns to non-representational theory. Specifically, from a narratological point of view, it emerges that the movie's narrative ambiguity—i.e., its narrative structure that generates simultaneous, equally plausible plots—produces its engaging and straining effects. In contrast, the non-representational analysis, relying on Deleuze's engagement with cinema, studies how the interplay of camera movements and film cuts in a specific scene causes the breakdown of narrative and affects the viewer. The conclusion differentiates our experiences that *Lost Highway* is 'just too much' into the idea of a cognitive overload due to narrative ambiguity, on the one hand, and the affective excess of its puzzling and repulsive combination of unexpected but somehow working filmic elements, on the other. While the cognitive overload is a phenomenon that challenges, but also pleasures us while re-watching the movie, the affective excess can only be encountered when one either sees the movie for the first time or one's memories of *Lost Highway* start to blur. We end by exploring how our findings relate to each other.

Keywords: action-situation-action (A-S-A'), affect, ambiguity, breakdown/stutter, cognitive overload, cognitive conundrum, dialogue, effect, excess, failure, film, focalization, horror, inner detective, interpretation, machine, metadiegesis, möbius strip, mystery, narrative, narrative ambiguity, narrative levels, narratology, neo-noir, noir, non-representational theory, perception, pleasure, plot, postmodernism, sensory-motor link scheme, situation, simultaneity, story, success, temporality, temporal loops, transformation

Saskia Schomber studied Classics in Giessen and Tübingen. She is a teaching and research assistant at the Classics department of the University of Giessen, currently finishing her PhD thesis on the poetics and narrative aesthetics of late Greek epic poetry. Other research interests include performance studies in Greek tragedy, literary theory, esp. postclassical narratology, and critical approaches in Classics. At the moment, she is co-editing a translation of Dionysius of Halicarnassus' treatise *De compositione verborum* and preparing to co-edit a collected volume on Queer Temporalities in Classical Reception.

Seventh Chapter:
Short Essay About Birthdays
Felix Berensk̈otter

This contribution offers some reflections on why birthdays (might) matter. It explores this question in the philosophical terrain of existentialist phenomenology, specifically the thought of Martin Heidegger, who grappled with the meaning of being by focusing on the temporality of life. Using as a reference Heidegger's reading of the event as a profound and singularising experience in which humans face the possibility of their own death, I suggest that neither the moment of birth nor the subsequent celebration of birthdays fall into this category. Instead, I maintain that birthdays are intrinsically social occasions that allow us to spend 'quality time' with

others we care about and who care about our being in the world. As such, birthdays are not moments we own in isolation; they are moments when family and friends join us to celebrate being in time together.

Keywords: Birthday, Event, Temporality, Existentialism, Individualism, Friendship, Heidegger, Bergson, Arendt

Felix Berenskötter is a Reader (Associate Professor) in International Relations in the Department of War Studies, King's College London. From 2009 to 2024 he was based at SOAS, University of London, where he also headed the Department of Politics and International Studies. Felix' research deals with theorising world politics as a creative and political endeavour, with a particular focus on the concepts power, identity, anxiety, security, peace, and friendship. His work has been published in a variety of outlets. He is currently completing a textbook on the power of concepts and is writing a monograph on international friendship and estrangement.

Ways of Concluding: Solitary Engagements and Living-Together
Quintus Immisch

This essayistic conclusion reflects on the work on our edited volume and links the question of the event with Roland Barthes' concept of idiorrhythmy, aiming to locate the space for creativity that this edited volume wanted to offer within the dynamic interplay between constraint and originality. A first section takes a closer look at three contributions to the volume, arguing that the event is understood as a social structure that allows for individual practices and seems to dissolve social cohesion, but nevertheless generates epistemic proximities, as these contributions share several ways of conceiving their writing. A second section contextualizes these considerations with Roland Barthes' lectures on *How to Live Together*, which model a minimal regulation of social cohesion in the concept of idiorrhythmy, suggesting a concept that holds potential for 'undiciplined' ways of writing.

Keywords: Living-together, similarity, social structure, epistemology

Preface:
Teardrops and Treetops

Daniela Sonnabend & windpark books

When I was little, probably about five years old, we lived right beside a field. Once you went down the hill there was a small stream with a puny peninsula hidden behind bushes. This islet was our own magical place. Here we collected tadpoles, organised mud fights and brewed magic potions. Sometimes, I threw my sister into the stream, so that she wouldn't always cling to me. But my favourite thing was watching the shrimps, fish and other tiny creatures in the world of the stream.

One of those days, when I was crouching down observing a small crayfish, it happened.
Suddenly and unexpectedly, I felt a stinging pain in my eye. I reflexively squeezed it shut, my balance faded and I toppled backwards onto the soft earth. With all my strength, I struggled to keep the other eye open, so that I could dimly recognise the trees around me. I could feel the foreign body moving in my eye, floating from top to bottom between my eyelid and cornea, the small black lump pushing itself under my lower eyelid. Finally, I gave in and also closed the other eye. All I could see now was a reddish haze that shimmered between dark- and orange-red.

After a few seconds, the small black shadow, whose shape I couldn't identify, became visible.
It was difficult to concentrate on trying to recognise its shape because whenever I tried to follow it with my gaze, it moved out of my focus at the same speed. So I tried to stare straight ahead under my closed eyelids to recognise the object that was now on the right side of my outer field of vision.
With my eyes squeezed tightly shut and focussed, the small dot began to develop contours. A drop-shaped base with two wider drops on either side of it, like a spade. I felt the resistance between my eye and eyelid suddenly reduce and at the same time the shape I had just found expanded slightly and melted into a shapeless lump.
The itching could no longer be suppressed and I rubbed the tears out of my eye.

When I opened them, I saw the little fly buzzing away from my face. After two disorientated loops, it seemed to have regained its balance and disappeared behind the treetops.

Welcome: An Introduction-Machine

Paul Kaletsch

I) Undisciplining the Discipline

Once upon a time a designer sat down. They constructed an object to solve a problem. Often during dinner, the designer's guests picked up their napkins to clean themselves. Whilst doing so, they put their used cutlery on the tablecloth and soiled it. You can hardly imagine what a terrible mess that caused. Each time the designer yet again had to clean, starch, and iron the linen. Now, once and for all, they had had enough of this drudgery and their careless and messy guests. And so, the designer shaped the object's form in such a way that their guests could rest their cutlery on the object without ruining the tablecloth. Problem solved. My extremely detailed and historically accurate account of the invention of the knife rest depicts how the knife rest received its form in order to serve a function that the object's designer had in mind prior to their invention of the knife rest (Smith, 2018, pp. 99–100).[1] The thinking that implicitly operates in my account assumes a natural correspondence between the form of the knife rest and the purpose that it *should* accomplish. In other words, due to the physical form of the knife rest, one only uses the knife rest correctly if one places used cutlery on it. Such thinking limits the knife rest to this one function as a solution to one specific empirical problem in a particular context.

In *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze, a poststructuralist philosopher, and Guattari, a political activist and institutional psychotherapist, sought to provide a political alternative for the post-68 French left to dogmatic Marxism or psychoanalytic thought or the various attempts to fuse them. For this purpose, they tackled, amongst other things, the relevance of the Oedipus complex, as the title of their book indicates. In very vulgar terms, this psychoanalytic complex refers, for instance, to the "Oedipal triangle" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983, p. 3) between parents and son. Apparently, since the son naturally desires his mother sexually, he must want to murder his father in order to have her all to himself. Yet Deleuze and Guattari refused to take the naturalization of this triangular constellation as "something perfectly obvious, a 'given' that is there from the very beginning." (ibid.) Instead of accepting the seemingly obvious relevance of Oedipus, they proposed another question: Namely, "Given a certain effect, what machine is capable of producing it? And given a certain machine, what can it be used for?" (ibid.) The thinking implicit in these two questions does not start from the premise of Oedipus but examines the Oedipus complex as an effect produced by a machine. And even though the word 'machine' immediately triggers the image of a machine in a factory constantly churning out physical products that correspond to a certain model, put that on hold for now. Simply because one can neither compare the reification of Oedipus as an apparently objective fact that structures social relations and society to an industrial product nor the social machine producing Oedipus to a machine manufacturing physical objects in a factory. Similarly, returning to the knife rest, don't confuse the function—the knife rest's purpose of holding used cutlery during meals—for which the designer invented the knife rest in the first place, and shaped its form to best perform that service, with the certain effect that the question of Deleuze and Guattari pertains to. However, the function of the knife rest plays a role in the effect in question, that is, the seemingly natural and unquestionable correspondence between the knife rest's shape and its function. In other words, the knife rest's function just follows the form of the knife rest—the shape predetermines this usage. Regardless of the purpose that the knife rest was designed for and its fixed form, a knife rest can do so much more. Precisely, at this point, the machine comes into play. Again, though, be warned, don't mistake the machine for the knife rest making machine in the knife rest factory—which in this example, as opposed to the Oedipus one, indeed exists—with the social machine in question. The social machine—the complex set of relations between an order of knowledge, norms, and everyday social practices—reduces not just the knife rest but really any kind of tool to just one natural function: the one that corresponds to the purpose that its designer shaped the tool for. Therefore, Deleuze and Guattari's first machinic question examines the social arrangement that reduces the knife rest to *what it should do*.

1 I picked up the example of the knife rest from Smith's (2018, p. 99) reference to the introduction of Deleuze and Guattari's (1983, p. 4) *Anti-Oedipus*.

Paraphrasing Deleuze and Guattari very crudely, they propose a puzzling second question when they ask what the knife rest can be used for. Obviously, a knife rest should be used as a knife rest, so why do they even ask such a stupid and invalid question? Smith's (2018) discussion of Deleuze and Guattari's conceptualization of the machine, provides this answer: "One could perfectly understand what the knife-rest is in terms of its actual properties, but this does not at all exhaust what it can *do* [emphasis in original]" (p. 100). Smith here reiterates the knife rest as a body from the vantage of Deleuze and Guattari's Spinozist understanding of bodies. Such bodies are not defined by what they actually *are* but by their capacities and inabilities, that is, what they virtually *can, and cannot do* as determined by the different relations that they enter into in varying contexts (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013, pp. 299–304). From this perspective, a knife rest only receives the function to hold used cutlery as a result of its external relations to a consumer of food, cutlery, and the context of a formal meal.

Introductions of edited volumes usually clarify the topic of the book and the shared methodological approaches, summarize the different contributions, locate a red thread, and situate the edited volume in the extant literature on the subject. Often introductions take a short and structured form in order to serve these purposes because such adherence to academic standards ensures publishability and citability. Accordingly, introductions only introduce like this because academia disciplines them into this correspondence between form and function. I will start from another point.

I know the effect that I want the introduction to accomplish, so I will build an introduction that can produce that: Namely, I want to have fun while writing this introduction, and I would like you to have fun reading it. If you don't, just put it aside. With fun I actually mean joy and with joy I mean that I am writing not for the sake of writing, or to inform you, but so that "my force of existing or my power of acting is increased or improved" (Deleuze, 1978, COURS VINCENNES - 24/01/1978, para. 13). If the affect or "affectus" (ibid., para. 28) of joy corresponds to an increase in my power of acting—or my bodily capacity—then I'm not here to feel good or, in other words, emotionally happy (Massumi, 1995, p. 88). Rather, I want to write in a way that makes the capacity of my body and of the body of the reader rise, no matter if that causes sad or happy emotions.

In the preface of Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*, the book's translator, Massumi (2013), does not ask readers of the book if they like *A Thousand Plateaus* or if the book holds any truth in relation to the world but three very different questions: "What new thoughts does it make it possible to think? What new emotions does it make it possible to feel? What new sensations and perceptions does it open in the body?" (p. xiv) An increase in a body's power of acting—or potential—hence, raises the body's capacity to think 'new' thoughts, take 'new' actions, utter 'new' statements, and relate to different discourses and matter.[2]

The 'new' sounds a little mystical, so let me try to reframe this. In order to do so, let me return to the setting of a formal dinner. The meal behavior of the adults on the table is limited to the reproduction of the knife rest's supposedly natural function. That is, they only use the knife rest during a formal dinner to place their dirty cutlery on it. Due to the fixation of the knife rest's spatiotemporal setting to formal dinners and the restriction of its external relations to diners and their used cutlery, the knife rest can only provide us with the "dead repetition of the same" (Smith, 2018, p. 99): A knife rest is a temporary location for cutlery during formal occasions.

A child enters the formal dining room. This is not just a kid of one of the guests. No, I'd like to think of this child as a persona in the fashion of Deleuze and Guattari's reconstruction of Little Hans. In a case study, the psychoanalyst Freud named a boy with a phobic response to horses Little Hans. Concerning the previously raised question about the 'new', Deleuze and Guattari provide one interesting answer in their reading of Little

2 Even though it might sound strange that a body articulates new statements, I stick with the term body because, although, in his lecture on Spinoza, Deleuze occasionally adds the soul or mind to the body, he clearly emphasizes the latter: "we don't even know [savons] what a body is capable of, we prattle on about the soul and the mind and we don't know what a body can do. But a body must be defined by the ensemble of relations which compose it, or, what amounts to exactly the same thing, by its power of being affected. As long as you don't know what power a body has to be affected, as long as you learn like that, in chance encounters, you will not have the wise life, you will not have wisdom." (Deleuze, 1978, COURS VINCENNES - 24/01/1978, para. 29)

Hans' inquiries into who and what possesses "a peepee-maker" (ibid., p. 298). According to Little Hans, a girl must have a peepee-maker not because she owns a certain organ but simply because she urinates. This conceptualization of the peepee-maker accordingly does not reduce the peepee-maker to an organ. Rather, Deleuze and Guattari's reading conceptualizes peeing as "a machinic functioning" (ibid.) that different arrangements of non-organic and organic components can accomplish: "Does a locomotive have a peepee-maker? Yes, in yet another machinic assemblage." (ibid.) A locomotive's running engine releases both steam and condensation water during its operation. Little Hans' own physical composition urinates with an organ. In this context, the 'new', then, designates the ontological difference between such an organic arrangement and constellations that facilitate peeing but do not operate organically.

Deleuze and Guattari, in their discussion of their observations and analysis of how children engage with animals, offer another conceptualization of the 'new' in their exploration of Little Hans' horse:

> They [children] make a list of [animals'] affects. Little Hans's horse is not representative but affective. It is not a member of a species but an element or individual in a machinic assemblage: draft horse-omnibus-street. It is defined by a list of active and passive affects in the context of the individuated assemblage it is part of: having eyes blocked by blinders, having a bit and a bridle, being proud, having a big peepee-maker, pulling heavy loads, being whipped, falling, making a din with its legs, biting, etc. These affects circulate and are transformed within the assemblage: what a horse 'can do.' (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013, p. 300)

An assemblage here conceptually refers to the context of the horse's current relations, for example, its place (street), and the road users it interacts with (the bus). In this context, certain actions of the horse can disturb the assemblage and transform it (biting, falling, or going into a different direction). Other elements reduce the horse's capacity to change the assemblage, the driver's tools to control the horse, for instance. Little Hans catalogues how the variation of contexts produces new functions of what a horse can and cannot do. To an engineer like Little Hans, the 'new' either refers to the ontological difference in terms of components and relations between assemblages that produce similar functions or to the difference between the functions that a body can engage in its current assemblage and the functions that the body can accomplish in other assemblages.[3]

During formal dinners the adults always maintain the knife rests' assemblage and, thereby, reproduce what the knife rest can do (function as a rest for cutlery). The enforcement of etiquette at such a dinner, on the other hand, constrains the knife rest's potential for other functions: 'Carl, you put the knife rest on the wrong side.' 'Just put your used cutlery here, Yvonne.' 'Suzan, you're fidgeting with the knife rest, again. I told you that makes me nervous.' However, for little children the regime of etiquette does not apply yet. Depending on the crowd, on most formal occasions, children can still do what they want as long as they do not endanger themselves or others, and do not cause noise that significantly interferes with conversation. And so, the kid who just entered the stage can move around freely and play. As discussed previously, this child's playing works like this: The kid abducts objects from their established context and relates them to other objects and moves them to different places. In doing so the child engineers new functions for these objects. In contrast to the adults, the child holds a higher power of acting because it understands that the design of the knife rest does not dictate its function but its external relations, its context, or, in other words, its assemblage, do. And so, the kid, in experimentally relating the knife rest to different objects, explores what the knife rest can do. Therefore, such a kid might as well relate the knife rest to the table and produce new functions: a tool to form the table's shape and a drumstick to make percussive sounds.

The child functions as the player who dissolves existing contexts of objects and creates new assemblages with them that the kid can maintain or yet again transform into another arrangement. Constraining environ-

3 I use the word similarity here to address both the proximity of different operations of urination—they all accomplish peeing in some way—and the idiosyncrasy of such functions of urinating—the release of urine differs as much from the release of steam or condensation water as an organic function of peeing differs from a machinic functioning not confined to an organ.

ments, such as the family or the school, shackle the world with an epistemology of truth: Objects and bodies hold supposedly 'natural' functions corresponding to their form. Accordingly, objects and bodies *should* repeatedly perform this 'natural' function in the same and reliable manner. In contrast to you and me, this strange way of seeing the world is still unfamiliar to the child. It must actively learn such disciplining knowledge on the cumbersome path of institutionalized education. Playing allows the child to move from the world of the *should* to a world that does not present itself as an ontological constant but is constantly *becoming* in the process of playing. Namely, in this practice of playing the kid does not just insert its body into a given world but, in doing so, engages in worlding, a practice of ontological production *with* the world. The player changes the world as much as the world absorbs the kid and dissolves its body into a new assemblage: again and again. The child's play already reveals that it *knows* how to engage in undisciplined epistemic production; the kid doesn't require undisciplining but maybe it can teach us.

What I think an introduction *should do* in an edited volume compels me to write in a way that ensures that the introduction does what it *should* do. This, of course, does not just happen in the somehow hermetically sealed space of my subjectivity but takes places in a sense of obligation toward the publisher (I need to deliver something decent), a responsibility towards the contributors (an introduction should mention them or relate to their chapters), and existing standards of writing in the academic discipline of politics. You and I both have internalized such norms, forcing us to engage in self-disciplining. We are not kids anymore. And this prevents us from just starting to engage in undisciplined epistemic practices. I want to build an introduction-machine that moves us (that's you, the reader, and me) from the world of the *should* to the world of *becoming*. Moreover, earlier I stated that I want to write this introduction in a way that increases my capacity and that of the reader to produce the 'new'. Therefore, like disciplined writing dedicated to academic standards of rigor, originality, and clarity, I normatively commit my writing of this introduction to a mission of playfulness, productivity, and the 'new.' Since my self-disciplining, unfortunately, will simply ignore these empty and abstract norms, I attempt to emulate these concrete practices of writing undisciplined/eventfully/playfully. Writing eventfully plays around both with the components of this edited volume and the literary form of introductions in general. In doing so, this playful writing explores what I and the reader *can and cannot do* in different author-reader-introduction assemblages. Such experimentation with the components of this introduction, the edited volume, and *the introduction as such* unlocks the door to another world of a fluid lab that neither affords itself nor its 'observer' stability but invites the latter to games that constantly change the 'observer' and the 'world.' Hopefully, such an approach of attempting undisciplined writing accomplishes my undisciplining as a process of gradually undoing internalized norms of what constitutes genuine knowledge and what kind of epistemic practices can produce such knowledge. Moreover, ideally, in this becoming-child (or Little Hans) I will re-learn undisciplined epistemic practices.

My elaboration on the purpose of this introduction already segues into the question of what I want this volume to do. I have been talking about how I want to write in a way that, in a sense, undisciplines my writing. However, this is not just about my 'spiritual journey' in writing this introduction, it's as much about Quintus (the co-editor), you (the reader), the other authors, the publisher (*windpark books*), and Daniela Sonnabend (the contributing visual artist). This reminds me of the emergence of this book: our work process but also the book's origin. The whole thing evolved from a symposium that I organized for my 30th birthday. For this occasion, I wanted friends to present something that they were knowledgeable about, but that their professional context denie them to talk about extensively in the work environment. I brought friends together from different backgrounds who otherwise wouldn't have talked to each other. There was music, literature, design, and academic presentations. Towards the end of the symposium, we just hung out, but there was the constant feeling that we could cook up something together, that we were in fact doing that at that very moment. Like the symposium, the book should work as an island where the contributors can do what they want to do and not what they think they *should* do. Before the book, though, the island didn't constitute a real place yet. Instead, the island merely existed in the form of the hope that knowledge and knowledge production could be different. However, this wish did not even articulate another epistemology but presented a completely unimagined and, therefore, unknowable epistemic alterity. Those who want to travel to the island, thus, require the aid of the

conceptual persona of the kid because its playing illustrates one mode of undisciplined knowledge production. Only in becoming-kids, that is, in the process of unlearning discipline by attempting to write like the child plays, the travelers can reach the island. The intersection of the passenger's collaborative attempts of undisciplining makes the island a real space that invites undisciplined modes of epistemic productivity, affords, and protects them.

And then, there's you, the reader. Since I won't summarize the contributions in the introduction, you have two choices. You can either look at the list of abstracts and, based on them, decide what you want to read and what you don't want to. Or, rather than just extracting information from the book or deriving pleasure from the included art, for a publication on the event it might be more interesting for you to open yourself to the book in order to develop a singular technique of reading *with* the text: You can cite this tome, criticize it, throw or give it away, reinterpret it, rework the book into another object, and so forth. If you have a hard copy in front of you, you could, for instance, follow Daniela Sonnabend's art and read the disconnected bits and pieces you encounter on that journey. Whereas you'll find artistic interventions by Daniela and creative design by *windpark books* in the hard copy, the electronic publication won't feature these but offer a very plain black and white reading experience, almost lacking design, focusing on the text. How you're reading the digital document—whether on a smartphone, an electronic reader, a tablet, a laptop, or a stationary monitor—either increases or reduces your mobility, and, thus, shrinks or enlarges the environment that interacts with you during your consumption of this product. If you're on your phone, perhaps take a good look at what you see off-screen during your commute. Once something strikes your interest, search for that (in form of a keyword), something related, or a triggered association in the file. In my case, I think of the stationary screen in my room as something aseptic, almost immaterial, that just displays the text as such. However, if I'm eyeing it closely, I can detect a tiny black stain covering parts of this document. Moreover, the haptic feel of the display, its colors, and its frame, likewise, interfere materially with the electronic publication. So, I might as well follow how the materiality of my stationary technological setup uniquely renders the digital volume. The previously mentioned stain on my monitor, for example, can inspire me to read a contribution that somehow addresses disturbance, materiality, or texture, and so forth. Whether you're reading an electronic or physical copy, and where and when you're reading the book, all these can serve as tools to undiscipline your reading of this edited volume from your original reason and purpose of coming here, facilitate your construction of different goals or none at all, and foster you to read or use the book differently than you intended initially.

Lastly, there's the collaborative process of *making* the book between the contributors, the editors, the publisher, and the contributing artist. After the symposium, a friend who attended asked me—or I asked him, I can't recall—if we shouldn't turn the symposium into a book. Yes, I wanted to do that, but I didn't simply want to translate the oral presentations into writing. On the one hand, I didn't think that the presentation's appeal would survive in text. Although they were good presentations, they wouldn't function as well as chapters in an edited volume. On the other hand, I was interested in the making of this book as a process that doesn't attempt to identically mimic something spoken in text: I wanted our *making* of this book to resist the process of how we think we're supposed to create an edited volume based on a workshop, conference, panel, or symposium. I wanted to produce a book that relates to my symposium but resists the organization of its writing into the sole service of another 'higher' purpose, such as the mimetic representation of speech or the communication of content. Similarly, *windpark books,* Daniela, and I were not comfortable with a one-to-one translation of the print into a digital copy. Instead, I fancied a process of making this book in which writing, designing, and editing predominantly resist against the imperative of turning the book into a conference publication and the established way in which one produces such publications. I was hoping that our process of making the book would, as a side-effect, immanently construct its own method of making an edited volume and a purpose for the publication not solely reducible to the resistance against academic imperatives.

And I think mainly we did that in bringing people together. That, of course, is a corny cliché. Churches, the Rotary Club, the Young Republicans all do that, likewise, and probably more successfully than we're doing it here. Still, I think we did that a little differently. Even though academic texts and authors working in academia

dominate the volume, we don't only feature contributions to different academic fields. Amongst other entries, you can find biographic reflections, a short story, and the academic contemplation of a movie from two authors unfamiliar with film studies in this volume. Our process of making the book succeeded, if perhaps some of the academic contributors got to know an artist and creative approaches, and theory contaminated *windpark books* and Daniela a little bit.

However, I don't think we'll be the first nor the last ones to bring creative and academic approaches together in one book. I think what's special about what we're doing is that it started with a digital symposium where people actually presented, discussed, and hung out together. Furthermore, I hosted a writing retreat in my parent's house, where two of the contributions were written and I edited them on the spot. During that weekend, other contributors to the volume joined, and an acquainted philosophy PhD student popped by for dinner one night. Similarly, I didn't know *windpark books*. I knew Felix Hofmann-Wissner beforehand, but I got to know Jana and Leo, and later Daniela Sonnabend during online meetings. In the meetings with *windpark books* and those with Daniela Sonnabend I realized how much the university and theory shape my thinking and language, and how difficult it was for me to relay my ideas clearly to people who're creatively producing things and articulate as well as approach releasing a book very differently than I do.

I just name-dropped the event in the paragraph on reading, saying that this is an edited volume on the event. And then it's in the title of the book, too. So, what about the event? I'd say you're in the wrong place if you're looking for reconceptualizations of the event, critiques of existing concepts of the event, or contributions that address the event as a topic of interest. Instead, Quintus calls these practices of reading, writing, and publishing that I discussed previously eventful practices. I concur that these practices of writing, reading, and publishing operate eventfully in the sense that this undisciplining of the edited volume unleashes an unpredictable process: In advance, we cannot and "We do not know what the book might possibly become or what relations it may enter into" (Nail, 2017, p. 24). So, there you have it: the ominous red thread. Not what the different contributors write about ties the volume together but that the authors write about what they want and that they don't comply in their writing to how they think they *should* write but that they allow themselves to find another way of writing in the process of writing their pieces. The electronic and printed form of this publication, the publisher of the hard copy, *windpark books,* the artist collaborating in the design of the printed volume, Daniela Sonnabend, they all serve the 'undisciplining' of our *making* of this book—how to write an introduction, what tone is appropriate for a chapter, who can contribute and on what—and the undisciplining of your reading of the finished product.

Before I go more into the topic of undisciplining, I will venture on a brief detour on disciplined writing. I for one admire disciplined work and disciplined working a lot, perhaps also because I struggle with it. For instance, I love economic writing reduced to the bare minimum, for example, the prose of parts of the modern and contemporary Anglo-American literary canon. Undisciplined work and undisciplined work processes are not per se better in terms of quality than disciplined writing. *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus*, two collaborative works of Deleuze and Guattari, function as undisciplined writing because they operate as literature, political manifesto, and theory at the same time. The authors allowed their collaboration to unfold into a singular style. While this, depending on your opinion, might work well in the two books, the reception of *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus* always risks to either reduce the undisciplining to their concepts (content) or their mode of writing (expression). Don't get me wrong, this piece doesn't present my improved model of Deleuze and Guattari reception. I'm just trying to walk that line keeping these pitfalls in mind.

Deleuze's own philosophical writing challenged philosophy in the conceptually rigorous language of philosophy, for example, with his concept of the image of thought in *Difference and Repetition*. However, Deleuze and Guattari's concepts don't work that way. In 'Rhizome', the introductory chapter of *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari just assault the reader with an infinite stream of neologisms: "In a book, as in all things, there are lines of articulation or segmentarity, strata and territories; but also lines of flight, movements of deterritorialization and destratification" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013, p. 4). This is the second page of 'Rhizome'

and of *A Thousand Plateaus*, so, prior to this sentence, they could not introduce any of these concepts—segmentarity, stratification, territoriality, and (de/re-) territorialization—yet. Admittedly, they never really define them in a stable and easily comprehensible way throughout the book. An analysis that only tries to understand the meaning of such a concept, compile a stable definition from all the different uses in the books, or situate the concept in the intertext of references that Deleuze and Guattari drew on and the historical context they wrote in, on the one hand, will lead to frustrating results because the concepts do not hold a convincing stable meaning or definition. On the other hand, such a way of engaging with the concepts completely fails to address their aesthetic and affective dimension. For instance, as Deleuze pointed out, the body without organs is as much a concept as a practice of living: "I know people who've read nothing who immediately saw what bodies without organs were, given their own 'habits,' their own way of being one." (Deleuze, 1995, p. 8) While you cannot feel Kant's concepts, Deleuze and Guattari's mode of literary conceptualization facilitates a resonance that functions affectively and, hence, oftentimes fails on the plane of pure reason.[4]

Similarly, one can reduce the concepts of Deleuze and Guattari to narratives and metaphors or imitate their way of writing. As for the former, any of the plateaus read as a story just offer an annoying piece of literature because, even though Deleuze and Guattari were very fond of literature, they clearly could not write prose. They occasionally succeed in writing catchy political polemics (the intro of *Anti-Oedipus* comes to mind). At most times, however, they read like a desperate imitation of Burroughs, a beat poet famous for his literary experiments (whom Deleuze often cites). So, just read Burroughs if you want that. More problematically, though, reading Deleuze and Guattari as stories supposed to operate on the somehow magically detached and autonomous plane of creativity reduces their writing to art for art's sake. However, they always wrote to intervene politically by means of concept creation. Literariness, hence, serves concept creation for Deleuze and Guattari. Such concepts should facilitate a critical analysis of capitalism in the present and, based on that, a rethinking of what left politics can do in this context. Concepts, thus, serve politics in the collaborative writing of Deleuze and Guattari. As soon as the rhizome turns into a metaphor that only operates on an aesthetic level and the body without organs into a weird little short story, both plateaus lose their conceptual heft.

Concerning their mode of writing, Deleuze and Guattari often used short bits of literature for conceptual purposes. For instance, in 'Postulates on Language' in *A Thousand Plateaus*, they reconstruct Kafka as an ontological engineer of assemblages. Moreover, their writing submits scientific concepts from geology, biology, and mathematics to their politico-philosophical purposes. On its own, this bricolage of science, philosophy, literature, psychoanalysis, and politics does not do any of its constituent parts justice. It's not science but pseudo-science at best. Mostly, the writing suffers from unnecessary fuzziness and bad pacing—they draw out the easy parts, but they write faster the more difficult the content becomes. Writing like Deleuze and Guattari is not undisciplined. It's just bad (and pretentious).

So, I want the writing, the editing, and the design of the volume not only to engage in undisciplinary processes of producing but to deliver undisciplined products that are well written, intelligible, fun, and interesting. Pieces that don't namedrop for the sake of namedropping, don't introduce concepts without defining them, or lack an argument or structure. Ergo, pieces should engage in undisciplining but don't unnecessarily sacrifice disciplined writing just because they think that undisciplining *should* not look disciplined. If undisciplinary epistemic trajectories require a certain amount of disciplining in terms of clarity and structure because it renders their writing accessible, then, that's fine. Undisciplined writing doesn't need to be incomprehensible, unorganized, sloppy, and fast. Again, mind you, dear reader, that while undisciplining can be fun, in the sense of entertaining, that is, it doesn't have to be.

Primarily, I wanted short pieces that inspire. So, the contributions are not fully fledged, and I encouraged the authors to deliver them that way. Ideally, after you have finished a piece which you enjoyed, you will think that the author should expand on this elsewhere. A contribution works if the author's writing affected her

4 At least that's what I—without ever really having engaged with any concepts of Kant—claim in this crude example to make a point.

joyfully and if you received joy reading it. Or, in other works, the writing worked if the author's capacity and inspiration to write differently increased and if your capacity to read differently rose. A piece that looks undisciplined but doesn't undiscipline you, however, doesn't work—so, drop it! Your time is precious and not every bit here works for you or has been written for your constitution.

II) An Island

Why does it matter anyway—undisciplining? The more time I spend in academia—and maybe that applies to other professional environments as well—the more I become aware of its disciplinary processes and the voluntary and involuntary self-disciplining of early career scholars, even theoretically leaning or creatively working ones. Indeed, one can't talk about disciplining in academia without addressing privilege and positionality. I, for example, can write however I want. If my dissertation won't cut it, I'll be sad. Although I don't have enough money to just relax for the rest of my life, at least I have enough financial resources and cultural and social capital—not to mention my heteronormative masculinity and whiteness—to probably make it elsewhere without too many difficulties. Hence, technically, I can resist academia's discipline and don't need to self-discipline my writing, my research, and my teaching. If you're in a more marginalized positionality, though, you can't afford that, or, at least, it costs a lot more.[5]

Yet, interestingly in my social circle the prospect of precarity and academic failure disciplines both friends from privileged and unprivileged backgrounds into researching less what they want, refraining from using theory not established in their subjects, and abstaining from writing in a manner that their field of study might not tolerate. Obviously, if society doesn't grant you a second chance, you must do what's necessary to get a job. That's a problem that undoubtedly necessitates structural changes in academia. However, surprisingly, even those who could dare something due to their safety net, don't resist academia's disciplining. Instead, even privileged early career scholars or established researchers engage in the reproduction of academia's disciplinary mechanism, fearing to disappoint themselves and their social environment if they—for once—don't make it.

I have previously addressed how the book, ideally, should serve as an island where those involved in the *making* of the edited volume find shelter from disciplinary imperatives and a space in which they can explore their own trajectories of undisciplining. I don't think that a shared topic—let's be honest, the event isn't one—a method, or even an interest keeps us together. Indeed, some of us were loosely acquainted, some already friends, and others were strangers before this project kicked off. However, everybody joined because they wanted to write differently—not in the way they learned and *ought to*—about something they usually couldn't write about—what's relevant to them and not to their professional environment—and were excited by the idea of doing so: They did it for the kicks and not for the finished product and possible professional rewards associated with such a publication. The desire to produce undisciplined, for the thrill of it, and to do so together instead of in the usual professional isolation, to find togetherness, and a new way of being together connects these people, this book, its contributions, the artist, and the publisher.

And still, if the book constitutes the island as a place enabling undisciplining, then, the publication will exile us once again to the mainland, that is, in our disciplined professional environments of the *should*. Collaborating in the *making* of the book allowed the different contributors to travel to this island and to temporarily inhabit this space together facilitating undisciplining. And yet as soon as *windpark books* releases the publication, the book as a stable product renders the open process of undisciplined book *making* redundant. Apparently, the book did not sustain the island, but its *making* did: temporarily collaborating productively in an undisciplined fashion. Certainly, collaborating in this way might have temporarily raised the contributors' capacity

5 Nobody put this more succinctly than Darius, a character from *Atlanta*, a television series by Donald Glover, in a conversation with Earn, the show's protagonist, in the second season's 11th episode, *Crabs in a Barrel,* starting at 19:36: "Earn: 'I'm getting better at this. You know that.' . . . Darius: 'I see you, man, I see you learning. But learning requires failure. Al just trying to make sure you ain't failing in his life. You know, like, y'all both Black, so I mean y'all both can't afford to fail.'" (Murai, 2018)

for undisciplining even in their regular professional context. Yet discipline does not fancy such undirected and unpredictable forces of productivity, and so—in the case of academia—it quickly excises this productive desire from our bodies with long hours of unpaid and tedious work of, for instance, grading, timetabling, and administration, precarious prospects of monetary gains and job stability (the construction of interests underpinning 'rational behavior'), and standards (artificial intelligence is a relevant subject; no one talks about psychoanalysis anymore; you shouldn't write blogposts.) Even worse, discipline can seduce us into thinking that we're engaging in undisciplining but actually doing its labor. Think of the joyful spirit of experimentation, the facilitation of rhizomatic organizations, and the dismissal of normativity all present par excellence in contemporary Silicon Valley capitalism. Only a continuation of undisciplined collaborative work or at least of a space that enables such trajectories to unfold, can maintain the island.

Framing the *making* of the book as the construction of an island poses another question. How can one leave the island? Or rather, how can the island not only serve as a refuge of amusement whose trajectories of undisciplining only function in a spatiality of isolation, remoteness, and periphery? How can the island connect its undisciplinarity to the disciplined mainland—the reality of the professional environments of the contributors—and perform political labor of resistance where it actually matters? Deleuze and Guattari provided an interesting answer to this in their conceptual distinction of pleasure from desire. They conceptualize desire as "a process of production without reference to any exterior agency, whether it be a lack that hollows it out or a pleasure that fills it" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005, p. 154). Instead of a Lacanian lack that generates productive desire or a pleasure that desire must inevitably seek, this concept of desire operates as a self-arranging, autopoietic, undirected, and unpredictable process of production: an ontological force of productivity. To this Deleuze and Guattari contrast pleasure: "Desire will be assuaged by pleasure; and not only will the pleasure obtained silence desire for a moment but the process of obtaining it is already a way of interrupting it, of instantly discharging it and unburdening oneself of it." (ibid.) According to Deleuze and Guattari's idiosyncratic reading of the pleasure principle, subjects experience desire as a constantly unnerving demand on them, a demand, however, that does not offer any other clues than its insistence on the subject. To obtain peace from this cryptic force running through them and their environment, subjects translate their desire into their social environment's language of interests: interests in security, financial gain, power, sex, and so forth. None of these are reprehensible, but, in this immanent ontology, they don't precede desire as natural interests but succeed it: They result from certain social arrangements of desire.

Anyway, earlier I committed my writing of this introduction to an increase of what you and I can do (joy) as opposed to happiness (pleasure). The island fails if it enables contributors to pursue their little hobbies—their irrelevant art for art's sake—to catch their breath only to function a little longer in the intolerable reality of the mainland, in other words, if contributors only do what the logic of the mainland dictates people *should* do with their free time to receive pleasure (rest, consume, reproduce, or gain some kind of resources: education, money, social capital, etc.).

Previously, I mentioned togetherness. The mainland only allows working together if its synergies maximize profit in comparison to non-collaborative performances of the same project. These incidental collaborations only sustain the overall logic of alienation effectuated by contemporary capitalism. On the mainland, solitary undisciplined epistemic or creative production, on the other hand, competes against each other for rewards in the form of job stability and financial security. The art market, for instance, translates the undisciplinarity of certain art into financial value and, thus, paralyzes such creative products by means of commodification. The contributors of this volume, instead, didn't get together for the sake of living together, like organizations dedicated to living (together), such as a family or a flat share. Togetherness in our case didn't mean that each contributor must collaborate with another contributor in their work. Even if contributors didn't work together in such an obvious manner, they were doing their own stuff—what they want to do but what the mainland prohibits them to do—but they were not alone in doing so. Instead, contributors were part of a community of contributors working on completely different things but in a similarly undisciplined 'method' of working. At least during the *making* of this book, the contributors inhabited the same place, the project of *making* this

book, at the same time (the publication timeline). The contributors temporarily shared the space of this project, so that they could unfold their own trajectories of undisciplining. The different contributions could resonate with each other in the common spatiotemporality. However, a focus on these 'intertextual' resonances ignores the collectivity's resonance, that is, the book *making's* spatiotemporality that facilitated undisciplining. In other words, only the collective organization of a time and space can enable undisciplining that the mainland doesn't immediately reintegrate or destroy. The island succeeds only if it perpetrates a logic of undisciplined producing co-constituted by collective transdisciplinary organizing.

III) Perspectives

Earlier I gravely stated that the island's life rests on sustained undisciplined producing and a communal space that can host such processes. Put in a less serious tone, I don't see editing this volume as a one-off thing. Or, at least, I hope it won't be. So, I'm thinking about how we can maintain the connection between those who attended the symposium and remained in conversation but didn't contribute to this volume and those who worked together on the book, and what we could do with the network composed by these relations. Even though the whole writing retreat that I mentioned previously was a disaster—since we had zero downtime, I was sick throughout the whole thing, and one of the contributors was close to a breakdown at one point—I think the format as such—perhaps not in my parent's home, not with such time pressure, and with me understanding what I can and can't do, what I should and shouldn't do as an editor—has a lot of potential. *Windpark books* will probably organize some kind of launching event for the publication. Such 'eventfulness' could offer a promising path to maintain connections. To rent a house together in the countryside and get together with people from different academic fields, activists, and artists to produce something but without a clear product in mind, I think, could work out brilliantly over the span of one or two weeks.

For this publication the predefined outcome of an edited volume, somehow based on or related to my birthday symposium, from the get-go overcoded the open process of getting together temporarily for the purpose of doing something collaboratively. Removing this clear goal cuts out the teleological direction from doing something together and reintroduces openness, so that the objective can transform into a process that constructs or finds its own "end, the goal, the object (the idea) that fascinates, attracts, directs, and activates a tropism, the Cause (with a capital 'C'), in three words: the for-what-purpose, the *Telos* [emphasis in original]." (Barthes, 2013, p. 43) Don't get me wrong, I don't want to exalt undifferentiated openness in itself. Rather, there is not only the purpose of doing something together but also a clear "motive, the determination (objective), causality, cause (with a small 'c'), in a word: the why" (ibid.). Namely, people get together because they want to temporarily live together with precisely *these* people and for the purpose of collaborative production.[6] And such a situation would pose the problem—nothing problematic but rather a productive problem inhering in the situation and insisting on different solutions—of how to live together (temporarily) in order to create in a collaborative and open process.

I neither fancy the exclusiveness of a club nor the institutionalization of a public and professional network. The former brings the downsides of elitism and exclusion, whereas the latter removes the ethics of becoming-friends—not in the sense of everyday friendship but the communitarian forms and practices that shared epistemic and artistic production create—and replaces fun with obligations and earnestness. To a certain extent, this network must remain exclusive, if it doesn't want to institutionalize and risk anonymity and professionalism between members. Yet, I'm thinking more of the exclusivity of outsiders, a clique of nerds in high school, who can kind of 'sense' who might want to join their network. Let me pull an example from the first episode of the fourth season of the Duffer brother's Netflix-show, *Stranger Things*, to illustrate how this differs from the exclusion on grounds of race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, and so forth found in institutions, such as British 'Gentlemen's clubs' or North American and German 'party' or political fraternities.

6 Since people don't get together to have a good time but to *work* in an undisciplined fashion, and only share a space temporarily, I don't worry too much about contributors not getting along.

In Hawkins, Indiana, the local *Dungeons and Dragons* (a fantasy tabletop role-playing game) club, named *Hellfire,* is in a pinch because Lucas, one of its members, can't join the campaign's finale because he's got a basketball game. The club and Eddie, its leader, don't sanction postponement since Eddie and other members might graduate soon. So, Dustin and Mike need to find a substitute (a sub) for Lucas. At 57:03, we see Dustin and Mike struggling because all the potential substitutes declined their offer. As a last resort, they recruit Erica, a Black middle-school nerd, who has already featured in *Stranger Things* previously as Lucas' sister. Eddie reacts as to be expected—interestingly not on grounds of race (there are other Black members in *Hellfire*) or gender but because of her age:

Eddie: 'Absolutely not.'

Dustin: 'You asked for a sub. We delivered.'

Eddie: This is *Hellfire Club*. Not *Babysitting Club*.

Erica: 'I'm 11, you long-haired freak.'

Eddie: 'My, my, the child speaks.'

[Others chuckle]

'So, what's your name, child?'

Erica: 'Erica Sinclair.'

Eddie: [chuckles] 'So this is Sinclair's infamous sister.'[7]

Erica [turns around to Mike and Dustin]: 'He's sharp.'
[all laughing]

[Eddie glances menacing at his crew in the back. They stop laughing.]

Eddie: 'What's your class and level? Level one dwarf?'

[Others laugh]

Erica: 'My name is Lady Applejack. And I'm a chaotic good half-elf rogue, level 14. And I will sneak behind any monster you throw my way and stab them in the back with my poison-soaked kukri. And I'll smile as I watch them die a slow, agonizing death. So, we gonna do this, or we gonna keep chitchatting like this is your mommy's book club?'

Eddie: 'Welcome to *Hellfire*.'

[They shake hands.] (The Duffer Brothers, 2022)

The scene ends at 58:26. For *Hellfire Club* in the end neither Erica's age, gender, nor race matter. Her passion for and knowledge of *Dungeons and Dragons* serve as her entry card to the finale of the campaign. *Hellfire Club*, on the one hand, operates as a closed society because its members usually are so committed that they don't need to recruit strangers to keep the game running. However, if need be and the person's right, *Hellfire*

7 Sinclair is Lucas' and Erica's surname.

will open its doors to someone external, if the other members can vouch for the recruit and the recruit for herself.

I don't think I fancy the idea of permanent closure and only temporary openness all that much. Why shouldn't people approach us, even though we might be currently not looking for new authors, editors, designers, artists, and so forth? Then again, for this edited volume, at one point, the recruitment of participants had indeed ceased because Quintus and I knew how many contributions we wanted, the authors had confirmed them, and *windpark books* and I had decided on an artist for collaboration in the design of the book. So, I think that pretty much sums up a possible M.O. for this network: no advertisement and institutionalization, no permanent closure, and recruitment based on an 'applicant's' desire to say something interesting in a compelling but undisciplined fashion and to collaborate with others for that purpose.

Earlier I claimed that the island depends on ongoing undisciplined processes of productivity or at least a place where these can happen at any time. During my birthday symposium and the *making* of this book a network of people formed. The preceding paragraphs offered a perspective for a post-book future of this network. The survival of the network depends on three things: undisciplined creative and epistemic production, connecting people within the network and linking people inside the network to persons outside the network, and organizing events that can lead to undisciplined production.

Of course, most likely, we'll just publish the book and that's it. But you, dear reader, may now suddenly feel an inclination towards undisciplined production and/or organizing collectives dedicated to such transdisciplinary work. In that case, see you on this or another island. Or, you're not feeling particularly joyful after reading this introduction, and who could blame you for that? If you feel like it, try another chapter or drop the book. No worries and good riddance.

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First Chapter: Specters of the Haitian Revolution

Taylor Borowetz

Toussaint Louverture and Cécile Fatiman are dead. Toussaint Louverture was a revolutionary leader and governor general, and Cécile Fatiman was a Vodou priestess who sparked massive uprisings. We cannot ask either of them about their experiences. We are prevented from doing so by an intractable barrier: the space between life and death. We are sealed in our world, and they are sealed in theirs. This confines us to the traces that they, and all others who rose up in the Haitian Revolution, left behind. Stories, letters, scraps of paper: we attempt to piece them together, trying to conjure a ghost.

This contribution proposes a plane on which to convene with specters, presented as a methodology that can inform historical research and theory-building. Working with Derrida's framework of spectrality, it briefly outlines four main offerings. First, it contends that spectralization can be applied to historical events and processes to decompose them into partial, inexhaustible threads, increasing narrative complexity. Second, it argues that an analogous process of decomposition can provide an alternative to conglomerating incoherent ethical systems. Third, spectralizing allows the researcher to reach toward individuals rendered inaccessible, excluded from traditional archives and historical legibility. Finally, specters gaze at us from beyond the limits of our epistemic practices, a haunting reminder that we can know and live otherwise. To Derrida, being responsible to spirits is the ultimate ethical imperative.

On the spectralization of historical narrative

Between 1791 and 1804, enslaved people on the French colony of Saint-Domingue orchestrated a revolution. They rebelled against the plantation owners and slave drivers, their colonial "masters", and the overarching edifice of racial slavery as a whole. Culminating in the first ever post-colonial, post-slaveholding free Black republic, we now refer to this period of uprisings as the Haitian Revolution. This description functions as a useful heuristic, folding together a wide range of motivations, individuals, ways of knowing, and ways of being. Enslaved people and their comrades embodied metaphysical systems within and beyond a wide range of African, Indigenous, Vodou, and Christian cosmologies. Their actions were salient in a multiplicity of worlds.

Flattening this ethical, epistemological, and ontological richness by describing it as motivated entirely by escaping slavery does a historiographical injustice. The events comprising the Haitian Revolution signified much more than just a revolt against French authority and the plantation system: Robbie Shilliam writes that our simplifications represent "a fundamental failure of our politics and imagination. In doing so we are silencing the response" (2017 p. 23). The revolutionary response was wider and deeper than categories of race or exploitation can capture (Shilliam 2017).

Homogenising these events under the umbrella of a single term has clear political salience: the "Age of Revolutions" was, historiographically speaking, Western and European. Intellectual histories of liberty, democracy, and individual rights present the French and American revolutions as events of universal significance. For the most part, the Enlightenment and its corollary philosophical canon could be situated geographically, and allegedly provided all one needed to know about human nature and the corresponding possibilities for social organization.

Michel-Rolph Trouillot, a Haitian anthropologist, sparked a wave of change. In *Silencing the Past*, he outlines the necessity for alternative histories to rectify a tradition of Eurocentric omissions. Trouillot's historiographical project was animated by a much larger conviction: that the Haitian Revolution has the potential to reverberate throughout global political thought. Denying its centrality therein couldn't be attributed to the paucity of archival sources from the Haitian Revolution, but rather a concerted effort to restrict the constitution of our historical narratives to certain European voices and subject positions.

Referring to the events between 1791 and 1804 as the Haitian Revolution allows us to participate in Trouillot's historical-political project by proposing a node, akin to the French and American revolutions, that our

analyses can coalesce around. Singularizing the Haitian Revolution makes it possible to draw inspiration for the possibility of political action in the present. It proves to us that incredible, expansive, and world-historical changes are possible, and that those suffering the horrific excesses of imperialist violence can be the architects of such a foundational shift.

All strategies of historical narration require simplifications of one type or another. All allow different theoretical frameworks and concepts to proliferate. All lead us to emphasise one set of cases or actions over another. Omissions are necessary in order to render a narration coherent. We must, however, remain explicit about the limitations of each strategy: the events we designate "irrelevant" and the stories we allow to fade into ghosts. International hostility fueling the stigmatization of Vodou, for example, caused depictions of the Revolution and its causality that were inextricably intertwined with the religion and its rituals to be subsumed beneath more hegemonically palatable stories.

Spectralization provides a framework to approach narrations of the Haitian Revolution as a whole. Grand narratives can cement a teleology that is difficult to shake, and these representations can flatten important details for the sake of a larger coherence. The Haitian Revolution cannot be captured in a single narrative arc. Recognizing the political importance of telling the story of the Revolution in a way that makes it legible from the outside, this contribution proposes a different approach: leaning into the discomfort of fragmentation and contradiction rather than a coherent totality. The goal of such a historiographical approach is the decomposition of events that have been "fixed" in their significance, thereby holding them open for continuous and generative reinterpretation. Derrida suggests one such method: convening with ghosts.

On the decomposition of ethical systems

Having dealt with the epistemological costs of fixing a teleological legibility inherent in retelling the Haitian Revolution as one coherent event from which we can gather a central political lesson or a single ethical imperative, narrating individual stories and biographies can constitute a move toward complexity. Treating a single person as representative of a whole, however, is distinct from reflexively focusing on one part as a fragment among others and fails to offer many epistemological improvements due to the persistence of an implicit retroactive simplification. Focusing on one narrative that would necessarily exclude others often takes the form of intensifying the logic of representation and retelling events in the most "complete" way possible to anchor a claim to scientific legitimacy, or by claiming that one causal political logic predominates, un-alienating the behaviour of people in the past on the basis of class or racial distinctions, for example. This section engages with the spectralization of an individual as an alternative to singularizing a system of ethics and treating the individual in question as an embodiment of it.

Despite the fact that Toussaint Louverture is relatively accessible to us, any coherent narration is necessarily incomplete. An academic might attempt to give an overview of his contributions to French or Enlightenment thought, but this would struggle to capture a conceptualization of freedom that may have been gained from Vodou practice, or contributions to medical knowledge from an upbringing in African Allada culture. The perspective from which one engages in scholarship necessitates certain simplifications, and thus certain omissions, in order to produce a coherent narrative. As scholars, we are necessarily limited by our own perspectives. In addition to the frameworks to which we attach and order new information, we bring methodologies of viewing and approaching reality. Though we can read the traces Louverture left behind, our attachment, being in our own worlds, necessarily prevents us from fully accessing his. Unknowability beckons to us from beyond the limits of our epistemic practices, the intersection of our methods and positionality. The void of death and the absences in the archive we cannot fill proliferate a host of spectral presences.

Toussaint Louverture was an architect of the Haitian Revolution, of sovereignty, and of independence. Per Hazareesingh's 2020 biography *Black Spartacus*: Toussaint chose the surname "Louverture" in August of 1793, countering governor Léger-Félicité Sonthonax's declaration of emancipation by identifying himself as "the opening". Prior, he carried the name "Bréda" from the slaveowners of the plantation he was born on. Life expectancy on the Bréda estate was 37 years, with one of the highest mortality rates of Afro-Caribbean plantation workers in the region. However, Louverture's father's reputation may have conferred the necessary

social standing to allow him to marry a higher status free woman and may have given him supervisory power over the Bréda estate as Bayon de Libertat's coachman. In a 1797 letter to the Directory, Louverture wrote that he had been emancipated 20 years earlier (whether this was formal/legal emancipation or de facto *liberté de savanne* was unspecified). After he was freed, before the outset of the revolution, Louverture owned at least one slave and rented a coffee plantation that was cultivated by 13 enslaved people. Hazareesingh's biographical details regarding Louverture's early life emphasize the ways his education and upbringing may have shaped his political and ideological commitments (2020). Louverture was brilliant, consistently followed by glowing appraisals as a healer, strategist, manager, Christian, and republican. He was raised in Allada culture, and studied Machiavelli, Montesquieu, and Raynal.

After climbing through military ranks and gaining recognition, Louverture was appointed Governor-General of Saint Domingue by the French. He held this position between 1797 and 1801, when, without French approval, he moved to draft a new constitution without approval from France (Popkin 2011). The Constitution of 1801 outlawed slavery on the island forever. It didn't necessarily break Saint-Domingue from French control, but this move, as well as naming Louverture Governor and Chief General for life, was a stark claim for an unprecedented degree of political autonomy.

We can come to know Louverture through our scholarship. Hazareesingh engages archival material with meticulous rigour and depth, but even one who isn't a trained historian can now access a range of artefacts: Louverture often dictated letters and proclamations, written documents that were commonly circulated in French. But we can do more than just read the Constitution of 1801, for example, we can understand it. Foundationally, Louverture is legible to us because we can attach his actions to our own schemas to give them meaning. Outlawing slavery in a constitution is, historically speaking, a very specific articulation of liberation, salient only within certain contexts. In a contemporary world where politics plays out on the lines of states, laws, and proscriptions governing the behaviour of individuals, we understand the stakes of legal-juridical rights as codified in a constitution. Louverture's actions suddenly take place on surprisingly familiar territory.

However, Louverture's voices aren't always harmonious: owning at least one slave while sacrificing his life to end the institution, allying with the planter class, and at times even executing revolutionary leaders who were committed to the causes of the Black formerly enslaved population. He was a human being, not the embodiment of an ethical system that we project backwards. Avoiding "contradictory" behaviours implies that recognizing his incredible successes and sacrifices requires complete adherence to an external standard of behaviour, deviation from which would otherwise refute the overarching ethical and political representation inscribed retroactively. However, we cannot reconstruct the ethical systems within which he made his choices or recreate the stakes that he took into account. The only thing we can be certain of is that these ethical systems are multiple and fragmented. We have letters, speeches, legal documents, and biographies, but never enough to render Louverture truly knowable to us, to put ourselves in his world. We don't understand how his actions, like owning slaves or quashing rebellions, made sense to him. Despite the grandest stack of archival papers or the most beautiful oral histories we cannot be with him, exhaust him, or do him justice. He is present but simultaneously unknowable, partial, and fragmented, sealed in this liminal state by death.

Between life and death, we re-enter the realm of the specter. The discord between Louverture's multiplicitous voices prevent us from getting to him, from getting to know him. A specter, to Derrida, is a fragmentation of being. Not a whole individual—we may imagine a spirit—a specter is a partial, particular reflection, and there is never just one. We create and multiply specters when we engage with them, just as our image of Toussaint Louverture begins to proliferate into a multiplicity of voices, narrations, and experiences when we listen closely. Similarly to the proliferation of events following a spectral fragmentation of the Haitian Revolution, an individual's decomposition into specters pulls at the seams of our desire to order the world into coherent, systematic wholes. The discord between these specters prevents us from subsuming them into a single ethical framework.

On illegibility and archival exclusion

Cécile Fatiman shaped the trajectory of the events we designate as the Haitian Revolution. An enslaved woman in Saint-Domingue, Fatiman was a high priestess of Vodou. Her presence, however, is always already

spectral. Fatiman is virtually absent from historical accounts of the Haitian Revolution, appearing in archival material for one night: August 21st, 1791. We meet her in Bwa Kayiman, woods surrounding an alligator swamp (Shilliam 2017).

Robbie Shilliam synthesises an account of the events that took place between Sunday August 14th, 1791, and the following Sunday, August 21st[1]. Enslaved workers had started to meet regularly to plan the insurrection, originally setting the date for the 24th of August. However, after fires are set to two plantations just days later, the revolutionaries are caught and interrogated. Dutty Boukman, a *houngan* or high priest of Vodou, realizing time was of the essence, convened a meeting on the 21st. He begins the meeting with a prayer.

Fatiman then joins us through Shilliam's text, an account he had to piece together from five different publications in order for us to come to know her. Following Boukman's prayer,

Cécile Fatiman, a *mambo* (female priestess), is ridden by the *lwa* Ezili Kawuolo who presides over a blood oath binding all present to liberty or death. In the following week fifteen thousand enslaved peoples join the insurrection and destroy one hundred and eighty-four sugar plantations on the northern plains. It starts from here, in earnest, what comes to be known as the Haitian Revolution.

Lwa are spiritual agents in Haitian Vodou, one of whom possesses Fatiman during the ceremony. Shilliam argues it is completely irrelevant whether one ascribes a certain ontological status to the specter- either way, the causal relationship is clear: "If the *lwa* were not gathered at Bwa Kayiman with the chiefs, then there would have been no revolution. I am making an eminently pragmatic point" (2017 p. 23).

One way of coming to know a spirit is to be possessed by it. Derrida's spectral framework describes an analytic of possession as a liminal state. He blurs the distinction between being possessed by something and being possessed of it, both ownership and captivation. He conceptualizes the specter using a Western metaphor of the ghost and the corresponding metaphysical assumptions. In Derrida's discussion possession is largely metaphorical, difficult to grasp and impossible to quantify. But on August 21st, 1791, Cécile Fatiman's possession was real. It constituted the collectivity that gathered in Bwa Kayiman that night. It was central to maintaining relationships with the spiritual agents and practices of Vodou more generally. It had consequences for the entire trajectory of the Haitian Revolution.

Fatiman and Kawuolo's presence in the history of the Haitian Revolution challenges the scholar through their relative absences in the archive, pushing the Derridean analytical framework to its limits and haunting us from the edges of our ways of knowing. In addition to the reality and causal effects of Ezili Kawuolo's presence, the metaphorical quality of possession as a metaphor fails to engage with the actual world. Per Shilliam's account: in Vodou cosmology, there is no super-natural category. The world of humans is the world of the *lwa*, and they join us at a crossroads between dimensions. This is one of the central premises of Vodou, that these respective domains, and those within them, can interact. The ceremony that Fatiman undertook allowed her to make way for such an interaction, to allow Ezili Kawuolo to un-seat and temporarily replace her own consciousness, taking a corporeal existence. Thus, the *lwa* can intervene materially in human affairs. During the ritual of possession the *lwa* offer a specific type of knowledge and oversight [konesans] to witnesses who can then cultivate it and be moved to action. *Lwa* are organized along universal categories of human experience and can channel the forces they represent. Ezili Kawuolo is known to be a "fierce protector of her people, and righteous avenger of those who refuse her people their humanity" (Shilliam 2017 p. 19).

We cannot, however, move closer to her through the same archival methods with which we approach Louverture. One possible reason for Fatiman's absent presence could be the logic of the archive of the Haitian Revolution with regard to Vodou. From 1835 to 1987, successive Haitian governments banned many widely accepted religious customs by legislating against "spells" or "superstitious practices" (Ramsay 2014). In addition to the general ostracization of Haiti by the west following the Revolution, Vodou was specifically targeted by the Catholic Church and occupying US forces (Ibid.). The long durée of Vodou's stigmatization that Ramsay

1 In a footnote, Shilliam writes that his account is synthesised from the work of Bob Corbett, Daniel Simidor, and Rachel Beauvoir-Dominique, "The Bois Caiman Ceremony: Fact or Myth," 2002, http://faculty.webster.edu/corbetre/haiti/history/revolution/caiman.htm; Rachel Beauvoir-Dominique and Eddy Lùbin, "Investigations Autour Du Site Historique Du Bois Caiman: Rapport" (Cap-Haitien: ISPAN, 2000); Kate Ramsey, The Spirits and the Law: Vodou and Power in Haiti (London: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 43–45; David Patrick Geggus, Haitian Revolutionary Studies (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 8192; and Carolyn Fick, The Making of Haiti: The Saint Domingue Revolution From Below (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990), 91–92.

chronicles may have led to Fatiman's initial displacement from the revolutionary archive in periods of intensifying religious marginalization. Her systematic exclusion and the paucity of documentation, in addition to her fundamental role, puts Fatiman in a liminal position.

Unlike Louverture, we cannot access her thought in more detail through speeches or letters; we cannot come to know her through a biography. Her absence is even more glaring given her presence: in addition to her role sparking the Revolution she was married to Louis Michel Pierrot, a general in the Haitian revolutionary army who later became the president, and she reportedly lived to be 112 (Dayan 1998). Despite her centrality Fatiman is rendered spectral, partial, and fragmented: haunting our histories of the Haitian Revolution, conjured for a single night. She exists at the limit of our knowledge about the Haitian Revolution and ways of knowing it, pulling us toward the fragmentation and incompleteness of an overarching story. We can start to perceive her absences. Spectrality allows the scholar to feel what we can never know, at least to sense that something inexhaustible about her remains beyond our grasp:

> It [the specter] is something that one does not know, and one does not know if precisely it is, if it exists, if it responds to a name and corresponds to an essence. One does not know: not out of ignorance, but because this non-object, this non-present present, this being-there of an absent or departed one no longer belongs to knowledge. At least no longer to that which one thinks one knows by the name of knowledge. (Derrida 2011 p. 5).

We want to know her to be responsible to her, but our desire is also generated by its impossibility. We desire to possess; we desire to possess what we cannot possess. We desire to be possessed; we desire to be possessed because we cannot be possessed (Derrida 2011). We desire to know the unknowable. Fatiman, herself, is not unknowable, but having lost her to death we can only engage her through fragmented specters. Fatiman's specters present a fundamental illegibility that will remain regardless, but they generate the desire to know differently, to know more, to undertake attempt after attempt. We are called to sense them, to feel, and to be moved.

On responsibility to specters

If we still want to know differently, to learn to live differently, how do we proceed? Engaging with the specter shows us the limits of our epistemic systems. We are forced to accept increasing fragmentation, to decompose with them. Even more uncomfortable than the multiplicity of specters is their heterogeneity (Derrida 2011). Specters of the Haitian Revolution proliferate out of every story, dissonant calls fly out of every document. The political goals and ethical inheritances of these specters are not uniform, and at times, directly contradictory. Louverture's alliances with the white plantation owners may have been motivated by a strategic realpolitik to retain both revolutionary goals and overall palatability (Girard 2012), but this position was likely morally repulsive to the formerly enslaved who were largely of African origin or descent, constantly victimized by racial terror.

In this particular case, engaging with the specters of the Haitian Revolution forges a position for situated, ethical, and necessarily fallible research: "[...] a context, always, remains open" (Derrida 2011 p. xvi). As the specters proliferate, so do the ways we can learn to live. We attempt to know otherwise, again and again. Specters pull at the seams of overarching ethical and epistemological systems, amplifying dissonance until the entire structure becomes untenable. The non-contemporaneity of our responsibility to those who are not with us unhinges the living present (Derrida 2011 p. xviii). Specters, and their proliferation, are generative of problems but not necessarily solutions. The nature of decomposition is messy. Ways of learning, knowing, and living, are multiplicitous and contradictory. The openness and complexity of inheritance, however, does not mean our choices are infinite (Derrida 2011). Spectrality is not an endless dissipation. The Haitian Revolution is both inexhaustible and constituted by real people and real events, marked by the material stakes of political struggle.

But these people, and these events, are unknowable to us. Even if I had succeeded to recount Cécile Fatiman's story, it would have been doing her an injustice. We don't share a foundational cosmology or metaphysics, and I cannot guess to what extent categories of gender and racial violence were salient. Attempting to write about her does injustice to her actions, inasmuch as I fail to place them in any kind of milieu where her

decisions and motivations resonate. I retroactively simplify them, creating a caricature along lines that make sense only to me. Even if I did have more information about Fatiman, I attach it to a schema that necessarily diverges from hers in fundamental ways. I cannot even know whether the categorical subject position I apply to her, the label of a Vodou priestess, would be meaningful at all, or at least in any of the same ways.

Acknowledging the agency of the *lwa* doesn't grasp the richness of these events: the meaning and significance of the night Fatiman was possessed. The conceptual sensibility of the specter gives us a way to open a dialogue with her when other strategies are doomed to fail. This presents a practice of learning from ghosts, one that might offer a mode of engaging with historical events, spirits, and ethics by fragmenting them into generative and incomplete threads. Individual spirits decompose into specters, relentlessly confronting our desire to render them legible. We approach Toussaint Louverture but he is inexhaustible. We begin to tell his story; it disintegrates into fragments in our hands. We get closer to the specters only to become aware of what we cannot know. Frustration is implicated but this exact failure moves us; showing us what we cannot know makes us aware of our epistemic limits. We continue because we can feel that the specter is watching us, we are haunted. This becomes the ethical imperative:

> No justice [...] seems possible or thinkable without the principle of some *responsibility*, beyond all living present, within that which disjoins the living present, before the ghosts of those who are not yet born or who are already dead, be they victims of wars, political or other kinds of violence, nationalist, racist, colonialist, sexist, or other kinds of exterminations, victims of the oppressions of capitalist imperialism or any of the forms of totalitarianism (Derrida 2011 p. xviii).

To live with specters is to begin the work of mourning (Derrida 2011). We visit the graveyard to convene with the dead: not to dig up their bones but to honour their legacy, lest we forget them. Still, we trespass on sacred grounds, aware that our best efforts to know Fatiman will not suffice. She shows us that our epistemic practices are violent, even beyond the injustice of Eurocentric simplification. The language of our incantations is itself inadequate: speaking in historically specific Western customs and metaphors surrounding death minimizes the connections between the different planes of a Vodou cosmology (Shilliam 2017). My externality to these metaphysical systems leaves me with crude tools, but we can still use them to push our ways of knowing to their limits. To mourn is to grapple with our relationship to the dead.

If we want to learn to live our lives differently, Derrida writes, we can only learn from specters. We can ignore them and continue on well-worn paths, saving ourselves the effort of critical interrogation and the discomfort of change. If we want something else, however, we need to locate knowledge outside our own set of experiences. To truly live otherwise, we can only learn from the unique liminality, the "heterodidactics between life and death" (2011 p. xvii). This provocation, "to learn to live", summons ethics as a category, as well as epistemology. Learning to live from beyond our current spatial and temporal situation echoes Trouillot's historiographical project, and the insistence in the capacity of history to co-create theory and political discourse. The proliferation of specters of the Haitian Revolution offers a mode of existentialist pedagogy, partners in dialogue from who we might learn to live.

If we choose to ignore the specters of the victims of systematic oppression, and especially of the Haitian revolutionaries, their gravestones might fade but their spirits will not disappear. Beyond sensing their gaze and feeling discomfort we can allow their desires to possess our bodies: offering them vessels to affect material change. This is more than a gift of agency-as-libation. Revolution is an attempt to enact political futures, and the project of the Haitian Revolution remained open to those who undertook it. If we fix our narrative and close it off, defining its stakes on the basis of our own categories, we limit its possible futures. A single narrative has a single trajectory, but revolution is dedicated to the unknowable potential of collective action. Being responsible to specters is generative of ethical political life. Bridging the otherwise intractable gap between life and death we can witness them, welcome them home, and invite them to the table where we imagine and enact our futures.

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Second Chapter: A Character Study

D. M. Braid

"tell me how the sun sets for you"
— Sorry: Tell Me (2022)

He sits with his friend. Everybody is talking. I sit in front, apart, facing them, preoccupied. I hear all the conversations going on but I am not really listening to any one. Still, I hear it clearly when he turns to his friend and

> he says: "[...] So I've decided I won't take any drugs this week."
> I look up from the text I've been skimming.
> I say: "Did you just say you weren't going to do drugs this week?!"
> He blushes. He says: "Did you just hear that..."
> I say: "So that is actually what you said." His friend smiles.
> He has missed his chance to deny it.
> Perhaps he has no instinct for dishonesty.
> He stutters a transparent lie to save face: "Not... that I take drugs, normally. 'cause that would be... bad.", he says (though what he means is that it would be bad if I knew that about him, so he is giving me a chance to disbelieve it).
> His face has become quite red – because he is pale, he blushes easily and visibly – but he still smiles (an embarrassed smile). I smile as well, genuinely amused. Then he starts laughing, tentatively – to pass what he said off as a joke? –, and I join in. So does his friend, and maybe a few others who overheard the exchange.

In retrospect, I don't know what we were trying to make believe by laughing about it, or what we were laughing about. I think about that a lot over the days that follow, and I think about him, and I think about what his life must be like in order to require a decision not to take drugs for a week.

What kind of drugs does he normally take?
How frequently, how much, and what for?
Just recreation? (Weed? Or 'shrooms?)
Or party-drugs? (Speed? Coke?)
A kind of rebellion? (Acid?)
Addiction? (Heroin?)
Who is he?
Questions.
They all show only how little I know him (and the world he inhabits).
Why did it surprise me to discover that he took drugs?
I don't know him well enough to even guess answers. And why should I?
He is one among many in this room, but it is he who stands out to me. Why?

When I walked along the hallway that Monday I almost walked past him and his friend. When I last saw them he wore his hair about ear-length, and had dyed it a bright, garish blond. That served as a hallmark by which I spotted them. It was hard to miss. Now it is cropped close, its natural colour. He must have had it cut over the weekend.

> I turn around, having almost walked past them, and gesture at where his hair used to be longer. I say: "No more?!"
> He says: "I got bored with it. So I cut it. It was time for a change."
> I say: "Change is good, sometimes, I suppose. But this is maybe the wrong season to cut your hair as short as you did."
> (It is early October, already colder.)

Him: "That's what they said at the hairdresser. I'll just wear a hat."
Me: "If you can pull that off."

On second thought, I'm confident he can pull off almost anything simply on account of how he carries himself: with such self-assurance, like a prince.

Somebody else tells me, a few days later – the Thursday of the same week – that he studies biology. We come to talk about him because I tell the story of me overhearing him tell his friend about pausing his drug habit, without naming names or describing anything more than his former hair style and self-assurance, but that's all it takes for Somebody Else to say: "Oh, I know him.".

He stands out not just to me.

"He probably wants to be a doctor", Somebody Else tells me.

(But who is he really, apart from the image we have formed of him?)

I wonder why he might want that.

I guess he hasn't thought about it. It would surprise me if he had. Why?

All my guesses all have no basis. All I can really do is make up stories.

The images flare up on their own now like dust in the saturated sun falling through walls of windows at a family estate: a family of physicians, or university graduates for whom being a doctor is one of a handful of proper career choices, or of aspirants to such a life who see medicine as an inroad to the world they hope to inhabit. Possibilities. An accident, a book, a memory of kindness, an image that came to him at the right time. How could I know? Who did I think he was?

In spite of everything I can only guess, I say (with a determination that surprises me): "That makes sense. He seems the type. Ambitious, privileged."

There I have a word that captures him: "privileged". Privileged to a point where he can afford to take for granted that "obviously a straight white male cannot claim to speak for everyone" – a phrase he will use once in conversation, one which is not about him, exactly, as this phrase is not really about him even when he says it, but just a thing one says to have more people say it, to make it true – as a truth beyond doubt, reflection or practice, and go about his life unburdened. He speaks, regardless.

Or so it seems to me. He is that privileged. All blond and light.

I wonder if his ambition will change, or if he will be one of those people who seamlessly grow into an early plan for their life, one which they had growing up – or others had for them, knowingly or not –, rather than one they formed only after making the first few choices, mistakes of their own, some of them to happiness, some to the opposite of happiness. (I am one of those people, just growing into something, and I don't know in which direction I shall fall.)

[Who is anybody apart from the images others have of them?]

One time, later, he signs off an e-mail submitting a small piece of work with the words: "If this will not do, I shall write another.", and there is the other word that will come, in my mind, to define him: "shall". As I read that sentence, I was suddenly sharply aware of how little used that verb is in spoken American English. How distinguished it sounds, even in writing, how distinctive; how fitting it was for him, in particular, to use it. It is his word. It spans his life, or seems to. He lives in the "shall": the things he shall do, the goals he shall accomplish, the dreams that shall fulfill themselves, the future shall be his.

It surprises me how harshly I judge him now, in writing.

I am reminded of a line that struck me in Slouching Towards Bethlehem, where Joan Didion notes that "writers are always selling somebody out". Yes. But I am also exposing myself to make a point here. I am not sure what it is, what I am articulating, or trying to, but I know that this text betrays more about me than I want to reveal, about what catches my attention, what interests me, what preoccupies me when I am left alone with myself: hopes, fears, fascinations, assumptions; all of that is personal, yet here it is plain to see between the lines. In thinking about him, I am mainly studying myself.

The questions of his life are mine: hobbies, pass-times, tastes, preferences. (Besides the drugs.) Relationships? Friends? Lovers? Maybe even partners of a longer term than lovers are, girlfriends? (Boyfriends?) Plenty of images of him drinking with friends, laughing together in a cone of light or leaning against the wall half in the dark on a bad night, defeated by love (unrequited?), by the aftermath of desire fulfilled or by all these images of what else, always still more than he could ever become, he should – on whose authority? – be already.

What are the designs for his life unspooling in his mind?
What does he want? What does he remember?
What does he choose to forget?
Now I should ask myself, why these are the questions I ask.
Why do I idolise his confidence, his beauty and – being older by a span that will in a few years become irrelevant – his youth as I do?
But I don't want to ask myself any of this.
All he is are things I do not have, some I never had like he has them[1].
Is that it? That he is beautiful. (Does he know it, and, if so, does that knowledge make him self-conscious, uneasy, or proud, or is it to him just a fact, perhaps only vaguely apprehended, if at all, like the fact that he gravitates towards the clothes he chooses to wear and the people who stand out to him in a crowded room?)
That is not it, I decide. This is not infatuation.
I am interested in who he is, what he stands for in my mind, not in being with him.

Another time: we leave somewhere almost together by accident, me a few steps ahead of them. His friend mumbles something inarticulate, a quirky habit of his (I'll eventually come to understand), to which I turn around with a puzzled look, asking without asking to explain, just to speak with them a little more:

> He (shrugs his shoulders,) says: "No words..."
> Me: "I'll have a lot of anecdotes to tell by the end of this, I'm sure."
> Him: "What do you mean?"
> Me: "You're like a well of stories, the pair of you."
> Him: "What stories?"
> Me: "Like the drug-story."
> I hadn't used that label in front of them before, but he knows immediately what I am talking about. His friend knows, too, and says: "Yeah, I have told that story to so many people since then."
> Me: "So have I. Without naming names, obviously."
> A month or so later, I will refer to him as "drug-boy" when speaking to others, because at that point I have told the story to everyone.
> Him: "I'd like to have that stricken from the record."
> Me: "What?"
> Him (after a pause, perhaps intentionally dramatising, though it doesn't feel like it in the moment): "Everything I ever said..."

And just like that my image of him shifts again.
There is doubt.
A surprise to me, another one.
His friend tells me, later, in his absence, that he is a "big smoker". Again, I am surprised, though I should have learned my lesson by now.
I had taken him to be certain of whatever he did. Why did I think that?
That was what first struck me about him, a year or so before the drug-story, when he came up to me for the first (and only) time to ask something. I don't remember what the question was, something well-prepared, formulated with excessive precision, too clearly targeted at a minute point, a technicality; I recognised it as a strategic question, targeting a gray-zone in the pertinent statutes. I told him the answer, which – as tends to be the case with clear questions – was clear and brief, he nodded and left.
As I think about it now, and about him then, it strikes me that as I see him in that first memory, he appears more commanding than he does now: Sturdier, taller (I think I may remember him taller than me, but I see now that he is not, or not by very much — we are almost the same hight; though he certainly seems taller from the distance because he is leaner than I am; he is, in fact, strikingly thin. (The association is unavoidable: drugs?)). Older(-looking)?

1 Isn't it a great unhappiness to idolise things that eluded me always. Not to not ever have had them, but to have wanted them all the while.

We never, to my memory, spoke one on one after that, not until long after I overheard him telling his friend about his decision to not take drugs for a week.

What does it say about me that I remembered that scrap of a conversation in the first place, and that I dwell on it, think about him, at this length.

He reminds me later, we did speak again once more in between these moments: A brief conversation I forgot about. What does it say about me that I did not remember our second conversation?
What else might I have forgotten?

He bites his nails. I notice that only after I speak to him one on one again, sitting down for a while, a year after we first spoke, a little over two months since I overheard him tell his friend he wouldn't take drugs for a week. (For all I know he has forgotten that day.) I notice how his nails look cut very short. (They are also covered with brown spots, which, to me, look like the remains of handling dough for baking, or clay for sculpting, or sand to fill up pots halfway before setting down a little plant and fixing it in place carefully with more soil, some water, putting the pot down on a saucer, the saucer on his windowsill or a shelf full of little flowers – Think of that! –, yet, as I see him, I would be surprised if they are that; what they really are, I cannot guess – Drugs? – because I do not really see him. That is what I should have learned, but cannot seem to accept.) Then, the next day, I look at him from the distance across a room and see him biting his nails. I must have seen him bite his nails before, but I never noticed. Attention is odd that way, I guess.

Have I forgotten something that would make me see him entirely differently?

Think about: him alone because of how easy it is to think about him in the company of others, the centre of a group or a party; think about: him feeling shy because of how easily he seems (to me) to engage with others, with such assurance; think about: him thinking how he shall scrape by on as little as possible because I cannot beat back the impression of wealth, of privilege!

Now I remember another moment I forgot. The first of those meetings with me in front and them there in front of me, he and his friend talking, just two in a group of others. These meetings take place weekly in a building I have never been to, in a room I didn't bother to check out before that first day. I spot him ahead of me, walking more slowly than I am – he has no need to hurry: he shall be on time –, so I naturally catch up. "You don't, by any chance, know where exactly the room is?", I ask him without introduction or preambles; much is left unsaid: that I remember him (from almost a year earlier), i.e. that I still know who he is, and do so well enough to recognise him in the crowd on the sidewalk, that I know we are heading to the same place (or should be, if both of us do what we are signed up for). I wonder if he thought about any of the implicit certainties – then or later – I skipped over to get directly to my question, to which he responded, then, directly: "I was hoping to follow you.", he says (though he could, of course, not have known we would run into each other like this, by chance, out on the street), leaving all the same things left unsaid.

I wonder.

I wonder, too, if he feels like he has something to prove.

I have often wondered if I inspire that in certain people, specifically in those who have a high opinion of themselves. To even wonder about that probably exposes a rather pure form of arrogance in me, my own self-assurance. Still, the fact is that I have often felt when reflecting on my relationships with other people, especially those who stand closer to the periphery of my life, exactly those who don't know me too well, that I make some people feel they need to prove to me specifically how they are clever, sophisticated people. (As if to them I stood for something!) I wonder if he feels that way, but I can never ask – because that would brand me with all that arrogance –, and so I can never know.

For reasons of their own both he and his friend address me by my last name only, no first name,
no "Mister", not even "Hello", just a comma after.

I don't know what to make of that.

I just wonder.

Where does he come from that morning, walking slowly from where he lives – "home"? – or elsewhere? How does he live, surrounded by what (and whom)?

Things: Carpets, notes, bedding with patterns on it or pictures, plants by the windows (open or closed at night), curtains or blinds, books (how many and which?), stuffed animals, warmth or cold in the winter, clothes in piles on the floor (like mine are) or neatly folded and stacked, love or loneliness? Drugs.

For a while I pass by a lamppost on my daily commute to the centre of the city – I usually take a different route back –, where somebody has affixed a poster that reads "ADDICTED? We can help!" with some faded pictures meant to project a wholesome atmosphere, a phone-number and an address to some kind of religious establishment. Every day when I stop there at that light which stays red for a long time and lean on that lamppost it reminds me of that conversation; it keeps me thinking of him and his drug-habit, magnifies it in my mind more and more disproportionately as time flies.

I idolise his drug-habit as something else I never had, even when I was that age.

To him it probably has no such monolithic status. He can take drugs or not, week by week, a habit only intermittently, like cold-brew coffee or exotic food.

I don't know what he eats. I offered him, among others, donuts once or twice on days when I bought a whole box from some charity bake-sale and he always declined them, seemingly conscious of, as people vaguely put it, "what he puts in his body", almost neurotically so, since he is young and he can certainly stomach a donut (and the drugs, whichever kind now, apparently present no such problem). But he is not in the habit, and that is probably for the best.

It keeps me wondering.

I try to decide if he looks younger or older with his hair cut.

Older: because that colour was so clearly to my mind one only a teenager could choose[2]. Now he no longer wears his youth for all to see. Age is hard to estimate precisely without clear indicators. So for all anybody could tell from seeing him now, he could be in his 20s. I doubt anybody would guess him older.

Younger: because attention is now focused on his face, and he has a young face, because he is young (and his life has been easy, I imagine again: soft light falling through high windows, large rooms, open spaces outside, leisure, choices, beauty—by many measures a happy life, but bathed, as it appears to me, in an unreality that exposes his life to my pages like to photo-paper which, once developed, depicts only a made-up world); by the looks of his face, he could be any age between 15 and 25, give or take a year. I don't know how old he in fact is. I'm guessing he was 19 when we first met; high with self-assurance.

And yet: doubt, maybe some lightless days now and then, more or less long and dark, or spaces overstuffed with expectations, images like old dust making the air too dense to breathe in an attic storing generations of things no one shall ever use again, too many habits to shake: all he shall be.

I am reminded of an evening lecture I attended long ago on the topic "Why Grow Up?". One of the answers it supplied was that maturity brings certainty: As you grow older, you know – more and more – who you are. In the discussion following the lecture, the moderator said: "It has been my experience that as I have grown older, I found myself questioning more and more of what I previously took for granted, and so I find fewer and fewer certainties in my life now."

That has been my experience as well, overall.

But I have also experienced the opposite.

My life has taken on a more definite shape in time. That has not come from the discovery of absolute certainties. It is the result of deciding to take for granted, "only for the time being" (I tell myself), this or that, knowing it full well to be contestable at best, and swearing to myself to review it before it inadvertently becomes a principle but knowing also, deeper down, that I will never again find that time to reflect on it—time getting away from you, that is what ageing means[3]. Certainty is an embarrassment.

He does not yet know too well who he is.

I imagine him lying in bed in the evening: on his back or his side, anxious or calm, reaching up by force of habit to brush strands of hair out of his eyes only to find it cropped short, suddenly feel the beat of his heart and wonder whether this haircut was a mistake (so late in the year), only to call himself by his own name, because nobody else is there in the dark with him, and say: "No. It's alright. Hair grows back. You look fine. You're okay. And the people around you won't look at you different. They are you friends. You're not alone."

2 But ours is a time trying to shape a world where nothing is refused (so nothing is true, either), everything is admitted, and nobody is ever hurt, a world – but what makes a world real if not that it is the source of random, irremediable hurt...? – of universal, perennial adolescence.

3 The lesson to draw: to be careful with the choices you make because even most of those that seem like you can revise them at any point, you will never return to. They become fixtures, facts. The great difficulty, and always the same difficulty, lies in grasping the choices I make as I am making them; and, to make them (on the basis of such an awareness, or without it, as the lucky manage to do) in such a way that won't make me regret them later, looking back over what came of them. That is the definition of a happy life. Few are lucky enough, often enough.

I am.

That moment on the sidewalk seems so long ago. Not because it was that long ago, but because so much has changed. He cut his hair, decided not to take drugs for a week. But what has changed most is how I see him now. All the complication, if that's what it is, or just the difference between what I imagined and what he turns out to be. It may as well be the sediment of years.

Years of him changing before my eyes, while I get no closer to who he is.

Such is the spectacle of others.

When we first met he wore his hair the same length it was before he cut it after he dyed it. His hair is naturally blond, not that artificial blond he later chose, but a solid shade—befitting the solid young man I took him to be; not one which – like the colour of my hair these days – shades off into brown or grey as the seasons and my stress-levels change. (Though after he had it cut, it did look brown more than blond.) Perhaps that was part of it. With his hair dyed, especially with that colour he chose, he looked younger; not because it changed his appearance drastically – he was, as I said, blond already – but because it changed the kind of personality his appearance suggested: no longer the tall, elegant, ambitious and diligent prince, but rather, now with that screaming bright hair, the rebel, awash – that seems to me an inevitable association with garish hair-colours – in a certain kind of electronic music, who goes out to clubs (of course, again, I think: to take drugs), to dance, to drink, to meet new people, for the possibility of sex.

"Isn't that why anyone does anything?", his friend says to me years later.

He was once asked to define himself in three words – so he tells me somewhere in between all those moments I find more memorable – and when I ask him, he tells me that his three words were (in this order): "sardonic", "chatty", "British". When I say nothing in response, he says: "Are you surprised?", I don't know if I am. His face takes on a broad, mischievous grin, perhaps a challenge for me to tell him that he is really somebody else and the expression that comes to my mind when I speak of his "self-assurance", and a smile that says "sardonic" above all; so I say: "With that smile, I believe it."

I don't know why I aspire to speak in these defeating witticism which seem meant almost to preclude a response. Killing conversation at will like that is a skill I cultivate. (How can I, recognising that trait of my character, still wonder why at the end of the days and years that pass I remain alone? As if it wasn't obvious.) That I succeed shows, upon reflection, also what confidence I can project. The silences I can produce are a sign of respect I can command.

I have often wondered if I inspire that in certain people. In him, too.

I ask myself whether he is like me. I do not know. I cannot guess.

I cannot possibly let him know how much I have been thinking about him (and why, WHY, WHY ever have I been thinking about him so much).

All the explanations that come to mind are too simple. It isn't that he reminds me of myself; nor is this some delusional infatuation, although I cannot deny altogether that some desire runs through it all somewhere, somehow. I just don't know for what. Knowing that would be key. But I neither want to live my life with him, nor to live his life in his place. Maybe I want to live my life while – impossibly – being how I see him—but that, now, is neither here, nor there, neither him, nor me, not his life, nor mine, nor anything[4].

At the basis of all this thinking about him is a constellation of disparate circumstances – a conversation, a hair-cut, a lamppost; two different but commensurate youths lived through by different people in different places, who happen to meet really only relatively briefly along the long ways through their lives –, each one so remote from the others that to relate them all their circumstnaces to one reason or even only a cohesive array of coordinate causes would yield a story so complicated it would strike nobody as worth telling. It promises no insight. It cannot be done.

I can't get to him from across this distance between us.

And still. Still I try to see him in these images. Really, I paste them over the face and the posture of guilty pride I remember, to make my impressions up into something more than just that, something resembling a person to tell me I know him well. Why?

That smile, he smiles often enough with only half his mouth and a vague trace of derision as a counterbal-

4 Why is it still so hard – only for me? – to separate envy and desire?

ance, and the easy confidence I take it to stand for. It fits him so well, based, as it is, in wealth, privilege and a princely beauty draped over his boyish frame. I wonder if I am capable of anything like that.

Could I, or could I have at some point, if things had been different, things entirely out of my control, in a different world, could I have had such confidence?

I wonder if he, in turn, wishes he were older.

I did when I was that age. (Not knowing, then, what that meant, and how I would then, that is: now sometimes wish, to the contrary, to be younger again.)

I expect he doesn't think about any of that.

A colleague tells me that she finds anonymity liberating when dealing with other people's work: "If I know whose work I am looking at, I just have expectations and I think that's unfair to them. If I am too invested in some people, it's for all the wrong reasons."

That little remark stays with me after we say goodbye at the end of another evening of food and not knowing whether we could be closer to one another than we are.
There is no doubt I am invested in him for all the wrong reasons.

What endears me about other people generally and about him in particular (generally speaking) is just that they are closer to living some alternative life like I like to sketch out for myself when I feel ill at ease in my own; and younger people closer still to living a life other than their own. Everything still seems possible: boundlessness, excess, a passion that can throw him around the room, smash him into furniture, pin him down or blow him away. And then to recover unscarred. Love as I imagine "it should be", as I've never felt.

He is still young. He is not who he was, with his hair cut short.

He does the things he does not because that is who he is but just because the opportunity presents itself. His friend later describes to me a party they went to by saying: "Drugs were ingested." and I say: "Like that, in the passive voice?". They do not yet know that to be someone in particular consists in knowing when to say "No.", which opportunities to ignore, and which invitations to refuse.

Some people never do, only after a certain age, that ignorance is ignoble.

I think only now do I really appreciate just how young he was when I first met him, and still is. He was probably born in the 2000s. His features, his frame, his body all testify to his youth. I did not appreciate that until I was older, say 25, how bodies change – subtly but definitively – in one's early to mid-20s. They inevitably develop a certain sturdiness, clunkiness. That thinness which marks the bodies of children, teenagers and even many people, students especially (that is to say, people whose lives do not involve significant physical strain on a regular basis), at age 20 or so, grows out of itself; people grow up, at least physically. With his hair cut, the schoolboy almost re-emerges.

I am no longer that age.

That is what I notice as I think about him. Maybe, just maybe, just that.

I notice how my mind is settling – only in some places, of course, this observation is deceptive –, I notice myself no longer remembering if I in fact said what I am saying to the very same person before; I find the moments that constitute my days begin to smear, and blend, and vanish without leaving so much as a trace in memory.

I no longer experience events as singular.

I have begun to notice in myself a stagnancy: I notice myself repeating formulations I have used before; there are things about which I no longer change my mind, or think about at all any more. I have had almost every conversation I have too many times already. Exceptions are rare; still, when they come and I know it in the moment, they are wonderful. Maybe it was always like this, the exceptions always exceptions.

He never is who I take him to be.

I envy him that his life is not in this stagnant phase yet; that is his youth.

I wonder whether he envies me, in any way at all, even a little; if this life of mine has something to envy for the likes of him, for somebody living a life so unlike what my life ever was and, if I am being honest, could possibly have been. That is the test to determine if my life is not, after all, alright as it is. Because confirmation from people whose lives are like mine is easy and worthless, nothing but externalised self-affirmation. It is affirmation, envy, desire, admiration coming from those unlike myself that counts; and to find in others, in turn, something I am not yet but can find it in myself to want to be.

It always comes back to my inability to separate envy and desire: obsessive imagining all the least little details of his life for myself as if I was there[5].

And so I wonder also, I have to admit that, too, finally, if he likes me.

I wonder if we could be friends, maybe in a few years time; in another life.

I wonder if he thinks about me sometimes and thinks "I should tell him about this!". To experience this or that as something to tell somebody in particular is the basis of friendship and is, what friendship is.

The summer after the drug-story, when I have no expectation of ever seeing him again – our paths diverged again –, I send him a brief message, like a postcard. It says "Be well." and how I envy the self-assurance I take to define him.

I don't expect to hear back. But again he surprises me. He responds.

Then more than two years later, a sudden insight flashes across an evening. I don't know how long he had not been on my mind at that point but suddenly there it is: I can imagine him voting Tory. I see it before me, I know what his reasons will be: that, though he does not support everything they stand for, their policies make things easier for him, because he is privileged, and, beyond principled commitments to equality &c., he does not have it in him to take too much out of his own life to give to others. I do not envy that.

(But perhaps I have no need for envy because I am no different.)

Then everything turns out differently, and once again we are all in the same place: him, his friend and I. More than two years have passed since I overheard him talking about not taking drugs. I have moved and, no longer passing by that lamppost and with the fullness of time expended and expanding in between, I have not thought of him often or much at all. His friend informs me that he has "discovered cooking".

There is that sudden rush of discovery again, like air into a vacuum, my thoughts are drawn by some latent power to fill that other life.

I know I should resist this. I should not just make him up for myself, only to find that he is not who I imagine. To take seriously another person – not just hear their words and watch their actions, and say "I get it.", "I understand.", but grasp the fabric interlacing them – is to hold oneself back.

His friend reminds me that, after the meeting at the start of which I overheard their conversation, they lingered while everybody else left and I packed up my things and, as I turned to leave he was about to approach me, not knowing what he would say but wanting to say something to reassure himself, presumably, that I did not think badly of him; he still remembers, as his friend now tells me, that I said only: "As long as you're having fun." — "That is his favourite part of the story.", his friend says: "That you didn't care."

Why not? (How have I forgotten that part of the story entirely? (I remember it now.)

I cannot claim to know what it would be wrong for him to do.

And even if: it is not my place to tell him how to live.

But in another way I cared a great deal: I have thought about it to no end.

And about him. To no end. We are still relative strangers; though we could be friends, perhaps, we remain what we have been: semi-distant acquaintances.

In conversation with his friend I refer to him vaguely as "your buddy". His friend corrects me: "No", he says, "He is my good friend."

As these years come to their conclusion, I meet him for coffee. He has grown older, learned to say no to drugs, among other things, and learned how difficult it is to say yes to anything knowing that doing so means saying no to more than we like of the possibilities open to us, standing where we do, living in this time replete with chances. The world grows ever surer, narrower, in time.

This permanence of life lived comes as the great surprise of growing older: how the minor circumstances or their traces, the stages that seemed only temporary reshape one's perspective on the future and one's ability to act in every new present moment, realign hopes and wishes and stay, fixtures now.

Everything always happens for the first time, but also always only once.

So I feel as if I'm limping, always half a step behind my own life.

I can never be prepared for what I then have to live with.

When I first met him, he was 18 or so and I was 25.

5 That is what desire is, to aspire to miss out on nothing about somebody else to be in a position to touch every part of their body and soul.

Now I am 29 and he must be 22. We are four years older, four years later, no longer as young as we were, but still young, both of us.

What now?

He hasn't changed much, I find: his hair still blond, its natural shade again, the same length as before, parted in the middle. He looks as good as ever.

Smiles.

Was he this upstanding, if vaguely uncertain still largely confident character all along, not the stoner, raver, rebel or addict he sought at times to appear to be (or that is how it came to seem to me, in any case).

He has learned that it is not enough to be good, even excellent, at something, even many things; or to be vile. It is not enough to choose a life wholesale, like hair-dye to apply to oneself late at night alone in the bathroom. One must have something to hold onto, at least that, if nothing else, something one can find it in oneself to want always and above all else to be. We have both been discovering this fact for ourselves, by different routes over these four years.

My education, which seems only preparation for another life to come, did prepare me, but for a life I, when it comes to that, now, no longer want to live.

His friend tells me that he is indecisive and unsure what to do with himself. "I am trying to persuade him to become a cook, but I think he would have to...", he trails off, "... get over some ideas..." — "... of what he thinks is beneath him?"

I try to talk them into having me over for dinner, because I have, one might call it: a naturalist's, an anthropologist's, a writer's interest in watching them interact, listening to them talk to one another, seeing him cook—but that never happens.

He has "'discovered' cooking" not because "one does" (at a certain age—many do, others don't), or because he needed to—he found it in himself to want to begin doing that now.
Can't he hold on to this habit and be content?

I wonder if his friend is any more reliable as a witness to his inner life, whether how his friend sees him – or, for that matter, how he sees himself, if he thinks about that much at all – is any more accurate than my image of him.

Who is he, really?

I have gotten no closer. But the one final question all this failing raises above all the others now is: closer to what? And it reveals its own answer.

If people are nothing but the images they can make stick in the eyes of others, there is no fact of the matter. We are all making him up. He is, too.

What of it, all this?

When I arrive, mostly on time, he has already sat there a while, waiting, with a cup of coffee. We talk for two hours, from 4pm into the early evening of a spring day about this and that, changes and plans, his and mine. It is perfectly pleasant, perfectly ordinary, even cordial; for all anybody could tell, we are just two friends catching up over coffee. Maybe, just maybe, we are just that. (Or we could be, now, or in a few years' time.)
At the end we shake hands.

(He remains in the end, who he was: upstanding, ambitious, privileged.)

When we talk about his friend and about writing, he says: "I tried writing once, but I am really more of a reader. But I envy him that he has this passion to commit himself to." To envy other lives and to desire to have them as one's own is how life moves, always towards something other than I am now.

Who is he now? He doesn't seem to know for certain himself. Does anyone?

I tell him about this, as I call it, "prose piece".

I say: "In the end it's not really about you, I mostly wound up writing about myself getting older."
And he says: "Doesn't everyone?"

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Third Chapter:
A Metaphysics of the Stump: Spengler's Thousand Plateaus

Arnaud Miranda

I believe the experience of reading philosophy is not unrelated to alchemy. It is not accidental if these two disciplines were historically close and mysteriously joined. Reading philosophy has to do with a hermetic tradition to decipher, which you can only do through an experimental—somehow artisanal—process. A philosophical text may remain obscure or ambiguous on its own and become clear and meaningful when resonating with other texts. The old alchemist says: when you see something for too long, you can't see it anymore; you need to look away to grasp its very essence. Philosophical understanding comes with an alchemical revelation: the truth of a text sometimes hides in another, stranger book.

That is precisely what I intend to show in this contribution on Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* and Spengler's *Decline of the West*. On paper, these two books have nothing in common. Spengler is a reactionary thinker, the father of the German Conservative Revolution, and his book seems to nostalgically depict the end of our civilisation. Deleuze and Guattari, on their part, wrote a post-May 68 revolutionary book and called for the liberation of desires. However, we will see that these two books share a lot in common. More precisely, each one helps to make sense of the other through the notion of territoriality. *A Thousand Plateaus* brings interesting perspectives on Spengler's description of the end of civilisation as an uprooting. Conversely, the *Decline of West* emphasizes the ambiguity of Deleuze and Guattari's revolutionary concepts of deterritorialization and rhizome. Each work will act as an alchemical revelation for the other: we will see that there is already some Deleuze and Guattari in Spengler, and that we can find traces of the *Decline of West* in *A Thousand Plateaus*. Therefore, a question arises: what does happen once we uncover this unexpected relation? Will the alchemical solution remain heterogeneous, or can we merge them into a new philosophical object? What can the common reading of Spengler and Deleuze and Guattari help us to understand?

To answer these questions, I will divide my contribution in four parts. I will first try to justify the connection between the two texts with historical and formal reasons (I). Then, I will expose Spengler's conception of territoriality in the *Decline of the West* and its theoretical limits (II). We will see that Deleuze and Guattari's own vision of territoriality can shed new light on the limits of Spengler's thought (III). Nonetheless, *A Thousand Plateaus* cannot be read as a mere response to the *Decline of the West*. One should rather read these two conceptions of territoriality as closely intertwined: they allow us to develop a philosophical conception of civilisational decay that I call a *metaphysics of the stump* (IV).

Some reasonable justifications

On the face of it, one might think that a cross-reading between Spengler and Deleuze-Guattari is an absurdity. Of course, it has already been shown that postmodernity has inherited a lot from the reactionary tradition (Wolin, 2004). Derrida, among many others, was a Heideggerian and Foucault was a careful reader of Schmitt. But one could rightfully say that Spengler doesn't have the aura of the two and is not known to be a primary source for Deleuze and Guattari's work. Nonetheless, I will defend that some reasons exist to twine their thoughts together. Besides historical and conceptual reasons, we will see that the very structure of the *Decline of the West* and *A Thousand Plateaus* opens the possibility of a seducing combination.

There are several intertextual trails that indicate the presence of Spengler in Deleuze and Guattari's writings. First, Spengler is explicitly named on a few occasions. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Spengler's *Man and Technics* is cited for his reflections on the performativity of language (Deleuze, 1987, 76). This way of using Spengler can come as a surprise. It is twice a surprise. First surprise: what is the need for Deleuze and Guattari to specifically quote Spengler about the performativity of language? It doesn't seem to be a very Spenglerian idea, or a fully original quote. Second surprise: within the Spenglerian corpus, the idea they quote is relatively marginal. It is not general knowledge about Spengler that Deleuze and Guattari could have extracted from a rapid and oriented reading. By the way, the quote appears to be very different from an earlier mention of the German

author by Deleuze alone. In a seminar in 1955, Deleuze mentions Spengler's *Decline of the West* (mistakenly titled as '*Destin de l'Occident*') as an example of how philosophy can be intricated with totalitarian regime (Deleuze, 1955). If Deleuze undoubtedly hasn't read Spengler in 1955, *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980) may suggest the contrary. This late reading of Spengler takes place in a constellation of references to reactionary thinkers, especially close to what we consider as the spirit of the Conservative Revolution. For example, Ernst Jünger is mentioned three times in *A Thousand Plateaus* (Deleuze, 1987, 403, 518, 564) and the ambiguous figure of Dumézil serves twice as a basis for a plateau (Deleuze, 1987, 434, 528). Moreover, one might see the shadow of Schmitt in several passages describing the sea as 'a smooth space par excellence, and yet was the first to encounter the demands of increasingly strict striation' (Deleuze, 1987, 479). Hence, Deleuze and Guattari have reactionary references, and Spengler is a (minor) one of them. There is a second intertextual trail for Spengler's influence—although indirect—in *A Thousand Plateaus*. Deleuze and Guattari admittedly built their reflections on nomadism and *milieux* by reading Toynbee. One might see Toynbee as a mere proxy of the Spenglerian revolution. By his own admission, Toynbee's philosophy of history directly emerged from his reading of Spengler (Joll, 1987). Hence, even if Deleuze and Guattarri hadn't directly read the *Decline of the West*, some Spenglerian ideas could have passed through their reading of *A Study of History*.

Besides the references to reactionary philosophy in *A Thousand Plateaus*, I must also insist on Spengler's compatibility with postmodern interpretations. Spengler is not a traditional counter-revolutionary thinker like De Maistre or Maurras. His 'relativist philosophy of history' (Merlio, 2019) anticipates leftist cultural critique (*Kulturkritik*) and deconstruction of history as a totality. In a beautiful article entitled 'Spengler's vengeance', Bouveresse showed how Spengler's philosophy thrived with French Theory even if his works were completely forgotten. To him, it is 'by pure ignorance' if postmodern thinkers such as Foucault, Veyne, Deleuze and Derrida 'generally forget to mention an author of which they can be considered, in many respects, the objective successors' (Bouveresse, 2001, 88). It is not the case of every leftist cultural critic. Adorno admitted his debt, considering that 'Spengler hardly found an adversary who was his equal, and forgetting him has worked as an evasion' (Adorno, 1941, 306). With Jünger and others, 'Spengler stands, [...] among those theoreticians of extreme reaction whose criticism of liberalism proved superior in many respects to that which came from the left wing' (Adorno, 318). In other words, there may be conceptual reasons why Deleuze and Guattari refers to Spengler even if he is reactionary: his cultural critique prefigures the deconstructive project of postmodernity.

Besides these external justifications for a common reading, there also exist philosophical proximities. Deleuze and Spengler are both undeniably Nietzscheans. Nietzsche is not only a recurrent reference, but a true key to understand their philosophies. Of course, their interpretations differ: Spengler may well be read as the archetype of right-wing Nietzscheanism while Deleuze embodies what could be called left-wing Nietzscheanism. Nonetheless, this common inspiration explains conceptual proximities: their similar reluctance towards rationality and history as a linear process. Consequently, both Spengler and Deleuze develop a vitalist philosophy of becoming.

The last element I would like to emphasize is the unexpected proximity between the *Decline of the West* and *A Thousand Plateaus* as theoretical works. They share a certain way of writing: a kind of antistructure. First, they are both massive works that have the peculiarity to do philosophy by drawing on a set of heterogeneous disciplines. They philosophize *through* musicology, architecture, biology and not about these objects. As Deleuze confesses in his *Abécédaire*, his work with Guatarri had something of Bouvard and Pécuchet's "encyclopedic attempt" (Deleuze, 1996a). In that sense, Deleuze and Guattari's apparent theoretical modesty joins Spengler's collector mania. Second, and this is the most important element, Spengler's book doesn't have the systematic structure that he claims his new philosophy has. Chapters interact rather than progressively and logically following each other. The *Decline of the West* has *ni queue ni tête*, it is chaotic and needs to be deciphered.

Spengler's territoriality: rooting and uprooting

One way to decipher Spengler's *Decline of the West* is to emphasize the notion of territoriality. His peculiar account of birth and decay of cultures relies on the idea that they are plant-like beings. Cultures root in a motherland, on which their survival depends: once they have sucked out all the nutriments of the soil, they crystal-

lize and finally die of uprooting. Now that we know the general idea, let's try to understand more precisely how it is articulated in the *Decline of the West*.

According to Spengler, humans are not intrinsically historical. Their fundamental condition is a chaos of becomings. The original human life is ahistorical magma, with no orientation in space and time, no destiny. Spengler describes it as follows:

> A boundless mass of human beings, flowing in a stream without banks; upstream, a dark past wherein our time sense loses all powers of definition and restless or uneasy fancy conjures up geological periods to hide away an eternally unsolvable riddle; downstream, a future even so dark and timeless [...]. (Spengler, 2021, 128)

I want to insist on the way Spengler describes the ahistorical condition of humanity. It is not only 'timeless' and a world where 'our time sense' has no 'powers of definition', humans are swallowed by the geological force of the earth. It is not only that they have no temporal orientation, but they also have no territory to settle. Or when they do, it is nothing more than a flash in the dark:

> Over the expanse of the water passes the endless uniform wave train of the generations. Here and there bright shafts of light broaden out, everywhere dancing flashes confuse and disturb the clear mirror, changing, sparkling, vanishing. These are what we call the clans, tribes, peoples, races which unify a series of generations within this or that limited area of the surface. (Spengler, 2021, 129)

Hence, the condition of the ahistorical man is to fight for survival, living in nomadic herds, sometimes settling somewhere as an ephemerous clan. But above all, the ahistorical man lives in chaos. His existence is nonsensical: he has no territory, no identity, no destiny.

However, out of this chaotic life cultures emerge. Continuing his metaphor of the chaos of humanity as an ocean of darkness, Spengler says:

> But over this surface, too, the great Cultures accomplish their majestic wave cycles. They appear suddenly, swell in splendid lines, flatten again and vanish, and the face of the waters is once more a sleeping waste. (Spengler, 2021, 129)

Even if they finally return to 'sleeping waste', cultures bring something different. Cultures are proper historical beings: they are the 'prime phenomenon' of history (Spengler, 2021, 128). The life of cultural men transubstantiate: from being pointless and chaotic human life is now oriented towards a destiny. Where does that essential transformation come from? What does a culture have, that ahistorical life doesn't have? Territoriality. From the ahistorical and chaotic life, Spengler says, cultures 'are separated by a deep soilboundness' (Spengler, 2021, 814). What makes a culture historical is the phenomenon of rooting: men settle in a specific place that becomes their cardinal point and their origin. This process of rooting is a way to locate in space and time, to determine the culture's identity and destiny. That is the reason why Spengler compares cultures to plants: cultures are 'essentially related to the plants, in that they are bound for the whole duration of their life to the soil from which they sprang' (Spengler, 2021, 168). When he says the words 'bound to', one must take this seriously. When a culture roots in a soil, the counterpart is that it defines its own limits. The development of a culture will be forever limited to the land it grew upon. Hence, 'there is a mother landscape behind all expression forms' of cultures, which 'must fulfill their [cultures] history there where their idea originated': 'their [cultures] inner evolution stays spellbound in the place of their birth' (Spengler, 2021, 814). Every expression of a culture is hence an exploration of its own identity, a realization of its limited destiny. One must see a culture as a tree. There is no tree without a seed rooting in a specific place (otherwise, seeds are blown in the wind). However, the counterparts of the rooting are that the tree cannot spread indefinitely, and that its inherent possibilities of development are bound to the ecosystem it grows in.

One may now wonder what happens to the tree once it is fully grown. What does happen to a culture that has realized all its inherent possibilities? Spengler makes it pretty clear in the following passage:

> Every Culture stands in a deeply symbolical, almost in a mystical, relation to the Extended, the space, in which and through which it strives to actualize itself. The aim once attained—the idea, the entire content of inner possibilities, fulfilled and made externally actual—the Culture suddenly hardens, it mortifies, its blood congeals, its force breaks down, and it becomes Civilisation. (Spengler, 2021, 129).

Once it has explored every possibility of its rooted identity, a culture begins to crystallise into an inanimate being: civilisation. Civilisation is paradoxically the full actualisation of a culture's potential and the symptom of its decadence. As such, civilisation is also a process of uprooting. Civilised men progressively lose their organic bond to the soil. For Spengler, the modern city is paradigmatic: 'the Cosmopolis itself, the supreme Inorganic, is there, settled in the midst of the Culture landscape, whose men it is uprooting, drawing into itself and using up' (Spengler, 2021, 379). Hence, civilisation consists in the inorganic decay of a culture. Once a culture explored its inherent possibilities, it loses its vitality and becomes a mechanic and phantomatic being. Spengler continues to use the metaphor of the tree to describe this process. What happens to the full-grown tree? It slowly dies at the peak of its height. Civilisations are 'like a worn out giant of the primeval forest', they 'thrust their decaying branches towards the sky for hundreds or thousands of year' (Spengler, 2021, 129). Ultimately, their 'immemorially old roots' are 'dried up in the stone masses of its cities' (Spengler, 2021, 626).

Through the process of rooting, cultures open a breach in the ahistorical chaos. They give their people a spatiotemporal orientation, a destiny, a history. One may wonder what happens after a culture's blood congealed into a civilisation. Spengler has an intriguing idea. Once a culture has completely dried up into an inanimate body, it allows new forms of ahistorical lives to thrive: 'in the midst of the land lie the old-world cities, empty receptacles of an extinguished soul, in which a historyless mankind slowly nests itself' (Spengler, 2021, 975). In other words, ahistorical life blossoms up from the ruins of the civilisation. The uprooting process of civilisation hence leads to the emergence of new forms of ahistorical life. But is this 'historyless mankind slowly nest[ing] itself'? Spengler does not elaborate much on it but draws the enigmatic figure of the *fellah*[1]. 'We find everywhere in these Civilizations [...] and the giant cities in turn at the end of the evolution [...] a small population of fellaheen who shelter in them as the men of the Stone Age sheltered in caves and pile dwellings' (Spengler, 2021, 641). As the chaotic ahistorical human life, fellaheen life 'is just the zoological up and down, a planless happening without goal or cadenced march in time, wherein occurrences are many, but, in the last analysis, devoid of significance' (Spengler, 2021, 707). Spengler does not expand on this idea. He simply concludes on the fact that we are to be witnesses of the end of 'the historically dying West' and of 'the fellah world waking up' (Spengler, 2021, 728).

Deleuze and Guattari's territoriality: ritournelle and deterritorialization

I believe *A Thousand Plateaus* can shed light on this enigmatic posthistorical life. To understand why, we must first consider Deleuze and Guattari's own account of territoriality. This notion is closely related to the crucial concepts of territorialization and deterritorialization, which are disseminated through the book. I consider the chapter 'Of the Refrain' ('*De la Ritournelle*') to be the best passage to understand what is at stake in these ideas (Deleuze, 1987, 310–350). Deterritorialization can be a frighteningly abstract concept, and this chapter makes it concrete and simple. This will hence be our anchor point.

First, I must define some terms precisely. A *ritournelle* is not simply a 'refrain' as the English translation suggests. The English 'refrain' has its equivalent in French with the word *refrain*, which corresponds to a repetitive part of a song. However, a *ritournelle* is not a simple refrain. It has the repetitive aspect of the refrain but has nothing to do with a chorus (which is elaborated, structured, connected to the verses). It is rather a childish mantra, repeated over and over for itself. Now, we can start reading what Deleuze and Guattari say about the *ritournelle*, and how it is linked to the processes of territorialization and deterritorialization. According to them, territorialization and deterritorialization can be understood through three moments that are not 'successive'

1 *Fellah* (pl. *Fellaheen*) is originally a historical term to describe a traditional Egyptian farmer. Spengler gives a completely different meaning to the word: a *fellah* is for him the typical ahistorical residue that survives a dying civilisation.

but 'three aspects of the same thing, the *ritournelle*' (Deleuze, 1987, 312). Deleuze and Guattari decompose these three moments as a story.

The first moment describes the origin of the process of territorialization. It is illustrated with the following passage, that describes the exorcising aspect of a childish *ritournelle*:

> I. A child in the dark, gripped with fear, comforts himself by singing under his breath. He walks and halts to his song. Lost, he takes shelter, or orients himself with his little song as best he can. The song is like a rough sketch of a calming and stabilizing, calm and stable, center in the heart of chaos. Perhaps the child skips as he sings, hastens or slows his pace. But the song itself is already a skip: it jumps from chaos to the beginnings of order in chaos and is in danger of breaking apart at any moment. (Deleuze, 1987, 311)

The fear of chaos is warded off by the reassuring repetition of the same musical mantra. Lost in the dark, the child 'orients himself' by considering the song as a 'calm and stable center in the heart of chaos'[2]. One can understand here the very origin of territorialization from Deleuze and Guattari: it is a way to ward off the disorder of chaos, to give oneself an orientation through the repetition of the same. Identity and sameness as the condition for orientation in the darkness of chaos. I hardly need to mention that this sounds very Spenglerian.

The second moment of the story describes the process of territorialization itself. Once the *ritournelle* orientated oneself in the dark, one must organize space and time in order to preserve this fragile order. Let us read how Deleuze and Guattari describe it:

> II. Now we are at home. But home does not preexist: it was necessary to draw a circle around that uncertain and fragile center, to organize a limited space. Many, very diverse, components have a part in this, landmarks and marks of all kinds. [...] The forces of chaos are kept outside as much as possible, and the interior space protects the germinal forces of a task to fulfill or a deed to do. This involves an activity of selection, elimination and extraction, in order to prevent the interior forces of the earth from being submerged, to enable them to resist, or even to take something from chaos across the filter or sieve of the space that has been drawn. (Deleuze, 1987, 311)

Now that one has a cardinal point, he must organise space and take the most of it. To keep 'the forces of chaos' outside, the 'germinal forces' must be directed towards 'a task to fulfil or a deed to do'. In another's words, once it has been rooted, the seed must germinate and grow. It must exploit the hardly conquered soil. The *ritournelle* is now not only a childish mantra to ward off the forces of chaos, it has now become a rallying song to repel them. By this very process, territorialization produces the territory itself. It creates a land with frontiers, and an identity through its psalmodic repetition of the same song. To territorialize is then not only 'a question of keeping at a distance the forces of chaos knocking at the door', but also inseparable from the production of an *ethos*, which means 'abode and manner, homeland and style' (Deleuze, 1987, 320). Territorialization is thus a matter of ordering chaos through the production of identity and territory.

This is where the last moment of the story comes into play. Deleuze and Guattari precise that 'the territory is constantly traversed by movements of deterritorialization', 'always *en route* to an at least potential deterritorialization' (Deleuze, 1987, 326). Hence, the very product of territorialization would be somehow deterritorialized. To understand what this means, let us read the last part of the text:

> III. Finally, one opens the circle a crack, opens it all the way, lets someone in, calls someone, or else goes out oneself, launches forth. One opens the circle not on the side where the old forces of chaos press against it but in another region, one created by the circle itself. As though the circle tended on its own

2 It should be noted that Spengler also describes the origin of cultural rooting through the metaphors of child fear and musicality. It is 'from this primitive fear' that 'springs historical sensitiveness in all its modes' and that 'every new Culture is awakened in and with a new view of the world' (Spengler, 2021, 190). And this 'new view of the world' of a culture, its style, is depicted as a *Takt*, a specific rhythm. 'Style', he says, 'in the Cultures, has been the *Takt* of the process of self-implementing' (Spengler, 2021, 643–644) In that sense, every culture has its own musicality: 'the *Takt* of Classical existence was different from that of Egyptian or Arabian; and we can fairly speak of the *andante* of Greece and Rome and the *allegro con brio* of the Faustian spirit' (Spengler, 2021, 132).

> to open onto a future, as a function of the working forces it shelters. This time, it is in order to join with the forces of the future, cosmic forces. One launches forth, hazards an improvisation. But to improvise is to join with the World, or meld with it. One ventures from home on the thread of a tune. Along sonorous, gestural, motor lines that mark the customary path of a child and graft themselves onto or begin to bud "lines of drift" with different loops, knots, speeds, movements, gestures, and sonorities. (Deleuze, 1987, 311–312)

This passage describes the heart of the process of deterritorialization. The 'circle', which is the territory created by the *ritournelle* process of territorialization, must open. The key is that the circle doesn't collapse into the original chaos. It doesn't fall facing the forces of chaos. It creates the conditions of its own dissolution: the circle does not open 'on the side where the old forces of chaos press against it but in another region, one created by the circle itself'. Let me say it differently. The *ritournelle* was originally a repetitive song to ward chaos off. It was the very process of territorialization as the production of sameness, identity. Now, Deleuze and Guattari say that the *ritournelle* will ultimately open itself to variations. This is a very concrete idea. Imagine a refrain you mechanically repeat for hours. You will ultimately vary from the original, say a word for another, change the order of the phrases, incorporate lyrics from a different song, etc. This is the very process of deterritorialization: the auto-dissolution of sameness and identity. This also concerns the territory itself. A territory always bears the conditions of its own dissolution: it tends 'on its own to open onto a future, as a function of the working forces it shelters'. By setting arbitrary lines to exist as a land, the territory creates the possibility of their demolition. Deleuze and Guattari nicely called this 'ambiguity between the territory and deterritorialization': 'the ambiguity of the Natal' (Deleuze, 1987, 326). As a conclusion, we can now appreciate the very meaning of this banal and concrete sentence previously mentioned: 'one ventures from home on the thread of a tune' (Deleuze, 1987, 312).

A Metaphysics of the Stump

The attentive reader undoubtedly noticed the resonances between these two conceptions of territoriality. Nonetheless, it is time for me to explicitly connect the dots. I will now try to show how *A Thousand Plateaus* and the *Decline of the West* do not only converge but eventually merge. This will lead us to the untold story these two books secretly narrate: the metaphysics of the stump.

First, I would like to explicitly state the resonances we have heard between Spengler's and Deleuze-Guattari's conceptions of territoriality. Their two stories first converge in the way they describe territorialization. The process of rooting consists in the exorcisation of primitive chaos. Rooting on a soil implies orientation and order. The origin is the cardinal point. That is not all. To territorialize also determines one's identity and territory as a totality bounded around sameness and repetition. More surprisingly, Deleuze and Guattari's idea of deterritorialization finds echoes in Spengler's description of a civilizational uprooting. In both, the actualization of identity coincides with its auto-dissolution. Spengler's cosmopolis is at the same time a pure product of a rooted culture and a force that will eventually lead to its uprooting. Equally, Deleuze and Guattari's concepts of territorialization and deterritorialization are inseparable; they are ontologically conjoint.

Another element the *Decline of the West* shares with *A Thousand Plateaus* is the importance of vegetal metaphors. The idea of rooting and territorialization is inseparable from the figure of the tree. Spengler's culture 'blooms on the soil of an exactly definable landscape, to which plant-wise it remains bound' (Spengler, 2021, 129). Deleuze and Guattari, for their part, suggest that 'the tree has dominated Western reality and all of Western thought' with the imagery of 'the root-foundation, *Grund*, *racine*, *fondement*' (Deleuze, 1987, 18). However, if Spengler ends its vegetal metaphorical story with the slow death of the old-tree, Deleuze and Guattari introduce another figure: the rhizome. The rhizome incarnates the idea of deterritorialization. While the tree is grounded and territorialized in one originary location, the rhizome is constantly deterritorializing. It is multiple, heteregoneous, disruptive, unpredictable. It is chaotic and defined by its bare becoming. However, one must not take the rhizome as the conceptual opposite of the tree. The relation between territorialization and deterritorialization applies to the tree and the rhizome. Their realities are intertwined: 'trees may correspond

to the rhizome, or they may burgeon into a rhizome' (Deleuze, 1987, 17). In other words, the tree may be necessary for the rhizome to thrive and conversely: 'A new rhizome may form in the heart of a tree, the hollow of a root, the crook of a branch. Or else it is a microscopic element of the root-tree, a radicle, that gets rhizome production going' (Deleuze, 1987, 15). To be precise, rhizomatic life seems to consist in being *in-between* trunks and branches:

> The stems of the rhizome are always taking leave of the trees, the masses and flows are constantly escaping, inventing connections that jump from tree to tree and uproot them [...] Even, and especially, territories are perturbed by these deep movements. (Deleuze, 1987, 506)

In this last passage, one can hear the deterritorializing power of the rhizome. The rhizome does not only thrive in the cracks of the roots, the branches and the trunk, its undermining force threatens to uproot the tree.

Now we can see how the *Decline of the West* and *A Thousand Plateaus* intertwine to tell a common story. Spengler makes us understand the relation between territoriality and the historical development of culture. Deleuze and Guattari, in their part, give us a deep insight on the uprooting and death of the Spenglerian old tree. This leads to what we can call a metaphysics of the stump. The primary condition of humanity is chaotic, nomadic, pure becoming. It is a wasteland, hosting a nonsensical and disorganized profusion of wild grass, ferns, and many unidentifiable primitive plants. The soil is covered by what seems to be an ocean of unleashed vegetal becomings. Suddenly, deeply burying its roots in the soil, one plant grows vertically. A culture territorializes. The growing tree now overlooks the chaotic rug and deploys its wide branches overhead. In the shadow of leaves, a circle of clear ground surrounds the trunk of the majestic tree. The tree now has come to maturity—the culture becomes a civilisation. On the giant's body, the first signs of fatigue appear: some moss thrives on the roots, fragments of lichen cover a few branches, a woodpecker has nested in the trunk. Finally, the dying old tree dries up, crashes onto the floor, ultimately a bare stump. In and on the dead body of the giant, thousands of species now proliferate: mammals, insects, fungi, worms, etc. A multiplicity of beings survives and develops only because of the presence of the tree stump. Their survival depends on the presence and the destruction of the tree. In other words, it is only in the ruins of the decadent civilisation that new forms of chaotic life will thrive.

What can we learn from this image of the stump? First, one can understand how fertile Spengler's description of civilizational decay can be, when read in the light of Deleuze and Guattari's *Thousand Plateaus*. One can see that uprooting has to do with the liberation of multiple chaotic becomings. The end of history is not the apocalypse, it is simply the resurgence of chaos in the ruins of civilisational order. Second, when reading Spengler, one can have a new and original insight on *A Thousand Plateaus*. Deterritorialization takes an interesting meaning when related to the idea of decadence. A rooted historical identity is not simply the enemy of becoming and multiplicity; it is their very condition of existence. The rhizomes thrive on the tree trunk. Hence, deterritorialization is not primitive chaos, it is the necessary irruption of disorder inside order; it is the inevitable explosion of difference into the land of identity and sameness. Spengler helps us to understand that the Western civilisation is a dying tree. This could lead to pure fatalism and nostalgia. However, Deleuze and Guattari give us an incredible guide to understand the new forms of life that emerge from the uprooting of Western identity and culture. The end of history is not the end of the world, but the liberation of becomings in the ruins of our dying civilization. We can survive as rhizomatic scavengers. We are meant to become woodworms. Our new forms of life will consist in decomposing what was previously our own cultural identity. Deconstruction is not a revolutionary process: from the moment the seed germinated, it has always been the inescapable horizon of the Western tree.

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Fourth Chapter:
Beyond the Madeleine: Experience, Temporality, and the Queer Event in Proust

Quintus Immisch

I. Modern Times, Queer Temporality, and the Event

Modernity has always been a matter of synchronization and time management. Fascinated by what has 'just happened', 'modern' times are characterized by acceleration and the fact that humans are subject to a rapid and pulsed rhythm of time. While people, goods, and news circulate faster and faster in modern life, humans progressively find themselves in a new time regime, which is supposed to guide them to increase their productivity, be it at work or in their allegedly private pleasures. We know how the story goes: it's the story of trains and buses, of telegrams, photographs and movies, of machines and assembly lines. They condition, illustrate, produce and comment on the fast and homogenized life, especially in the emerging big cities. And not only that: How much the accelerated feeling of life affects also the imaginary, for example, is shown by the modern novel's need for events: its protagonists long for something to happen. This discourse of acceleration pulses life, and we can call it *chrononormativity*:[1] a hegemonic time regime that hardly allows for alternatives and imposes a rhythm on thoughts, bodies, machines. At the same time, the modern temporal order has constructed its 'other' by conceiving figurations of what resists this chrononormativity. These exteriorities of time have been filled with concrete marginal figures: As modernity continually races into the future, it invents the 'savages' and 'primitives' in order to locate them in a long-gone prehistory (Johannes Fabian calls this *allochronism*).[2] According to this narrative, far away in time and space, the 'savages' represent an earlier evolutionary stage, which is 'not yet' as developed as (such a colonial) modernity. Other resistant figures, sick of the modern time regime and not being part of it, are pathologized as *hysterics* and *neurasthenics*: They are modern, but cannot keep up, they stumble, caught in their nervous conditions. In Freud, for example, we can see that all these figures are conceived analogously, and even explicitly connected, when he publishes *Totem and Taboo* and still announces, in the subhead, some *Resemblances Between the Mental Lives of Savages and Neurotics*.[3]

But there is another figuration of modernity that resists the established time order: the queer figures who move beyond the hectic centers of acceleration, populating the modern time horizon with their 'peripheral desires'.[4] Modern sexuality is structured by several events that are supposed to guarantee its smooth functioning and its proper development towards heterosexuality: We can think, for example, of Freud's anal and oral phases, of the Oedipal triangulation, of the 'first time'. All these events organize biographies and conduct people into heterosexual couples, sealing those ultimately in marriage. Thus, these events structure the hetero-modern arrow of time and, biopolitically, induce humans to biological reproduce. We can see how this dynamic translates into concrete biographies, for example, in the genre of the *Bildungsroman*, which sends central (bourgeois male white heterosexual) subjects into the world, 'initiates' them, and lets them return home as young fathers. *Be fruitful and multiply*.

The story goes quite differently for the 'peripheral' queer: Moving beyond the channeled sexuality and "operating [...] off the designated biopolitical schedule of heterosexuality"[5], they live a life under the sign of what is called queer temporality.[6] For Jack Halberstam, for example, queer temporality is "the dark nightclub, the perverse turn away from the narrative coherence of adolescence – early adulthood – marriage – reproduction – child rearing – retirement – death, the embrace of late childhood in place of early adulthood or immaturity

1 Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds. Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories*, Durham: Duke University Press 2010, p. 3.

2 Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other. How Anthropology Makes its Object*, New York: Columbia University Press 1983.

3 Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo. Resemblances Between the Mental Lives of Savages and Neurotics*, in: *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. XIII, edited by James Strachey, Anna Freud, Alix Strachey and Alan Tyson, London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis 1955.

4 Michel Foucault coined the term "peripheral sexualities" to describe what is marked as perverse in the 19th century (e.g., masturbation, queer sex), cfr. *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, translated by Robert Hurley, New York: Pantheon Books 1978, p. 39. Cfr. Robert Deam Tobin, *Peripheral Desires. The German Discovery of Sex*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press 2015.

5 E. L. McCallum/Mikko Tuhkanen, "Introduction. Becoming Unbecoming. Untimely Mediations", in: *Queer Times, Queer Becomings*, edited by E. L. McCallum and Mikko Tuhkanen, Albany: State University of New York Press 2011, pp. 1–21, p. 5.

6 *Queer Temporalities*, special issue *GLQ. A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 13, 2–3, 2007, edited by Elizabeth Freeman.

in place of responsibility".[7] Speaking more generally, queer theory developed the concept of queer temporality to analyze "how time and its uses allowed for theorizations of normative and non-normative arrangements of life."[8] The main point of this theoretical approach is that queer people often don't follow the hegemonic timing of life, almost living in a different time. "Too slow as measured by heterocapitalist rhythms of life, not quite aligned with received patterns of living, or doomed to have no access to futures, queer subjects came to be burdened by time."[9] Instead, "[q]ueer temporality celebrates the queerness of nonprogressive, non-sequential time, exploring some of the radically subjective experiences of time and temporality."[10] Queer temporality is an ambiguous concept here: it can be something that is imposed on queer subjectivities, but it can also be something that the queer positively appropriate.

As a counter discourse to the modern chrononormativity, queer temporality describes the specific temporality that queer forms of desire and identity are endowed with, in order to remove them, similarly to other deviant forms, from the temporal order.[11] "Whether understood as throwbacks to an earlier stage of human development or as children who refuse to grow up, queers have been seen across the twentieth century as a backward race."[12] Furthermore, the question of reproduction plays no role for queer life in modernity, since the schema of 'productivity' does not apply: there is *No Future* for the queer.[13] But not only the future is denied to queers. They are also deprived of any collective history and the 'disposal' of the past. As the emergence of the homosexual as a 'species'[14] (and with it, that of queer discourse) is still very recent in modernity, a collective history of these 'new' subjects cannot have formed yet. Instead, their sexuality is considered not to be fully formed yet, and the queer present they live in is marked by untimeliness. They are "temporally backward, though paradoxically dislocated from any specific historical moment."[15] Their time seems strangely suspended, they live in bubbles with only slight permeability to the 'world'. When the levels of time are dissolved, the imaginary of time must also take on other forms, time has to be imagined differently. The flat arrow of time does not seem to be representative here. Queer temporality critiques:

> the notion of time as a flat plane on which events march forward in sequence. It suggests a potentially queer vision of how time wrinkles and folds as some minor feature of our own sexually impoverished present suddenly meets up with a richer past, or as the materials of a failed and forgotten project of the past find their uses now, in a future unimaginable in their time.[16]

This particular form of time is concerned with other directions, it is, as Rilke writes in a felicitous verse, "time standing vertically on the motion of mortal hearts".[17] Moving transversally to the direction of time, queer temporality sorts itself around the events of normative sexuality. The 'straight' and the 'queer' are also intertwined

7 Carolyn Dinshaw/Lee Edelman/Roderick A. Ferguson/Carla Freccero/Elizabeth Freeman/Judith Halberstam/Annamarie Jagose/Christopher S. Nealon/Tan Hoang Nguyen, "Theorizing Queer Temporalities. A Roundtable Discussion", in: *Queer Temporalities*, special issue *GLQ. A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 13/2–3, 2007, edited by Elizabeth Freeman, pp. 177–195, p. 182.

8 Kyle Frackman/Ervin Malakaj, "Introduction. Approaches to Queer Temporalities in German Studies", in: *Monatshefte* 114/3, 2022, pp. 353–362, p. 356.

9 Frackman/Malakaj, "Introduction. Approaches to Queer Temporalities in German Studies", p. 356.

10 Carla Freccero, "The Queer Time of Lesbian Literature", in: *The Lesbian Premodern*, edited by Noreen Giffney, Michelle M. Sauer and Diane Watt, New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2011, pp. 19–31, p. 22.

11 Cfr. Elizabeth Freeman, "Introduction", in: *Queer Temporalities*, special issue *GLQ. A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 13/2–3, 2007, edited by Elizabeth Freeman, pp. 159–176, pp. 161–162.

12 Heather Love, *Feeling Backward. Loss and the Politics of Queer History*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 2014, p. 6.

13 Lee Edelman, *No Future. Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, Durham: Duke University Press 2004.

14 This hypothesis occurs in a famous passage in Foucault's *History of Sexuality*: "We must not forget that the psychological, psychiatric, medical category of homosexuality was constituted from the moment it was characterized [...] less by a type of sexual relations than by a certain quality of sexual sensibility, a certain way of inverting the masculine and the feminine in oneself. Homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphrodism of the soul. The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species." (Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, p. 43) Nevertheless, the idea that premodern queerness is radically different from modern queerness has come to be criticized as teleological in the context of *Queer Unhistoricism*, cfr. Carla Freccero, *Queer/Early/Modern*, Durham: Duke University Press 2006; Carla Freccero, "Queer Times", in: *After sex? On Writing since Queer Theory*, edited by Janet Halley and Andrew Parker, Durham, NC: Duke University Press 2011, pp. 17–26; Sebastian Matzner, "Queer Unhistoricism: Scholars, Metalepsis, and Interventions of the Unruly Past", in: *Deep Classics: Rethinking Classical Reception*, edited by Shane Butler, London: Bloomsbury Academic 2016, pp. 179–201.

15 Freeman, "Introduction", p. 162.

16 Freeman, "Introduction", p. 163.

17 Rainer Maria Rilke, "To Music", in: *Ahead of All Parting. The Selected Poetry and Prose of Rainer Maria Rilke*, edited by Stephen Mitchell, New York: Modern Library 1995, p. 143.

in a spatial constellation whose multiple directions cross along opposite vectors, and peripheral paths break off. Hence, modern queer identity describes "a historically specific relation to power, rather than an identity per se".[18] As a literary manifestation of their negative relationship to power, for example, many of them do not age, but remain forever young, and "as they refuse 'becoming,' these youth become queer."[19]

Nothing happens in their lives: the queer dandies of modernity from Huysmann's Des Esseintes to Proust's alter ego seem to live a life without events, suspended in their untimeliness and pushed away from the paradigm of the modern desire for an eventful life. This need for events is also evident, for example, in Stendhal's *Chartreuse de Parme*, where the young protagonist really desires events: He goes to war in order to participate in the Battle of Waterloo, to participate in 'history'. Instead, he only sees smoke rising from afar and asks: "But is this an actual battle?"[20] In the end, he sleeps through parts of the battle. Therefore, even in early modernity, being concerned with the event becomes one of the techniques of the self in the modeling of time and in synchronizing the self with society, world, the others: Since the 19th century, the desire for the event had been present in literature, crystallizing here in an explicit demand for the event. Whoever wanted to become modern needed events, historical events or those related to work or sexuality. This, and the event character of modern sexuality, is at stake when queer temporality resists the regime of time. Queer figures have to find other events, to appropriate events that do not allow their participation. The hegemonic event does not happen for them. Marriage, childbirth: those say little to queer people around 1900. They meet secretly and at strange times, they struggle in the closet. Therefore, literature is not only the place, but above all the temporal order that allows such other events: Here, it is possible to overwrite symbolic inscriptions, ignore discursive protocols, fantasize weird times. In literature, people can arrange to meet despite chrononormativity. And in the very moment when they lose any sense of time, they create the setting for a queer event.

It is time to follow up such an event. Let's look at Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*, in which the remarkable timelessness and the triviality of what is (not) happening configure themselves to form an event that in turn shakes straight time and reacts to the demand for events. The aim will be to examine how Proust's novel relates to the ambiguous modern discourse of queer temporality: where chrononormativity throws the queer out of time and yet where resistance and something like 'proper temporality' can be detected.

II. Chrononormativity and Hegemonic Time in Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*

Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*, a novel in seven volumes published in Paris between 1913 and 1927, is counted, because of its modernization of narrative and subjectivity, among the greatest works of French literature. The novel is initially dealing with the narrator's inability to remember, and then, how he successfully does so: *In Search of Lost Time* tells the narrator's memories of his life in the Parisian high society between the 19th and 20th century. However, the novel doesn't mainly emphasize this plot: Frequently, nothing really happens. Rather, nothing happens at all, and the novel belongs to the kind of literature that will later be called the "world of boredom".[21] Instead, the focus is the narrator's reflections on memory, time, and meaning, as well as the precarious realization that these trajectories of consciousness and experience have become fragile.

Questioning modern time, the *Recherche* enters a critical relationship with the complex of chrononormativity, which tempers modern life and aligns it with the principles of an accelerated economy. This becomes particularly clear in one of the novel's most famous scenes in the first volume (*Swann's Way*), in which the intellectual inactivity of the narrator, who is not working anyway, undermines the principle of directed productivity.

Instead, coincidence becomes productive. We know Proust above all for a famous madeleine scene, in which the sensual event releases the *mémoire involontaire*, that is, the memory that was inaccessible through pure intellect. The narrator dips a madeleine in the tea and eats it, suddenly remembering that he had always

18 Siobhan B. Somerville, "Introduction", in: *Cambridge Companion to Queer Studies*, edited by Siobhan B. Somerville, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2020, pp. 1–14, p. 5.

19 McCallum/Tuhkanen, "Introduction. Becoming Unbecoming. Untimely Mediations", p. 6.

20 My translation. "Mais ceci est-il une véritable bataille ?", cfr. Dorothee Kimmich, "'Ist das eine Schlacht?' Heine, Immermann, Stendhal und Flaubert: Erzählen von Ereignissen", in: *Ereignis. Konzeptionen eines Begriffs in Geschichte, Kunst und Literatur*, edited by Thomas Rathmann, Köln: Böhlau 2003, pp. 45–62, p. 52.

21 Eugenio Montale, "Il mondo della noia", in: *Auto da fé. Cronache in due tempi*, edited by Giorgio Zampa, Milan: Mondadori 2016, pp. 69–72, p. 69.

eaten a madeleine just like this when he was a child. In this way, he gains access to his childhood memories which were previously 'blocked' by the remembered difficulty of going to bed. This so-called 'episode of the madeleine' also plays an important role for the question of the queer event in Proust's *Recherche*[22] and makes us understand in how far the novel is an "inquiry into the mechanisms of desire".[23]

Central to the novel, this event unfolding around a madeleine enables memory. Strange as it is, this event and its narrative context allow the *Recherche* to search for other temporalities of modernity, those marginalized by the modern modes of acceleration.

Right at the beginning of the novel, in the middle of the pale childhood memory, we see how heterological time and queer temporality intersect, as the narrator listens, in the seclusion of his room, to modernity rushing by: "I could hear the whistling of trains, which, now nearer and now farther off, punctuating the distance like the note of a bird in a forest, shewed me in perspective the deserted countryside through which a traveller would be hurrying towards the nearest station [...]."[24]

In this scene, two worlds with their specific time qualities touch, and the train marks a double distancing. On the one hand, the noise of the engine renders the very silence of the room audible, while, at the same time, it situates the precarious subjectivity of the *Recherche* beyond the paradigm of progress which materializes in the train: The narrator is cut off from the outside world. On the other hand, the same narrator declares the territory of modernity to be a vast and "deserted countryside" that cannot be of interest to him. The disparity between an external, unfamiliar, and accelerated modernity, on the one hand, and an intimate temporality of the narrator, who does not participate in the former, on the other hand, already shapes the first pages of the *Recherche*. In this context, time and space overlap: This other time happens also in a different space, in the countryside, far from the hasty city. In contrast to the modern time rushing along in the distance, the narrator remains idle in his room, mostly in bed, hardly moving, where we can watch him think.

> Noiselessly I opened the window and sat down on the foot of my bed; hardly daring to move in case they should hear me from below. Things outside seemed also fixed in mute expectation [...]. What had to move—a leaf of the chestnut-tree, for instance—moved. But its minute shuddering, complete, finished to the least detail and with the utmost delicacy of gesture, made no discord with the rest of the scene, and yet was not merged in it, remaining clearly outlined.[25]

Unlike synchronized modernity, the narrator's spatial constellation is occupied by solitary entities whose movements, however slight, are not transmitted among each other. The narrator's temporality remains erratic and a disparate configuration; even the nuances do not carry over but remain asynchronous.

Much like the sleepy protagonist in Stendhal's *Chartreuse* who misses out on the battle of Waterloo, the narrator, remote in his solitary atemporality, misses out on the distant events of modernity that are always happening 'elsewhere', and outside his bubble. Indeed, notions of time completely dissolve as he alternates between waking and sleeping, decomposing the principle of linear progress, moving for- and backwards between what has been and what is to come. Instead, the narrator establishes a form of timelessness in which time seems

22 We do not engage with Proust scholarship here but conceptualize the queer event. For queer studies on Proust, cfr. e.g. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, Berkeley: University of California Press 1990, pp. 213–251; Elizabeth Richardson Viti, "Marcel and the Medusa: The Narrator's Obfuscated Homosexuality in *À la recherche du temps perdu*", in: *Dalhousie French Studies* 26, 1994, pp. 61–68; Edward Hughes, "The Mapping of Homosexuality in Proust's 'Recherche'", in: *Paragraph* 18/2, 1995, Vol. 18, pp. 148–162; Stacey Meeker, "Closeted Metaphors, or Reading Identity in *A la recherche du temps perdu*", in: *Paroles gelées* 14/1, 1996, pp. 13–29; Urs Urban, "In der Kammer. Die Verortung der Homosexualität bei Proust", in: *Literarische Gendertheorie. Eros und Gesellschaft bei Proust und Colette*, edited by Ursula Link-Heer, Ursula Hennigfeld and Fernand Hörner, Bielefeld: transcript 2006, pp. 167–176; Gregor Schuhen, *Erotische Maskeraden. Sexualität und Geschlecht bei Proust*, Heidelberg: Winter 2007; Adam Watt, *The Cambridge Introduction to Marcel Proust*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2011, pp. 113; Elisabeth Ladenson, "Sexuality", in: *Marcel Proust in Context*, edited by Adam Watt, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2013, pp. 115–122; Eveline Kilian, "Alternative Temporalities: Queer Time in Marcel Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu* and Dorothy Richardson's *Pilgrimage*", in: *Modernist Cultures* 10/3, 2015, pp. 336–356; Adeline Soldin, "Seeing Feeling. Queer Voyeurism in *A la recherche du temps perdu*", in: *French Studies* 69/3, 2015, pp. 318–332; Luc Legrand, *L'Homosexualité dans la vie et l'œuvre de Marcel Proust: une 'sale tante' au grand cœur*, Brussels: Peter Lang 2019; Thomas Hughes, "The Balcony: Queer Temporality in The Stones of Venice and Proust", in: *Ruskin's Ecologies. Figures of Relation from Modern Painters to The Storm-Cloud*, edited by Kelly Freeman and Thomas Hughes, London: Courtauld Books Online 2021, https://courtauld.ac.uk/research/research-resources/publications/courtauld-books-online/ruskins-ecologies-figures-of-relation-from-modern-painters-to-the-storm-cloud/2-the-balcony-queer-time-in-the-stones-of-venice-and-proust-thomas-hughes/.

23 Sara Danius, "Black Socks, Green Threads: On Proust and the Hermeneutics of Inversion", in: *The Cambridge History of Gay and Lesbian Literature*, edited by E. L. McCallum and Mikko Tuhkanen, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2014, pp. 344–362, p. 344.

24 Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*, translated by C. K. Scott Moncrieff, vol. 1, London: Chatto & Windus 1957, p. 1–2.

25 Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*, vol 1, p. 41–42.

to compress itself into space. The bed becomes the place of non-occurrence and of time not passing in this little one-room world: "I'm going to sleep,"[26] he reports, a paradoxical testimony of these dissolving operations which can never be said because the subject is already necessarily absent at the moment of its semantic truth.[27]

Now, this untimeliness is not simply 'there', but closely connected to the subject's forms of desire. In fact, there seems to be something strange about his libidinous dispositions and activities which arise 'sometimes' and occur in sleep as strange figurations of femininity: a "woman" or "maiden of my dream," that is "[f]ormed by the appetite", populating now the erotic experience.[28] But this dream creature doesn't represent his actual desire. While our narrator sleeps a timeless sleep (or does not), up there in his suspended and lonesome room, the object of his desire is walking downstairs in the house. It is his mother to whom his desire is attached and whom he perpetually wants to kiss. The desire to kiss her assaults him every evening when he has to say goodbye to her for the night. After all, the great problem of the *Recherche* before the madeleine-event sets in, is the child going to bed, and the farewell to the mother it entails. No less significant is the narrator's regret that "Mamma, for fear of annoying my father, would not allow me to give her in public the series of kisses that she would have had in my room."[29] Our narrator is thus in the midst of the Oedipal triangulation which makes him desire the mother and fear the father. No wonder, then, that he speaks ambiguously of the "drama of my undressing"[30], with "drama" evoking theater and the Oedipus tragedy in particular. The novel suggests that the female object of desire is only possible within an incestuous distortion of hegemonic heterosexuality, another 19th century form of 'peripheral desire'. Of course, this failing sexuality is not only a problem of time, but again located in the narrator's room of deviant desire.

As we see, at this point the narrator's sexuality has 'not yet' overcome the Oedipus complex and has not yet been anchored in the rushing of heteronormative modernity. The strange timelessness of his room, a stage of kisses, stands in the regime of the modern time order. One year before the publication of the *Recherche*, in 1913, Freud published the above-mentioned essay *Totem and Taboo*, in which he deals with the incestuous *Objektbesetzungen* of the 'neurotics' and the 'savages', interpreting them both as an early stage of development. Proust's narrator, who remains excluded from the modern times of the (hegemonic) 'others' due to the persistence of the Oedipus complex within him, experiences a temporality imposed on him by others. Very concretely, as a child he is not allowed to sit at the table with his parents for as long as he would like to but is sent off to the sexual enclave of his room, dislocating him from the stream of straight action. Moreover, he is afraid of "knowing that the creature one adores is in some place of enjoyment where oneself is not and cannot follow"[31]. Thus, he explicates the asynchrony of the other's and his own temporality. In addition, his mother does not answer his letters sent downstairs[32], leaving him in the anxious idle of his queer temporality, which occurs in "[t]hose inaccessible and torturing hours into which she had gone to taste of unknown pleasures"[33]. Finally, he has no story because the oedipal triangulation and the uneventfulness kill all memories, making his own past inaccessible to him, thus, preventing narrative: "To me it was in reality all dead."[34]

It is not surprising, then, that the narrator suffers from the queer temporality he is forced into. The "hateful staircase", separating him from his mother, provokes in him the "sorrow that I felt each evening"[35]. The heart which "began to beat more and more painfully"[36] conducts the precarious beat of queer temporality. And as his mother holds a dinner party downstairs, he is captured by "des tourbillons ennemis, pervers et délicieux"[37] ("swarms of enemies, perverse and seductive"[38]), in which different temporalities are twisted and which once again set modern acceleration apart from the narrator's own temporal subjectivity.

26 Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*, vol 1, p.
27 Cfr. Hans Blumbenberg, *Höhlenausgänge*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1989, p.18.
28 Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*, vol 1, p. 3.
29 Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*, vol 1, p. 34.
30 Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*, vol 1, p. 57.
31 Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*, vol 1, p. 38.
32 Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*, vol 1, p. 40.
33 Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*, vol 1, p. 39.
34 Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*, vol 1, p. 57.
35 Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*, vol 1, p. 35.
36 Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*, vol 1, p. 41.
37 Marcel Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu*, vol. 1, Paris: Gallimard 1946, p. 47.
38 Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past* Past, vol 1, p. 39.

In its metaphors and topics, the *Recherche* also identifies the narrator's sexuality as a "nervous condition"[39] and thus participates in the modern discourse that marks deviant forms of time and desire as pathological. He is simply driven by "agony",[40] and when one evening things get particularly bad, he stays awake until his mother comes upstairs after the guests have left and spends the night with him. "'But Madame, what is little Master crying for?' [...] 'Why, Françoise, he doesn't know himself: it is his nerves.'"[41] His diagnosed nervosity—his father calls it "sentimentality"[42]—clearly contradicts the functioning of (re)productive bodies. It is therefore significant that the father (as incarnation of reproduction) claims to be "not nervous like you".[43]

This night remains exceptional:

> I knew that such a night could not be repeated; that the strongest desire I had in the world, namely, to keep my mother in my room through the sad hours of darkness, ran too much counter to general requirements and to the wishes of others for such a concession as had been granted me this evening to be anything but a rare and casual exception.[44]

Here, desire is conceptualized as a quantity of time ('sad hours') which cannot be connected to modern temporality. It must remain precarious, and sanctioned, in the face of normative access ('requirements') and the idea of biological reproducibility we can see in this *factice* ('unnatural', 'artificial') night.

Thus, it seems that the narrator is entirely subject to the time regime of modernity, which allows him neither subjectivity nor 'proper time'. Chrononormativity allows its exteriorities only non-action, solitary spaces without connection to the world, retardation. In short, chrononormativity denies queer people any form of subjectivity and rather produces non-identities. By locating the narrator-subject in a minoritarian epistemology of time, the *Recherche* starts from a negative relation to power in which no events seem possible. However, things change when, after that awful night, no attempt is made to synchronize queer temporality; the narrator's queer time is simply tolerated. He is awarded a "puberty of sorrow [...]"[45]. Incidental as this seems, it is the direct precondition for the event of the *Recherche*, that is, for the 'killing' of the madeleine; this episode of the madeleine is the threshold where chrononormativity is contrasted with an event that does allow for subjectivity.

III. Against Modern Time: The Queer Event in Proust

So, after nothing has happened so far—nothing in the room, nothing in sexuality, nothing in temporality—a strange event takes place. This not only disrupts the temporal order of the novel, but also makes the *Recherche* itself an event in literary history. A madeleine in the tea: Proust's provocation here is narrating absolute triviality, which becomes the novel's center of rotation. By itself, hardly anything could be less eventful. But the narrator carefully prepares the event by making certain rearrangements (e.g., the recognition of pain) and creating connections that allow the event to branch out into another order. In fact, the event also connects the narrator's present with his Oedipal childhood, in that the event takes place *now* and yet—this is the memory—belongs to the past: The event releases the memory of its regularity in childhood.

Indeed, at the moment of the event, the narrator once again addresses the "drama of my going to bed", invoking the Oedipal temporality in which otherwise "nothing [...] had any existence for me"[46] and where being out of time leads literally to non-existence. Also, he dips the madeleine because he is "weary after a dull day

39 Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*, vol 1, p. 49.
40 Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*, vol 1, p. 38.
41 Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*, vol 1, p. 49.
42 Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*, vol 1, p. 47.
43 Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*, vol 1, p. 47.
44 Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*, vol 1, p. 55–56. "Je savais qu'une telle nuit ne pourrait se renouveler ; que le plus grand désir que j'eusse au monde, garder ma mère dans ma chambre pendant ces tristes heures nocturnes, était trop en opposition avec les nécessités de la vie et le vœu de tous, pour que l'accomplissement qu'on lui avait accordé ce soir pût être autre chose que factice et exceptionnel." (Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu*, vol. 1, p. 63)
45 Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*, vol 1, p. 49.
46 Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*, vol 1, p. 58.

with the prospect of a depressing morrow",[47] he therefore suffers from the monotonous temporality of a linear and alien order. Something, then, seems to be happening to the nervous and sickly condition of the narrator, a break in time, "a thing I did not ordinarily"[48] do. And indeed, the madeleine is not simply a pastry, but the whole scene has an eventful grammar and a sexual semantics. The madeleine, having a female name anyway, looks "moulés dans la valve rainurée d'une coquille de Saint-Jacques"[49] ("as though they had been moulded in the fluted scallop of a pilgrim's shell"[50]). Not only the 'shell', but also the *valve*, which phonetically evokes the vulva, constitute the sexual symbolism of the madeleine as a female genital, and therefore its functionalization in the discourse of sexuality as sketched out by the *Recherche*. This genital-madeleine, dipped in lime blossom tea, is quite literally put to sleep, drowned, dissolved. The scene is, strictly speaking, brutal. We observe here a sacrifice of the feminine that is meant to dissolve the false *Objektbesetzung* and end the oedipal triangulation in order to release queer desire. In fact, the dynamics of the scene correspond to each other: The vulva, this "little scallop-shell of pastry, so richly sensual under its severe, religious folds"[51]—and with it the (albeit peripheral) normative desire—is put to sleep. The subject wakes up, remembers, can finally narrate: In succession to the anatomical place and the temporal position of the biological productivity, the novelistic memory forms another type of producing. This production had already prepared itself in the earlier state of extraneous constraint. The letters the narrator sends within his mother's house to persuade her to come upstairs, to satisfy his desire, are his first 'writing attempts' to establish a connection with the mother: "How much we love him [...] the good-natured intermediary who by a single word has made supportable, human, almost propitious the inconceivable, infernal scene of gaiety."[52]

Without the episode of the madeleine, the *Recherche* would end after a few pages, we would have nothing to discuss now. But precisely because of this episode-event the failed attempts at writing are now replaced by the narrative productivity that makes the novel of the *Recherche* possible in the first place. The replacement of the letter by the novel itself instantiates the displacement of the vulva. And it is precisely this detachment from the paradigm of biological productivity that allows the vivification of what was 'dead' in the narrator. For him, heteronormative sex dies, and other forms of productivity come alive.

In fact, by killing the vulva, he apparently gains enough mental capacity to find 'something' within himself that had previously been hidden and repressed. This finding opens a first form of temporality, namely the narrator's own past and stories, with all the virtual, possible, unreal and possibly real events preserved in it. Hence, the queer event provides the narrator with a biography, with a past of his own as the simplest form of an individual time (which is denied to queer people in modernity).

This access to time overcomes the motionlessness and rigidity of the hegemonic temporal order and creates a 'room for one's own': "I feel something start within me."[53] This movement in time structures the entire event. Following the sacrifice of the madeleine/vulva, the narrator searches within himself for the gradually rising memories and perceives

> something that leaves its resting-place and attempts to rise, something that has been embedded like an anchor at a great depth; I do not know yet what it is, but I can feel it mounting slowly; I can measure the resistance, I can hear the echo of great spaces traversed.[54]

In this metamorphotic scene, an order dissolves. We see different vectors and time pushes not in one but in all directions—in the horizontality of 'spaces' as well as in the verticality of the submarine ascent. This 'something' first exists in an unknown form and then becomes a memory that can be localized in time. As a multiform or

47 Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*, vol 1, p. 58.
48 Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*, vol 1, p. 58.
49 Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu*, vol. 1, p. 65.
50 Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*, vol 1, p. 58.
51 Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*, vol 1, p. 61.
52 Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*, vol 1, p. 39.
53 Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*, vol 1, p. 60.
54 Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*, vol 1, p. 60. "quelque chose qui se déplace, voudrait s'élever, quelque chose qu'on aurait désancré, à une grande profondeur ; je ne sais ce que c'est, mais cela monte lentement ; j'éprouve la résistance et j'entends la rumeur des distances traversées" (Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu*, vol. 1, p. 67)

even unshaped Freudian *id* it could 'do' or be anything, but then it metamorphotically turns into the figurative. Only as it becomes time, it finally becomes legible for the narrator. The anchor, then, lifts as well, and the scene detaches from the hegemonic order of time. And above all, this event is not an adaptation to the modern regime of time; it is far too transversal for that, far too close to failure ('trembling'), too ignorant of the linear needs of modernity, and instead materializes as affective 'resistance'. This is not just a neurasthenic trembling here, but we also see a hint of pleasure and of the orgasm that will be possible after the queer event. Things become ambiguous, after all. There are 'spaces' now, and they have a specific quality to them. They exist beyond the rush of a synchronized modernity, and they undermine the silence that chrononormativity imposes on queer people: a "mounting".

The tableau with which the event ends is therefore revealing. The memories, as crystallizations of the new temporality, rise in the narrator:

> And just as the Japanese amuse themselves by filling a porcelain bowl with water and steeping in it little crumbs of paper which until then are without character or form, but, the moment they become wet, stretch themselves and bend, take on colour and distinctive shape, become flowers or houses or people, permanent and recognisable [...][55].

The dissolution, indeed, the liquid sacrifice of the madeleine, here transforms into the emergence of another and new dynamic that takes over the operation of dissolution, while at the same time limiting its rush ahead. And just as forms become fluid here, so too does the novel deconstruct the order of time, for the event takes place in the past *and* in the present, linking Oedipal youth with the deviant present. The narrator not only recalls, he also repeats. He is still the child because he does it again; he is no longer the child because the event only now opens up new 'spaces' for him. By blurring the temporal planes, time becomes imaginable in a different way, time that folds, for example, time that 'wrinkles' (see above).

Queer temporality is a floating mobility in which momentary forms, ephemeral constellations, pluridirectional movements and events can do something, being distinct, yet eluding fixation. The event has released an 'other' that explores different forms of legibility in the ongoing transformations of the scene. But that is exactly what they are: forms of legibility. And as such they penetrate precisely to the core problem of queer discourse: What is constantly elusive, must be shown in at least momentarily stable forms, be it the killing of the madeleine, be it the harmless game with its manifold shapes. Here, it is concretions of a queer temporality that must be imaginable so that it can dissociate itself from chrononormativity. So, how to conceive the queer event in Proust?

IV. Towards a Theory of Settings: Queering the Event in Proust

In the fourth volume of the novel, the narrator's relationship to queerness becomes particularly clear when he observes two men at a clandestine meeting in a courtyard and launches into an extended reflection on 'homosexuality'. Even though he explicitly distances himself from it, it is clear how much the narrator feels connected to these two men and to the species of 'homosexuals'. He cannot avert his eyes, becoming a voyeur of the scene, and also emphasizes that 'homosexuals' (because of their secrecy) have special abilities to recognize each other—just as he recognizes them and thus belongs to them. All this, the long reflection, the voyeuristic scene, and the discourse of belonging, are possible in this fourth volume, long after the event. So, it seems to have made a difference. Time to summarize the tableau:

We see quite different temporalities in Proust. On the one hand, chrononormativity grasps modern subjects, feeds them to hegemonic discourse, and demands productivity; it also organizes modern subjectivity through a series of salient events both in the historical process and in individual biographies as markers of a

55 Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*, vol 1, p. 62. "Et comme dans ce jeu où les Japonais s'amusent à tremper dans un bol de porcelaine rempli d'eau de petits morceaux de papier jusque-là indistincts qui, à peine y sont-ils plongés s'étirent, se contournent, se colorent, se différencient, deviennent des fleurs, des maisons, des personnages consistants et reconnaissables, de même maintenant [...] tout cela qui prend forme et solidité, est sorti, ville et jardins, de ma tasse de thé." (Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu*, vol. 1, p. 71)

transition. This is the logic of the *Bildungsroman*, which shapes (male) subjects according to hegemonic discourse and thus makes them available for social functions: They become adults, they become 'mature', they become fathers. They *become*. But it is also the schema of a correct development into heterosexuality that works behind the scenes in Proust's *Recherche*.

On the other hand, this chrononormativity generates a form of precarious queer temporality by imposing certain rhythms of time and life on queer subjects, denying them others, suppressing their subjectivity, making impossible the 'other' moments of their lives that could differ from straight time. This concerns, for example, the relegation of queer subjects to an earlier stage of development because their sexuality has not yet arrived in the 'now' (so as individuals they are preoedipal, as species they are 'primitives'). Furthermore, chrononormativity concerns those forms of prohibition that turn queer gatherings into clandestine meetings, and that make deviant constellations impossible because they would always need 'other' places and times. In Proust's case, let's just remember the solitude and uneventfulness of the room, the discourse of productivity, the clandestine meeting in the courtyard. This minoritarian temporality, however, can generate 'productive' moments and then, precisely as queer temporality, makes subjectivities possible and endows events with a different quality.

How does the central event of the *Recherche* operate? Does the madeleine episode fit into a minoritarian epistemology of queer time that suffers from practical forms of suppression and produces the need for events? Or is the event effective and disruptive, that is, capable of interrupting the dominant discourse of modernity (be it as a discursive temporality, be it as the narrative rhythm of the story), or at least rearranging its frequencies?

In Proust's *Recherche*, we first see in the event an optimistic interruption, an event of proper, private temporality: the disconnection from the rush of modern chrononormativity happens here very explicitly, insofar as the entire plot of the novel is owed to the supposedly meaningless madeleine, making the narrator a resistant subject with his own rhythms. On the other hand, the discourse of reproduction remains intact: It is true that the demand for productivity is initially rejected, as a demarcation is made from biologically reproductive sexuality. And beyond that, the novel resists the modern economy of productive time anyway, insofar as it is terribly long, it takes an awfully long time to read it, and it is incredibly boring at times. But despite its resistances, the *Recherche*, after all, *does* constitute a form of productivity: The *Recherche* is about writing, where writing replaces biological productivity. And in terms of literary productivity, the *Recherche*, as one of the most extensive modern novels, fulfills this paradigm to the fullest.

Overall, then, there is an ambivalence between the discourse of temporality that imposes productivity and the subversive potential that plays off the powerful vastness of narrative against the relative narrowness of a strictly timed discourse. This ambivalence also affects the event of the *Recherche*: The madeleine in the tea produces an event that, to be sure, frays, moves back and forth, diverges, generates transversal mobility, being in this respect a defiant event which resists modernity. Nevertheless, it corresponds to the typical demand for events in modernity: modern events tend to synchronize individual 'life' and general 'history' in order to create a synchronous and smoothly functioning subject. Let us think again of sexuality, where, for example, individual development proceeds in phases (e.g., anal and oral) and can always be mapped onto the general development of humankind, thus, allowing individual sexuality to merge into the process of 'culturalization'. The *Recherche* unfolds around an event, arises from it. So, what could be more in line with the modern demand for events than a novel devoted entirely to the event? Therefore, besides the ambivalence between discourse and subversive temporality, on the one hand, we are confronted, on the other hand, with the ambivalence of the event which could be either conform to hegemonic modernity or 'individual'.[56]

Are there queer events? Yes and no. There aren't any, inasmuch as any attribution of this kind would contradict the two concepts at stake here. Generally speaking, we have no valid theory of the event, we can provide no definitions of the event, and hardly say what *the* event is; the event is no longer just an event.

As far as the question of the queer is concerned, we cannot know what we are talking about here either, because attempts at definition are also obsolete. Queer studies are nowadays faced with the aporia that they are losing their 'object' by no longer wanting to define queer subjects and identities.[57] The question of the queer

56 On the notion of individual and collective events cfr. Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History", in: *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, edited by D. F. Bouchard, Ithaca: Cornell University Press 1977, pp. 139–164.

57 E. L. McCallum/Tyler Bradway, "Introduction. Thinking Sideways, or an Untoward Genealogy of Queer Reading", in: *After Queer Studies. Literature, Theory and Sexuality in the 21st Century*, edited by E. L. McCallum and Tyler Bradway, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2019, pp. 1–17. See also *After sex? On Writing since Queer Theory*, edited by Janet Halley and Andrew Parker, Durham, NC: Duke University Press 2011.

event must therefore be answered in the negative on both counts.

But events can certainly play out in a queer way, can be queerly transformed. In Proust, too, the event initially has no semantics at all, but acquires them only through its narrative context and embedding. If we take this seriously, we could say that the queer event is more of a *setting*: a point in time, a space, a set of practices, subjects, things, both visible and invisible. They are nothing, they say nothing; dunking the madeleine is not an event, it is pure regularity (the narrator even remembers having done it that way before). The event happens and becomes queer only when we know the narrator's prehistory and look at the aftermath, at the semantic attributions and the assonances (valve/vulve), at the situational transformations: the dissolution of the madeleine and the Japanese game, the oedipal triangulation and the orgasm, the letters and the novel, the tea and the tears, and so on.

And perhaps we can see this very well in Proust: Despite all his conformity to discourse (or not), he shows us a somehow 'decentered' event that leaves the prototypical core of eventfulness. What matters is not so much what happens in the center of the situation, but what is arranged around it, what moves transversally, what pushes backwards and forwards. The queer event is therefore not so much the explicit coming-out, not the clandestine meeting, not the first kiss or sex. Rather, the queer event-setting is possible where the interplay of chrononormativity and queer temporality allows for symbolic and social contexts of meaning that are simply possible but not obligatory. This event is an option, not a constraint. The queer event does not presuppose a specific identity, nor does it have to form one. It rather generates an infrastructure for life that can be used or not. This becomes particularly clear in the *Recherche*, where the event initially appears as an unspectacular regularity in the past, when the narrator, as a child, repeatedly dips madeleines into tea and eats them. At the same time, however, he does this very thing again later, reaching memory and releasing queer energy. Is the event, then, only visible and legible from a temporal distance? The event is not merely a memory event; it also takes place performatively in the presence of the narrator. It could always have been effective, but it only becomes so *now*: once again, an infrastructure that is simply used at some point.

Queering the event and looking for its settings can be a way for queer studies to escape an essential concept and search for what has not yet been told. In fact, by going in search of these event-settings, we can discover queer history and queer narratives told beyond any question of queer identity. We might then see not only the big narratives of identity, but also the small and almost undetectable queer energies that settle on micro-levels, crystallize in momentary constellations, and promise a different structure of experience.

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Fifth Chapter: Penelope Unravelling

Mrunmayee Sathye

This is not an academic essay. You have been warned – do not expect to find too many insights here, you will be disappointed. It's just a bunch of words strung together in the hopes of making sense. And nonsense.

Let's see.

I had gladly, and with much inspiration, decided to write something like an "autotheoretical" think-piece about the experience of reading 'emancipatory theory' – theorisations of identity and power from the perspectives of conventionally marginalised sections of society. 'Which society?' is a good starting point. So I won't start there.

It doesn't matter. Trust me.

What matters is that that text is not what you are reading here. Because, as it turns out, reading the works of other people writing about their selves, and writing about them is infinitely less shit-your-pants difficult than forcing yourself into the role of the author. Writing about yourself is often depressing, and the writing, more often than not, turns out quite – well, – pretentious. Writing about yourself with the knowledge that that writing will be seen and read, or maybe not, is horrifying. Who would've thought? The whole game of hiding and showing and seeing and being seen is something of a balancing act. It's like walking on a tightrope except it isn't at all tight and there isn't really a rope. It's exhausting. And ridiculous.

How do people do it? And more importantly, Why?

> Academia is very logical; it tries to logically set boundaries to that which is illogical, irrational. Go with me for a second. That which is emotional, artistic, deeply personal and all that. Where else would it be possible to chart out the rules of poetry in excel sheets and forget to read the poems? Academia desperately tries to find objectivity in that which can only ever be subjective, and then it writes about it as if it were something new. Because it has to be new if you want to find a job or if you want your name to survive the death of your body. Because here, your words can only ever have value if they haven't been read before. The author is dead, the reader has already reached a ripe old age, we are all cyborgs, and we're waiting on the next new thing. Which might already have arrived yesterday. We'll need to check the roster.

I do love academia though. Not so much the institution, which is tiresome for all its velvet rope, but the actual work, which is fun for nerds like me. Because here, feminist theory can both be feminist and theory. Sometimes. Because to a certain extent, it isn't that bad to look for the objectivity in subjective truths, or a strong objectivity amidst a sea of weak objectivities. I learnt that terminology in a book by Sandra Harding and am unabashedly using it without a valid citation because this isn't an academic text. The register is allowed to be different. At least that's what I'm telling myself.

Anyway. Even in academia, identity is sexy today in ways it never has been before. Look one way, and everyone is clinging to rescuing institutions and traditions and rules and structures; look the other way, and everyone only ever talks about themselves and their feelings. Between deconstructing the institution and reconstructing the human, a war seems to have emerged between past and future. As though the past and the future always exclusively belonged to sparring groups of opinionated individuals in the first place. As though it were necessary to pick a side: political or personal, before entering the stadium refurnished as a battlefield. It's either only the political with no room for the personal, or the personal instead of the political. Left, right, and centre.

Everything is about identity today. Maybe it always has been, but there is something fascinating about the way we all can be this busy trying to define everything and pack it up into neatly organised boxes for all to see. Analyse every experience and label it; if there should be a stray memory lurking behind the boxes that doesn't fit into them, the least you can do is to donate it. The boxes are critical. Minimalism not only in your cupboards but also in your discourses. Minimalist selves, maximalist lives. Making life easier one box at a time, one category at a time.
Yes.

Maybe.

So, this is not the text I set out to write and then abandoned and then picked up again. Because even in my denial, I have no integrity. I found it impossible to write "autotheory" myself while I'm writing a dissertation on autobiographical writings by other highly inspiring people. It didn't measure up. It couldn't. And for a couple of other reasons which you will find smattered through these next few pages. If you get them you get them, don't bother looking for them now, because they aren't all that life-changing.

I suppose that's how words work, sometimes they change your life and sometimes they are just useful for buying potatoes or finding the toilet. I prefer the first kind. Word-life balance.

The question, O me! so sad, recurring—What good amid these, O me, O life?

I sit in the room I grew up in and sigh. Visiting the parents is never quite as simple as just visiting the parents. There are so many other factors involved that I have lost count of them. I look at my bookshelves and stare at the books in them. Hundreds of books stare back at me, almost as if to ask me if I'm still theirs, if I still remember.

I started reading quite early in life. I was reading children's adaptations of English classics at the age of four and obsessively fawning over the adventures of the famous five by the time I was six. It had been decided – I was a reader. Children in real life were mean and loud and scary. The children in my books were interesting and brave and kind. I knew them. They were my friends, even if they didn't know it. I felt more of a connection to Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm or to Jo March than I ever would to any non-fictional child my age. Even today, the only kind of children I feel like getting to know are the kind that are made up of words.

The world around me was overwhelming, it was unpleasant and frightening at times, it was full of eyes looking at me when all I wanted was to not be seen. In my books, I found a safe space where I could be the one looking, slipping in and out of narratives that were not mine but also very much mine all at once. There were entire worlds there, in a dance of closeness and distance, and I, a happy resident of those imagined borderlands. Shedding my shameful body, leaving behind my anxious self, escaping from the tense debates amongst the people around me, I entered those worlds without having to construct an I at all. In fleeing reality for a taste of that sweet being without being, I could participate in all sorts of experiences without having to position myself, in a corner or otherwise.

If my childhood was rich with the fictions of others, my teenage came to be filled with books "one should have read". Whether or not I had lost the sheer joy of reading then, I don't know, but it was still the crutch helping me navigate the strange oceans of this exhausting world. In declaring myself not-woman – which was easier than trying to have a gender while also being 'fat and ugly'– I allowed myself, or maybe forced myself, to leave my body behind as I desperately sought my place in the think-thoughtful world of words and ideas. My body was nothing but a burden; it was the one visible, physical thing I could not seem to get rid of while I wanted

nothing else in the world than to be invisible. The transparent girl-child whom which what the sunlight passes right through. Oh what I wouldn't have given to be a ghost. To be light as air and quick as sound, passing through streets full of people unnoticed, undone, un-laughed-at. Shame is exhausting. It is also quite the pain to realise years later that it is also ridiculous.
Did I want to be a man? Definitely. The world of words was a white man's world, I think I already understood that as a brown girl-child. I spent my days playing with a strange sense of belonging despite the knowledge of clearly not-belonging, and it was my game. It wasn't the kind of understanding that is deliberate; I only felt it sleeping, buried somewhere in my bones. Did I really want to be a man? I don't think I was thinking about gender then at all, to be honest. I was mostly just trying to find the right way, or any way at all, to exist. To perceive my body as mine. It wasn't easy, and I couldn't. It still isn't.

This is not particular to me.
I am not special in feeling this way. I am also not alone in this.
There is an objectivity in subjective truth.

As a young person in India obsessed with history, I fostered a desperately romanticised view of the independence story early on. But the books that had opened all those worlds to me sometimes turned dark when Jane Austen's sporadic mentions of well-earning colonels in 'the Indias' became hard to ignore, or the Sherlock Holmes I so admired casually spat out something racist or sexist. Often both, in tandem. Of course, I remember many such bitter passages, but I shall have to refuse to give you examples. It isn't the examples that count; it is the feeling.

When you grow up in a country that used to be a colony, even the air you breathe is postcolonial. The stories we are told as children, the contents of our history books, the multitude of languages between which we continually switch, the silently internalised consciousness of a colonial hierarchy of the world, and the undercurrent of shame at typically 'native' behaviours. Funnily enough, where I grew up, in my mother-tongue, the English word 'colony' is used to describe the residential block where one lives, while the concept of colonialism itself has an array of other translations and connotations. I have also heard 'colony' to mean a Dalit ghetto in rural parts.

Most people around me grew up multilingual. And while this is, in retrospect, a valuable trait, that multilingualism often carried within itself a hierarchy of languages, a bitter awareness that code-switching was a hallowed skill and "good English" a sign of culture and education. The past half-century has seen many theoretical texts about that keenly postcolonial sense of language confusion and not-belonging. But reading and writing about third spaces and double and triple binds doesn't quite take away the sharp bite of the realisation that I am significantly less eloquent in what I call my mother-tongue than I am in English.

> *All round me are words, and words and words,*
> *They grow on me like leaves, they never*
> *Seem to stop their slow growing*
> *From within...[...]*

And still, I don't know what so many things are called in any other language I speak: the names of so many birds or trees or foods. Because I only ever learnt them from my mother.

> *[...] Words are a nuisance, but.*
> *They grow on me like leaves on a tree,*
> *They never seem to stop their coming,*
> *From a silence, somewhere deep within ...*
> Kamala Das, "Words"

I don't remember exactly when I started reading feminist theory for the first time. I suppose there never really is a single beginning to anything meaningful; several small beginnings merge into each other and make one forget that there ever was a before. But I remember feeling the way I used to feel while reading all those books as a child. Less alone. Like finding friends I never knew I already had. It made me feel like a part of something greater, something worth fighting for. And against. Feminist theory dared me to move from not-woman to woman, it opened up mental spaces in which it was possible and necessary for someone who didn't fit the long list of conventions of femininity to exist as equally woman. White feminist writers became my mentors and heroes – if they were women hacking away at the binds of the patriarchy, I wanted to follow in their footsteps and hack along. They weren't foreign white women to me, they were feminists.

And then I found Audre Lorde. And Teresa de Lauretis and Chandra Mohanty and so many others. I found new heroes. And my feminism began to grow. It became more coloured, more queer, more different. It became more. The boxes grew and I grew up. Newer threads began to weave themselves into the picture and I needled them in as I found them. For the teenager in me looking for explanations, feminist theory with all its complexities and debates and shortcomings became a playing field of learning and understanding the world. The more I read, the more multidimensional it all became. I had grown up romanticizing the ideals of freedom and emancipation, and feminist theory gave them new pastures to unfold and multiply. And the more I read, the more it all seemed to fit together into a tapestry of domination and struggle, power and injustice stretching across time and space.

We've got it now, haven't we? *We've found our ideology.* The invisibility of acts of violence is an act of violence itself. Invisibility is injustice. The struggle for visibility is freedom.

But there must be more. *There has to be.*

There aren't those many things which move me quite the way theory does. Theory is in the body, they say. If I try to shut my mind off for a minute and just take in what my body feels, I realise that it doesn't work that way. I can't separate them. I sit in a library and read an essay by Audre Lorde, and it *does something to me*. I can feel it in the pit of my stomach, the tingling which gets stronger and spreads through my body. I choke up and shiver for the sheer sense of... *emancipation?*. From what, though? Is it emancipation I am feeling or something else? It is that sense of being less alone, of finding a part of myself in someone else's words, and fitting into the tapestry of the world. It is emotional. And very much physical. Why should I try to write theory when reading theory can be so life-changing?

Why should I even attempt to 'do theory' when in such moments, theory in fact seems to start doing me?

It is the same with poetry. Every now and then, I'll find a poem that I feel in my body and it refuses to let go.

Between the narratives emerging out of marginalised corners of human existence and the structures which have caused them to shift into those corners and out of them, there is that fleck of no-man's land which I like to call emancipatory theory. Between those continents of objective explanation and subjective truth, a possibility emerges to walk the borderlands of thinking and feeling, of someone else and one's own self, and let the personal and political dissolve into one and many at once. I am sure I am exaggerating.

I have often blurred the lines between the personal and the political, as so many of us do every now and then. They intermingle and break apart like tides on a shore. But it becomes dangerous when you can't separate them at all as they coagulate aggressively into the same entity – I can't help thinking that I have made the political into my 'the personal' and lost sight of myself.

When I read queer theory or postcolonial or decolonial theory or feminist theory, who is the subject of that reading? Does the reading self ebb and flow amidst an ocean of other readers and feelers and force a sense of

solidarity with strangers? Is that sense of being a part of a discourse, feeling almost ethereally connected with the writing author-subject and those who came before and will come after, a false sense of assumed solidarity? Can one follow in the footsteps of an emancipatory legacy by reading and feeling vicariously while sitting at a table and forgetting about one's own life?

This escapist flight of fancy into theory makes me feel like a fraud sometimes. Fighting the big fight from the comfort of my writing table. With a nice cup of hot tea. The ultimate 'Schreibtischretter'. Schreibtischretterin.

I'm lying. Usually it's a cup of coffee.

Poetry is not a luxury.
Your Silence will not protect you.
These aren't my words. They are Audre's.

Sitting in my childhood room trying to blend out all the noise as I try to write, I realise that I have been playing at this game of visibility and invisibility ever since I was a child. And while the past decade of growing up seems to have made it easier to play, I must admit that I'm still not entirely sure I've quite understood the rules. Born into this world with a deep, primal need not to be seen, somewhere along the way, I also developed that precarious need not to hide. I desire the comforts of invisibility, of silence, of solitude, of intervals of nothingness and nobodyness; and I also desire basking in the warmth of speaking and being seen. Desire is funny that way, ask anyone.

Answer.
That you are here—that life exists and identity,
That the powerful play goes on, and you may contribute a verse.
Walt Whitman

Or not.

Lauren Fournier, loosely defines autotheory as "contemporary works of literature, art, and art-writing that integrate autobiography and other explicitly subjective and embodied modes with discourses of philosophy and theory in ways that transgress genre conventions and disciplinary boundaries". Which could mean anything – which is exactly what I love about loose definitions. They are the most fun for walking on a tightrope.

But it doesn't matter – this is not that text, remember?

It must have been around the age of seventeen that I suddenly realised that most of the books I had read, and most of the ideas I had consumed, were the brainchildren [– I had not expected this to be the actual plural of 'brainchild', damn it –] of white cis-men. After that, I started making it a point to read more books by women, by authors from countries as diverse as possible, by queer writers, differently abled writers, and writers of colour. Like Penelope, weaving by day and unravelling by night. Waiting. The scales still haven't quite balanced yet, but it's a process and not a single event, is it now? Rome wasn't burned down in a day, after all.

For now, I still enjoy reading Sherlock Holmes. Because now I can shake off the racist and sexist parts as the author's shortcomings without letting them get under my skin as literary truths of a misshapen world. Because nobody can take away my ability to enjoy the stories just because I don't happen to be a middle-aged white man in London.

Because we don't belong to our identities and our identities don't belong to us. Because the truths under my skin can only ever be my own.

I'll just have to find them.

Sixth Chapter:
Much too Much—A Dialogue on Watching *Lost Highway*

Paul Kaletsch & Saskia Schomber

Spoiler and Content Warning: This contribution contains spoilers of David Lynch's *Lost Highway*. The movie deals explicitly with pornography, violence, and sexual violence.

Introduction

Lost Highway

Although throughout his career David Lynch's critical and commercial appreciation was very up and down, today he belongs to what most would consider 'the US-American canon'[1]. Among Tarantino, Cronenberg, or the Coen-Brothers, he served as one of the figureheads of a creative director-driven cinema.[2] *Lost Highway,* a 1997 movie, forms one of the centerpieces of his œuvre. Together with *Mulholland Drive* (2001) and *Inland Empire* (2006), his last movie to this day, it composes the so-called L.A. trilogy. Like most of Lynch's movies, it combines uncannily familiar pictures of a white US-American (sub)urbia with experimental and surrealist elements.

As David Foster Wallace reports, Lynch's own blurb of the movie captures its elusiveness:

> A 21st Century Noir Horror Film
> A graphic investigation into parallel identity crisis
> A world where time is dangerously out of control
> A terrifying ride down the lost highway[3]

And indeed, if any genre applies, describing *Lost Highway* as an experimental mystery noir horror might work.

For those who are still wondering what the movie is about, a plot summary proves to be a difficult task. It could read as follows: In the first half of David Lynch's 1997 *Lost Highway,* when Fred Madison, a Jazz musician, and his wife Renee receive ominous video tapes of their L.A. mansion, their lifeless and sexually frustrated marriage disintegrates, ending in the brutal murder of Renee. In the second half of the picture, Pete, a young mechanic, begins a dangerous affair with the mysterious Alice, the lover of his customer, mobster-boss Mr. Eddy. The inevitable conflict of both men leads to the killing of Mr. Eddy.

Yet that only condenses what supposedly happens in the movie into an easily readable summary. First of all, it does not take into account the movie's aesthetics and the way they complicate our understanding of its plot. And what is more, it also implies that the movie tells us two apparently separate stories. As such, this summary already interprets and disambiguates one of the central enigmas of the film.

Transformation Scene

In fact, a central and ambiguous 'transformation scene' *(*47:39–53:16*)* links both halves of the movie and the protagonists to each other. This scene and precisely its ambiguity and our reception of it provoked us to write this piece. Recently convicted for the murder of his wife Renee (Patricia Arquette), Fred (Bill Pullman) sits in a death row cell. He is suffering from severe headaches. However, the guards deny him help. Then, serene music sets in. Next, the music stops, and we see a cabin in the desert burn down in reverse time. Afterwards, time flows lineary again in forward direction and an enigmatic figure steps out of the cabin, seemingly staring at Fred. This 'Mystery Man' (Robert Blake) already appeared twice in the movie, lastly Fred met him at a party.

1 Even in 2022, two of Lynch's movies (*Blue Velvet* and *Mullholand Drive*) continue to remain on the famous "The Greatest Films of All Times" list, put together by *Sight and Sound* on the basis of their ciritic's poll every ten years (https://www.bfi.org.uk/sight-and-sound/greatest-films-all-time).
2 Wallace 2013, 163. Interestingly, and not all that surprising, no women featured in this new canon of US-American *auteur*-cinema at that time.
3 Wallace 2013, 150.

Back in the cell, the ceiling light crackles intensely. The movie cuts to a shot of a median strip of a highway, seen from a moving car.[4] Then, Pete (Balthazar Getty) stands on the side strip of that road. In a crossfade, his family and girlfriend call Pete's name and run towards him during some kind of thunderstorm. In the following cut to the cell's firing ceiling light, smoke swirls through the cell. Fred rolls on the gory floor, screaming and covered in blood, while electricity is humming. A shot of a surface moves through smoke and flickering electric light to a gory humanoid orifice. In serenity, a blurred humanoid figure hovers in ethereal light. Fade-out to a black screen. When a prison guard checks Fred's cell, he reacts shocked. Later, his superior states that the inmate of the cell is not Fred. Instead, Pete sits in the cell, and looks at the door with a bloody face.

Fred and Pete are played by two different actors. The middle-aged Bill Pullman's "natty"[5] appearance as Fred oscillates between high-strung tension and overworked exhaustion. Balthazar Getty, in contrast, in his early twenties at the time of the movie's release, is a vital adolescent with a sometimes slightly dopey expression who plays tough.

With their generic North American heterosexual looks and demeanor, similar hair colors and not too different body figures, one might, seen from behind, mistake the actors for each other. Under close scrutiny, however, they don't look very much alike.

In general, the movie's first part with Fred as the protagonist, before the transformation scene, strongly differs from its second part, after the transformation scene, now with Pete center stage. For example, the first part operates with a rather closed spatiality, not limited to the house of Fred and Rene but focusing on it. Be it their house, the feverish jazz club, the crowded villa during the party scene, or the cell, all of those places confine Fred. Contrariwise, the second part emphasizes Pete's mobility, fitting his job as a (car) mechanic. It underlines Pete's movement through a variety of often open spaces, not ignoring but also not centering on, for instance, the closure of his parents' house.

On the other hand, particularly towards the end of Pete's plot, the colors, music, and atmosphere pick up on motifs of the first part. The similarities converge in a third, brief, and last part of the movie. Following a sex scene between Pete and Alice in the desert (01:57:14), in a second 'transformation', the nude Pete disappears and a similarly undressed Fred replaces him as the protagonist. But even before, reappearing characters, actresses, plot elements, and locations cross over between the two plots of Fred and Pete. Most stunningly, the actress Patricia Arquette who plays Fred's red-haired wife Renee then returns as the blonde Alice. Later, after Fred's reintroduction, Renee stars again in the third part of the movie.

What disturbs our reading of this development as an apparent 'transformation' and 'retransformation', however, is a scene that occurred a few minutes earlier, when Pete saw a framed photograph featuring both Renee and Alice. This photograph, to complicate matters further, is found in the villa of Andy, for whom both Renee and Alice worked; he is also the host of the party Renee and Fred attended earlier, and is ultimately accidentally killed by Pete.

Given these few examples, the idea of a 'transformation' taking place in the movie becomes questionable; one cannot help but ponder, however, how the different parts of the movie relate to each other. This question sparked off a dialogue which blossomed into this collaborative work. After Saskia watched the movie recently for the first time, we realized that we had diverging takes on the first transformation scene. From Saskia's vantage then, Fred did not corporeally transform in the scene, but the audience witnessed Fred's reimagination of his self as Pete. She translated the puzzling narration of *Lost Highway* into one story, i.e., Fred's story, and interpreted Pete as Fred's imagination: Hence, the narration of the second-half of the movie stretches an actually very short moment of the plot extensively, that is, Fred's waiting for his execution. When we discussed this, Saskia directly corroborated this with observations from the movie.

Paul, instead, did not search for logical links. Rather, the connection of the different parts or stories of the movie did not really matter to him. Accordingly, the transformation scene did not strike him as special nor problematic, and he didn't attempt to solve it. When Paul talked to Saskia about that scene, however, he instinctively resisted a resolution of the movie's ambiguity. At the same time, he made irrational claims about a real transformation from Fred into Pete, which would have disambiguated the movie, too. Summarizing one could

4 Attentive viewers remember that the movie also opened with an image of a similar (perhaps the same?) highway.
5 Wallace 2013, 155.

say the scene did not make sense to Paul, but its equivocal mystery, like many others of the movie, engaged him aesthetically.

A Dialogue

We were hooked on the differences in our viewing experience and wanted to explore them further. So, we decided to keep up our dialogue to try to find out what caused our diverging experiences. Having never worked with movies before, we both turned to the theoretical frameworks we usually work with in academic contexts to do so.

Saskia, who took the movie to narrate Fred's story, presumed that there had to be a plot in which this story was formed and told.[6] For someone working with narrative theory, this plot can be analyzed and its structure understood by means of, e.g., narratology. When employing this kind of analysis, however, Saskia realized soon that the narration of the movie did not yield to her former understanding as smoothly as expected. Starting with Fred in his cell as a key scene for the relation of the two protagonists to each other, she encounters *Lost Highway* as a striking example of narrative ambiguity, i.e., a narration that offers contradicting hermeneutic clues that cannot be resolved into one single version of a plot. Thus, while being able to capture the workings of the narrative, the analysis itself failed to corroborate a satisfying and unequivocal interpretation of the movie.

Narrative ambiguity, as Saskia's part will explore, is not synonymous to a postmodern postulate of an openness of meaning and arbitrariness of interpretation. Rather, it is a very specific way of narrating that incites and relies on the recipient's (repeated) attempts to make sense of the plot; it foregrounds the simultaneity of different plots and leads to an unsolvable cognitive predicament. Pleasure stems from this failing but unceasing attempt of hermeneutic disambiguation.

Even though Paul did not experience the movie like Saskia did, its nebulosity did *do* something to him. Naturally, he was curious to explore what precisely the movie did to him, how it did that, and how it differed from something interpretable. Since Paul was reading the becoming-animal plateau of Deleuze and Guattari's (DG) *A Thousand Plateaus* at that time, he wanted to observe with their theoretical repertoire how the movie's ambiguity (in the common-sensical use of the word) produces an affect with/on him. DG's non-representational strand of poststructuralism fittingly resists both the determination of meaning and the stale postmodern playing with meaning(s) or insisting on their 'gliding'.

The movie affected Paul when he rewatched it after Saskia did. This affect was self-sufficient, but, unfortunately, did not survive Paul's repeated viewings of *Lost Highway*. The more often he rewatched the movie and thought about it to write this piece, the less the movie managed to affect him. Instead, *Lost Highway's* formal mimesis of a conventional movie and simulation of a comprehensible plot increasingly unleashed a detective within Paul who could not stop to attempt figuring out the meaning of the movie once and for all. This triangle of form, plot, and his inner detective quickly absorbed the unique connection between the movie, Paul, Paul's environment, and the context of the viewing, and turned its formerly produced affect into interpretations. Despite the organizational success of these interpretations, they could not satisfy Paul—similar to Saskia's encounter with a cognitive conundrum that no single interpretation can ever solve.

We conclude with a summary of our different analyses of *Lost Highway's* functioning, and the question if the movie, from that vantage, 'succeeded' or 'failed'. We consciously will not attempt to really integrate our arguments into each other, but try to discern how they relate. While we both discuss how the movie feels overwhelming to us, it turns out that we are not talking about the same phenomenon. Instead, we differentiate how *Lost Highway* overwhelms us into the cognitive overload of simultaneous narratives (Saskia) and an experience of affective excess (Paul).

Interestingly, Saskia ends up close to where Paul started, namely, from his resistance towards any resolution of the movie's ambiguity. However, Saskia's embrace of an irreducible (specifically narrative) ambiguity is based on a narratological argument—not an emotional attachment. Curiously, since Paul closes with the diagnosis that the movie can't sustain its production of affects but confronts him with successive and different

6 Story here means the chronologically ordered, reconstructed version of events, whereas the plot is the way those events are told in narrative with all their omissions, shifted orders, repetitions, etc.

interpretations that can't provide closure, this brings him to Saskia's starting point of the lack of a reading that sutures the movie together. Therefore, we will explore if Saskia's analysis can offer something to the remaining debris of Paul's approach. Lastly, we discuss how the act of interpreting the movie and the resulting interpretations cause effects for and on both of us. However, our framings of what constitutes a good/bad, a joyful/sad a/effect differ.

A Narratological Exploration (Saskia Schomber)

In Search of a Plot

Critics don't tire of telling us that it is no use trying to understand, interpret or explain David Lynch's movies and that they should rather be experienced, felt, that you should just let yourself be overwhelmed by them.[7] While I intuitively see the point of this encouragement, in my experience, at least, it ultimately does not work out when we take *Lost Highway* as an example.

For one thing, there still is much in the movie—and also in the way Lynch talks about it—that makes you look for explanations. Symbols and formal sign posts abound; what are we supposed to make of them, if, due to their frequency and connection to enigmatic plot dynamics, we cannot accept them as mere coincidence? Are they just creating a *sur-plus*-effect, or do they function as an infinite string of hermeneutic snares[8] or as mere atmospheric devices? They might well be. The purely 'aesthetic' approach, however, as Paul has pointed out, runs the risk of becoming stale after its first experience. Is *Lost Highway*, then, a movie one can only watch successfully once and by willfully ignoring its details?

For another, most of us would agree that in spite of all mystery there is some kind of plot or even plots in the movie, it is not just bits and pieces of sensual impressions; rather, *Lost Highway*, despite all its craziness, evidently makes use of conventional techniques of cinematic narration.[9] There is a story told, thus an analysis of its narrative form must be possible. Is there something to be gained by an analysis like that of an apparently unintelligible movie, which people tell you to 'just' experience aesthetically, that is: sensuously?

I would like to propose that it is, in fact, the movie's narrative form and, even if this impulse might be grounded in my *déformation professionelle* as a literary scholar, thinking about it in terms of narrative theory that helps us understand precisely how (or why) *Lost Highway* affects us in the direct, sensuous, irritating way it does. While we may not be able to 'explain the movie', we can investigate the workings of its narrative mechanisms. Its effects, I think, rest upon the way the story is narrated: It is due to the film's narrative ambiguity that we want to explain it, fail to authoritatively explain it, and learn to revel in the pleasure of the excessive cognitive demands that come with this process.

Time and Space

Now, for full disclosure, I have to mention that, before I saw *Lost Highway* for the first time, I had already browsed through Slavoj Žižek's long-winded thoughts about it in his 2000 essay *The Art of the Ridiculous Sublime: On David Lynch's Lost Highway*. So, my fixation on *Lost Highway* as a narrative might partly be mediated by psychoanalytic readings of it. Typically, such an approach to narrative highlights the symbolism of its motives and dichotomies. A central argument of Žižek's essay, however, is a structural observation about Lynch's movie: "The temporal loop that structures *Lost Highway* is thus the very loop of the psychoanalytic treatment in which, after a long detour, we return to our starting point from another perspective."[10] By equating the narrative structure of the movie with the psychoanalytical process, Žižek highlights the temporalities of the film

7 Famously, Paul Taylor stated in his review of Lynch's *Eraserhead* (1977) that it is "a movie rather to be experienced than explained" (Taylor 1979, 44). The director himself—not to say that he has any more authority over his movies than his viewers—describes his work as intuitive, not intellectual; commenting on the last movie of his L.A.-trilogy, *Inland Empire* (2006), Lynch encouraged viewers to use their intuition, while stating "It's [the movie] supposed to make perfect sense." (cf. Colette-White 2007).

8 I.e., a mere obstacle on a hermeneutic forward trajectory, cf. Barthes 1974, 38; 41–43 and 209–210.

9 The critical reception often discusses Lynch's movies as navigating the faultline between experimental and mainstream cinema, see fn. 23 on this.

10 Žižek 2000, 18.

that are equally interesting from a narratological perspective. The way in which the movie, at its end, seems to pick up its own beginning, poses a major challenge in analyzing its temporal structure.

On first glance, we seem to have two rather linear and chronologically unfolding narrations, even if their connection is unclear. The movie narrates scenes of a marital life, how the couple receives the video tapes leading up to the murder of Renee, and Fred's conviction. Then it narrates Pete's return to his home and job, and his starting affair with Alice. Finally, Pete turns back into Fred (or is replaced by Fred, if you wish). Fred, who is actually supposed to be in a death row cell, then kills Mr. Eddy, the man that has been established as Pete's erotic rival for the past 60 minutes or so, but has now become the lover of Fred's wife Renee—the same wife that, *pace* the first narrative, is actually already dead.

I think it is safe to say that at this point we cannot ignore any longer that something is seriously off with the linearity of not only the narration, but also the story underneath it. The point is driven home when in the final minutes of the movie we see Fred ringing the doorbell of his own house twice, saying "Dick Laurent is dead," then being chased by the police; and twice the doorbell rings in the opening scene of the movie, where Fred hears someone say "Dick Laurent is dead" through the speaker, but cannot see anyone on the street. There is only the faint sound of a siren in the distance.

It is at this final point of the movie that viewers cannot help but doubt the linearity of time. However, there have been earlier instances where time felt out of joint and the narration seemed to actually bend and merge vectors of time instead of projecting them forwards. An uncanny example of that is the telephone scene at the party, in which the Mystery Man is on the landline of Fred's home talking to him while standing in front of him. Space and time, as it shows, are equally unhinged in the ontology of the movie's world. Since Paul will give this scene further attention,[11] let me turn now to the so-called 'transformation scene', that has Fred sitting in a tightly locked death-row cell. Here, too, something disturbing is happening on a narrative level. While the temporalities of the events seem to pose no immediate problem, their spatiality does: A protagonist vanishes and another one appears in his place while everything else in the setting as well as the other characters remain the same. This logical break, occurring roughly halfway through the movie, as well as the apparent time loop we become aware of at its end, cause what I call narrative ambiguity.

Narrative Ambiguity: Three Questions and Three Dynamics

Taking its cue from this high-level observation on the movie's spatio-temporal structure, my investigation into this phenomenon and its effects is based on three questions: What do I mean by narrative ambiguity? What alternative plots result from it? And what exactly are narrative strategies that produce this ambiguity?

What do I mean by narrative ambiguity? Narratives can be ambiguous. Not in the postmodern sense in which all art is essentially ambiguous, i.e., open to multiple, subjective interpretations. Narrative ambiguity denotes a specific, concentrated kind of ambiguity that becomes tangible for the audience by means of narrative devices. It emerges from specific narrative dynamics that produce contradicting hermeneutic clues.[12] These lead to distinct, conflicting but hermeneutically equivalent interpretations of the text or smaller textual units and create an unresolved 'cognitive stalemate'[13] in which all versions seem equally plausible. It often destabilizes the temporalities and ontologies presented in a narrative. And lastly, the key point of narrative ambiguity is that it ultimately cannot be resolved—and does not have to be resolved since it proves to be aesthetically productive, as I will later elaborate. In this regard, it differs from, e.g., traditional rhetoric, in which ambiguity is a stylistic deficiency, or daily communication where disambiguation is usually essential.[14]

What are the different plots? There are ramifications but let us focus on the main dichotomy already discussed: Either Fred is Pete / Pete is Fred or Fred is not Pete / Pete is not Fred. So, either the transformation scene really is a transformation, i.e., Fred is turned into Pete and back into Fred—and who is to say that a movie could not present us with a fantastic plot like this? This is, after all, the liberty of fiction. Or it is not a transformation and then we see the dream or some other psychogenic state of Fred (or the visual manifestation

11 Cf. Paul's section 'My Story With *Lost Highway:* From Horror To Excess'.
12 Cf. Rimmon 1977.
13 Potysch 2018, 194.
14 Bauer et al. 2010, 8–9.

of his psyche that is not consciously accessible for him, being only visible for the audience[15]).

How exactly is this narrative ambiguity produced? I will concentrate on three narrative dynamics of the movie that produce ambiguity, going from a macro to a micro level of narration.

1) Collapse of narrative levels:

As viewers, one way to judge if Pete is a hallucination or dream of Fred is to discern if the Pete-events form a metadiegetic narration, i.e., are not on the same narrative level as the rest of the narration. In the transformation scene itself, Fred's excruciating headache and the strange, elusive images of lights, as well as the short shot of Pete on the side of the highway before we see Fred rolling on the floor could be interpreted in accordance with filmic conventions as a clue that everything that happens afterwards is only in Fred's head. This interpretation starts to falter, however, when we notice that narrative levels are not neatly separated in the movie, especially in its second part.

There are some clearly metadiegetic elements which can be understood as embedded narratives.[16] We are shown, for example, the visualization of Alice's memories of her first meeting with Mr. Eddy, two porn videos featuring Alice and/or Renee, and, of course, the tapes that Fred and Renee receive. Those, however, at the same time turn out to be metaleptic devices, i.e., they are used to cut across narrative levels so that elements from one narrative level contaminate the other:[17] Remembering the narrative's temporal loop, we have to ask ourselves, if it is Fred who is ringing his own door, then maybe it is him filming and sending the tapes, too? But how can the character that is actually filmed in some of these tapes be the one producing them?

Narrative levels obviously start to collapse here and elude our ability to describe them logically. Another example of this occurs at the end of the movie, in the desert. The Mystery Man has just given a video player to Mr. Eddy which shows himself, Andy, Renee, and others watching yet another screen where a gory porn video featuring Renee is shown. But as if this layering of narratives isn't complex enough, when our perspective returns to the scene in the desert, the video player (which is, mind you, not a camera) suddenly shows what is happening right this minute in front of Mr. Eddy, namely, it shows Fred and the Mystery Man standing in front of the car. Thus, the movie's repeated, confusing metaleptic dynamics ultimately make the narrative levels fold into themselves, making it impossible to distinguish them with certainty.

2) Competing focalizations:

A big part of the movie's narrative seems to be internally focalized, i.e., we have an outside view of the character, but our perception is tied to the perspective of Fred and Pete: We see only what they see, the interpretation of what is happening is tinged by their emotions, assumptions, and concerns.[18] We, as the audience, engage with both of these characters, the internal focalization triggers us to experience both of them as fleshed out, embodied figures. Thus, the movie clearly has two male protagonists: Fred and Pete are, despite their points of convergence, two people with two different lives.[19] By having Fred reappear in—literally—Pete's place towards the end of the movie, however, the narrative establishes a frame, which might suggest some sort of narrative primacy of Fred's voice over Pete's. Again, we come up lost, conflicted about two equally strong narrative signals.

15 Pete, in the words of Foster Wallace 2013, 160 "as some Kafkaesque metaphor for guilt and denial and psychic evasion."

16 See Kuhn 2009 (figure 1).

17 Cf. Pier 2009, 190: "In its narratological sense, metalepsis, first identified by Genette, is a paradoxical contamination between the world of the telling and the world of the told: "any intrusion by the extradiegetic narrator or narratee into the diegetic universe (or by diegetic characters into a metadiegetic universe, etc.), or the inverse [...]" ([1972] 1980: 234–35)." See Genette 1980, 234–237.

18 Again, take, as an example, the scene of the party at Andy's house, discussed by Paul in section 'My Story With *Lost Highway*: From Horror To Excess'.

19 Cf. Wallace 2013, 157: "Then there's this scene where Bill Pullman's head turns into Balthazar Getty's head. As in, the Bill Pullman character in *Lost Highway* turns into somebody completely else, somebody played by *Lord of the Flies* Balthazar Getty, who's barely out of puberty and looks nothing like Bill Pullman. The scene is indescribable, and I won't even try to describe it except to say that it's as ghastly and riveting and totally indescribable as anything I've seen in a U.S. movie." My point here is, again, very similar to Paul's experience of the potential identity of Fred/Mystery Man, see pp. 12–14 and 17–18.

3) Individual scenes:

As a last point let us take a closer look at the transformation scene in the middle of the movie. The scene clearly functions as a tilt: Up to this moment the narrative has been giving us one plot—a plot whose way of being told has been puzzling at times, admittedly, mysterious in its representation of some events and patchy in others. But when Fred is turned into or replaced by Pete, we suddenly lose our grip on what we thought to be the structure of this plot.

Narrative ambiguity is produced by effects of tilting that are triggered in recipients at moments when previously accepted systems or patterns of organization are destabilized, thus having us check for new ways of meaning-making, generating multiple conflicting plots.20 It is important, however, that a tilt-effect in this sense is producing a balance perpetually in jeopardy, it is not causing the narrative to actually tilt over in one or the other direction. Ambiguity's allure is to always hang in the balance, not to fall. The transformation scene is the first moment of the movie whose violation of our logical and hermeneutic mechanisms of watching is so brutal that we can no longer ignore it. But the knack of this tilt-movement is that it not only makes us aware of the ambiguity of what follows; instead, in opening up multiple conflicting plots, it also projects this dynamic back, making us realize that ambiguity has been starting to creep in long ago and is seeping through the whole narrative. If we now remember Fred's conversation and simultaneous phone call with the Mystery Man at the party, we see that the spatio-temporal stability of the movie's world has been questionable ever since.

What is more: In this scene, too, we have interfering elements like the shot of the burning cabin in time-reverse. They hardly qualify as metadiegetic elements, since they seem to be totally disconnected from the other diegetic levels. There is also no indication to their status as anachronies; the cabin, which does feature as a site later on, will not burn down, so the above-mentioned shots cannot be explained as prolepses, i.e., narrating a plot event before it chronologically happens. Precisely because of their total disconnect, however, they could be understood as metanarrative pointers to certain narrative strategies or a shift in the narrative stance, pointing us to the fact that we are about to witness something (not for the first time maybe) that defies the way we perceive the physical, spatio-temporal laws of the world in our daily reality.

These are only a few of the mechanisms causing us to be left with the alternative plots outlined above. They are equally possible and the narrative makes it impossible to judge which one is the actual plot. Of course, we can pin the narrative down to one or the other plot version or transcend this question in favor of a psychoanalytical interpretation, as Žižek does, where we have two plots connected by means of analogy or symbolism. We can also just watch the movie, cherish the pictures, get caught up in the music and ignore all signs and clues and violently shut down our minds whenever they start wheeling.

However, we can also choose to accept the challenge: If we acknowledge the movie's narrative ambiguity, it is not an either/or of interpretation. If we cannot decide on one authoritative viewing, we have to bear the indecisiveness. Instead, as soon as we are done with watching it, we have to start over, watch it again because we realize that tying *Lost Highway* down to one way of interpreting it, means cutting down the others. This causes a feeling of deficiency, of lack, even of want. Therefore, what makes *Lost Highway* special is not that all of us can construct our personal reading of the movie, even if Lynch says we are supposed to do that. I don't think this is what is important here or that this is what is triggering us so heavily. Rather, a viewer's actual aesthetic appreciation of *Lost Highway* emerges from its specific narration that challenges us to endure the indecisiveness of the clues and the simultaneity of the plots: Reproducible pleasure stems from our necessary attempts, but ultimate failures to stick with one authoritative viewing of the movie.

The Pleasure of an Endless Ribbon

What does that mean for our practical experience of sitting down and watching the movie? Bernd Herzogenrath compares the movie to a Möbius strip which on a very basic level, and leaving all psychoanalysis

20 Bauer et al. 2010, 13–14.

aside[21], describes very well our narrative experience of ambiguity. A Möbius strip is a surface with only one side, there is no inside or outside, it is an endless ribbon.

It is not by chance that the movie ultimately ends in movement, i.e., with Fred driving down the highway and starting to scream, obviously having another painful headache or some sort of seizure, followed by a shot of the median strip seen from a moving car by night—a shot we already saw at the beginning of the movie and during the first transformation scene. The median strip of the highway at the same time suggests a linear, ongoing movement and, being an echo of the scenes we have seen before, a loop back to the beginning of the movie.

We are used to watching movies in whose stories time is moving linearly forward (even if the narration might not) and we feel uneasy when the spatio-temporal or ontological stability of a narrative seems to be in jeopardy; we cannot actually flesh out all the readings of a narratively ambiguous movie in our first reading, we need to start over, something that *Lost Highway* obviously urges us to do. But we cannot, at the same time, ever fully re-write or erase our other, equally plausible constructions. The movie challenges us to endure the cognitive overload it produces (while, of course, still reserving for us the alternative to re-focus on its aesthetics, if we cannot cope with the simultaneity of its possible plots). That is the nature of narrative ambiguity: When we move with the narrative of a Möbius strip, then, while we move forward, we also retrace our steps. We are always on a terrifying ride down the lost highway.

Watching Lost Highway With Deleuze (Paul Kaletsch)

My Story With Lost Highway: From Horror to Excess

Like Lynch's *Mulholland Drive, Lost Highway* disturbed me when I watched it for the first time as a teenager. Robert Blake's black-clad Mystery Man haunted me afterwards, especially the face of this hybrid of a person and an evil spirit: a face covered with white makeup, lips and eyes painted black, and the black hair shaved, a thin line parting it in the middle (Biodrowski, 1997). The Mystery Man's blazing dark eyes continuously pierce their target and don't blink. They twinkle with mischief, while the mouth contorts into a constant thin-lipped and derisive smile. I can only describe the timelessness of the Mystery Man as some kind of geriatric infant. A scene as an example helps to illustrate the kind of mysterious horror this character evokes.

Renee and Fred attend a party at Andy's villa, a friend of Renee's (27:50 in the movie). While Renee flirts with Andy, a stranger, the Mystery Man, approaches Fred, and the loungy beats fade into silence: "We've met before haven't we?" Even though party attendees enjoy themselves right next to the two interlocutors, the Mystery Man somehow isolated Fred. They are now alone together in the midst of the crowd. Fred looks amused but irritated, grabs his drink, and answers, "I don't think so. Where was it that you think we met?" The Mystery Man retorts, "At your house, don't you remember?" Fred's smile slowly disappears, "No, no, I don't. Are you sure?" The Mystery Man doubles down, "Of course, as a matter of fact, I'm there right now." Fred's mimic tenses up and he double checks, "What do you mean: You're where right now?" The Mystery Man replies dead-pan, "At your house." The Mystery Man hands Fred his phone and dares him to call the landline of his own house. And indeed, the Mystery Man picks up after two rings. Now, Fred talks to the Mystery Man on the phone, whilst the other Mystery Man grins at him: "How did you do that?" Through the phone Fred receives this explanation, "You invited me. It is not my custom to go where I'm not wanted." Fred inquires, "Who are you?" Both Mystery Men laugh simultaneously in response and their cackle amplifies into a booming reverb. After taking the phone from Fred, the Mystery Man leaves the party and the music reappears immediately, as if it had never stopped playing in the first place (32:08, the scene ends at 33:37).

21 Herzogenrath himself stresses this comparison in the light of his psychoanalytical interpretation of the movie (Herzogenrath 1999, section *Digression 2*): "On the one hand, Lacan employs the Moebius Strip as a model to conceptualize the 'return of the repressed,' an issue important in *Lost Highway* as well. On the other hand, it can illustrate the way psychoanalysis conceptualizes certain binary oppositions, such as inside/outside, before/after, signifier/signified etc. - and can, with respect to *Lost Highway*, characterize Fred/Pete. These oppositions are normally seen as completely distinct; the Moebius Strip, however, enables us to see them as continuous with each other: the one, as it is, is the 'truth' of the other, and vice versa."

Clearly, the Mystery Man isn't good news in the movie. Not his actions make him so creepy—he hardly engages in any except dialogue—but he is just creepy as such and inexplicably so. So, it's no surprise that he scared young Paul and stuck with him. Based on the few scenes in which the Mystery Man briefly appears, I experienced *Lost Highway* as a horror movie. Apparently, that exceeded my teenage sensitivity, but already then, I didn't mainly 'enjoy' the movie's horror, that's not why it stuck with me, and why I talked Saskia into watching it. In my first viewing, the movie simply was too much. In my subsequent four viewings across the span of roughly fifteen years, it became very obvious that Fred and the Mystery Man at least have a very intimate connection, if Fred is not the Mystery Man and vice versa: Before the party, Fred briefly (mis-)recognized another face in Renee's, that of the Mystery Man, and she frightened him; the Mystery Man is in Fred's *house* in the party scene; later Fred and the Mystery Man kill Mr. Eddy/Dick Laurent together. However, my increasing awareness of such solidifying clues—as long as I didn't watch the movie too often in too short of a time span—never turned into anything but hints implying possible interpretations. Although these explanations theoretically added up, the movie presented me with different characters, i.e., Fred is Fred (Bill Pullman) and the Mystery Man the Mystery Man (Robert Blake). In my viewing experience, both figures always operated autonomously, so I could naively experience them as the movie presented them to me. Despite my simultaneous intellectual readings of Fred and the Mystery Man as possibly one and the same, surprisingly, I didn't suffer from any cognitive dissonance.

While *Lost Highway* entertained me, that is, it still worked as a movie, it navigated the edges of my comfort zone. I didn't feel the need to care that I could neither follow the plot nor make any sense of it. The movie clearly made me feel something but absolved me of the imperative to give meaning to that feeling or decipher its cause. This conjunction of confusion, uneasiness, and the release from the demand to grasp the story line and conclusively interpret it composed the beauty of the motion picture for me. Still, after my conversation with Saskia about the transformation scene, and our puzzlingly different takes, and the decision to write something together about *Lost Highway*, I had to do more than just say that it 'tickles' me nicely. I had to say what 'tickles' me, how the movie's 'tickling' works, and what of me is 'tickled' and responds 'ticklishly' (Deleuze, 1995, pp. 8–9).

Breakdown

Lost Highway didn't give off that dry and boring high-brow vibe because it came in the familiar disguise of a neo-noir flick set in the United States of America of my imagination. So, I didn't need to force myself like with genuinely artsy stuff. I was thinking that I probably signed up for a bunch of beautiful people looking cool whilst shooting and/or screwing each other in an L.A. of permanent night, rain, and neon-lights, and I was so OK with that. So much for my aesthetic expectations and *Lost Highway* satisfied them at the beginning.

The movie starts with someone invisible buzzing the doorbell of Renee and Fred's house twice. Fred pushes the listen button and hears a strange voice saying, 'Dick Laurent is dead.' Peeking through the windows, he can't see anyone, though, only hearing police sirens. You don't see the death of Dick Laurent; you just hear of it. And at that point, due to a lack of context, you can't interpret it. At the end of the movie, though, a shot shows Mr. Eddy/Dick Laurent dead in the desert after Fred and the Mystery Man murdered him. What Saskia has described as a temporal loop, namely Fred pulling up in his own driveway, ringing the bell, and declaring 'Dick Laurent is dead', can also reveal the situation of the mysterious beginning: Fred, with the help of the Mystery Man, has killed Dick Laurent.

In the large form of the action-image, a character replies to a situation with an action on the basis of her perception of the situation in order to modify the situation and/or to introduce a new one (Deleuze, 1986a, pp. 155–156; 1995, p. 51). I couldn't recognize that in *Lost Highway.* Film noir, however, belongs to the small form of the action-image (Deleuze, 1986a, pp. 160–169). Here, sequences of action-situation-action construct the motion picture's plot: "The action advances blindly and the situation is disclosed in darkness, or in ambiguity. From action to action, the situation gradually emerges, varies, and finally either becomes clear or retains its mystery" (Deleuze, 1986a, p. 160). Although the 'first' action does not produce the situation but reveals some

of it, it is the fragment of the situation and its perception, again, that generates the successive action (ASA'). *Lost Highway* precisely begins with such an action partially uncovering a mysterious situation, with successive actions revealing more and more of the initial situation.

At 35:20, something disturbs the camera movements and the (time) cuts' smooth and imperceptible rendering of action-situation-action sequences (Deleuze, 1995, p. 59). At 33:38, Fred and Renee drive back to their house from a party in Andy's villa, where Fred had the previously described bizarre encounter with the Mystery Man. Driving home Renee tells a jealous Fred where she met the host, Andy, became friends with him, and that he had a job for her. Strangely, she seemingly can't recall the type of job when Fred asks about it. When they enter their street, inside the house an intense light appears briefly. It's unclear whether the couple notices this or not. Hence, Fred's prior uncanny meeting with the Mystery Man and his suspicion of a liaison between Andy and Renee might agitate Fred as well at that time. When Fred exits the house later after searching it, at 36:00, he chides Renee for leaving the car because he thought someone was inside the house. So, apparently, that distressed him.

Back to 34:34, though: Fred turns off the alarm system of their home and searches the place, accompanied by ominous ambient music. On his way through the house, he eyes the phone. Suddenly, at 35:20, the phone inside rings twice. Note that the phone also rang twice when he called his own landline in the scene with the Mystery Man before. After the second ring, the camera travels from the phone, across their bedroom and a red curtain until Fred appears in profile in the hallway at 35:32. He makes a 45 degree turn towards the camera, but then just stands there seemingly paralyzed. The camera zooms in on him and accelerates, while the ambient background track grows into a screeching sound—if you listen closely, you can hear a pitched down voice murmuring 'your house'. When the camera locks Fred into a headshot, the music fades back to an intense swooshing. The camera remains closely on Fred's face and upper body. Whilst thoroughly tranced, he seems to be staring at or recognizing something in the direction of the camera, and then, slowly, at 35:54 gets back to his senses and moves outside to Renee.

Clearly, Fred can't act or react between 35:32 and 35:54, and something does this to him and/or within him. Now, this doesn't necessarily have to relate to the situation which the search disclosed—the house and the two phone rings—however, the movie seems to suggest that something inside the house yet outside the frame, whatever Fred is looking at (the camera), relates to it. Of course, the scene with the Mystery Man comes to mind as a related exterior (in relation to this shot) and predecessor to this scene: Did the scene with the Mystery Man really happen before; does it happen at the same time when Fred searches his house; is Fred in his house all the time and has never been to the party; will he go to the party later; or is it just an uncanny coincidence that the phone rings twice in both scenes? Fred doesn't seem to know and neither does the audience. Consequently, such reasoning doesn't lead to anything but futile speculation, so I will move from the cause of Fred's paralysis to his inaction which the movie presents rather clearly. First, the situation fails to disclose itself to Fred; second, he can't form a clear perception of the situation that causes him to act, but the situation's excess of perception overwhelms him; third, Fred fails to act in response to this mental overload, instead it causes him to freeze: Perception turns into affect and through affect the situation acts on Fred.

Since the situation doesn't disclose itself to Fred nor to the audience and both form unclear perceptions of it, between 35:32 and 35:54, the "sensory-motor link" (Deleuze, 1995, p. 51)—the causal relation between situations, their perception, and actions and the characters and movie's seamless movement through (sequences of) them—breaks down. Accordingly, the image's camera movements and time cuts don't serve the "sensory-motor scheme" (Deleuze, 1995, p. 59) anymore—Fred cannot react—but deliver a narrative either too simple or too obscure: Fred is paralyzed for a bit, but you don't know why; or Fred is paralyzed due to reasons which you can only obtain from interpretations of unclear clues in the movie until 35:54. Therefore, due to the resistance of the intersection of the cuts and the camera movement against the sensory-motor scheme, I couldn't perceive the cliché immanent to the scene that would have realized the clear causality and movement I wanted to see (Deleuze, 1986b, p. 20). For instance, I could have read the cliché like this: Fred suspects someone in the house; accordingly, he searches it; there's no one inside, but the phone rings twice; hence, he brings Renee back inside.

The camera moves the viewer through the house, in which Fred only features as a character populating the spaces of the house that the cuts allocate to him. From Fred in the hallway (probably leading to the bedroom) at the first ring the scene cuts to the phone in the bedroom, and the red curtain. From there the camera travels the hallway until it meets Fred whose face, although he stares intensely into the camera, remains vacant throughout the shot. When the phone rang first, I couldn't know where Fred is—at the second ring, he's in the hallway of the bedroom—because the camera doesn't trace Fred's movements and the detaching cuts between Fred, the room and its objects further disoriented me. Interestingly, though, even after closely watching the scene repeatedly, I perceived Fred as experiencing something uncomfortable in the time between the second phone ring and his exit from the house. As if something hit him, when the camera zooms in on his face and the crescendo of noise peaks, but he doesn't know what, and he can't react to that unrecognizable something. The movie, however, doesn't support my reading. I can't know if something 'hits' him. Even though Fred gazes in a direction, there might as well be nothing. I interpreted the camera's acceleration onto Fred's face and the uncomfortable ambient sound as something that Fred experiences, although only I did. The interplay of the deep saturated black and red colors, the presence of darkness and shadows, and the grating sound give an intense impression of the couple's house. Together with the image's sound and movement intersection, this staging of the house clearly oppressed me, and I projected my discomfort onto Fred. And, indeed, before the first ring of the phone, Fred seems tense, but then his face goes blank until he leaves the house again.

Even now if I rewatch the scene, I feel uncomfortable. Neither an action happens, nor a situation takes place that makes me uneasy. I can't pinpoint what causes my unease. As discussed above, I'm not only confronted with the couple's house and its atmosphere as such, and the lack of a creepy action and/or situation, but also the image's time cuts and camera movements. Interestingly, the latter partly show Fred as he navigates the house and follow his point of view but mix it with point of view shots whose viewing subject, however, remains unclear. On the one hand, the house uncannily becomes an observing, moving, and living *something*. On the other hand, it feels as if a third party (not the viewer or the camera) is watching Fred in the house. Of course, this suits a movie that opens with a scene of a couple receiving videotapes recording their house's facade and later its inside. Lastly, although the sensory-motor link doesn't subordinate the camera movements and the cuts anymore, their rhythmic conjunction generates a quick succession of an enigmatic situation, the situation's excess of Fred's perception, and his inaction (Deleuze, 1986b, p. 20). The scene's story either describes a husband searching his house, and, hence, lacks a meaning, that is, an interpretation of this clear activity (why does he do that?); or its meaning, in unfathomable ways, exceeds that which the movie displays.

Lost Highway and I Build Something

When Fred goes into temporary paralysis after the phone rings twice, my inner detective kicks into overdrive. Where have I seen a phone ringing in the movie before? In the party scene, Fred called the couple's landline and the Mystery Man picked up after two rings. The Mystery Man spoke to Fred at the party and from his own landline at the same time. When is before and when is later? Where is Fred during the party and where is the Mystery Man? After the party, who is in the house when the phone rings other than Fred? Is Fred the Mystery Man or vice versa? Yet one only saw Fred, who was searching his house after the party and was temporarily paralyzed after the phone rang twice. At this time in the movie, one can't establish a clear link between the Mystery Man and Fred. The movie suggests something—the phone rang twice in both scenes; the Mystery Man spoke to Fred from Fred's landline—but that's it. The scene affected me; it confronted me with a choice. I could either follow hints in the scenes beforehand and my interpretations of them—are Fred and the Mystery Man the same person—or just take in the movie's plot as a narrative, that is, a contingent effect of camera and editing that doesn't offer closure and doesn't need to form a coherent whole together with my perception and interpretation.[22]

22 Deleuze understands cinematic narrative as a secondary by-product of primary camera movements and cuts: "Narrative in cinema is like the imaginary: it's a very indirect product of motion and time, rather than the other way around. Cinema always narrates what the image's movements and times make it narrate. If the motion's governed by a sensory-motor scheme, if it shows a character reacting to a situation, then you get a story." (Deleuze, 1995, p.59)

The first time I watched the movie, scenes like these especially struck me because I didn't have to make sense of them but experienced them aesthetically—meaning a prioritizing of the conjunction of camera movements, cuts, sound, colors, and lighting and a relativization of plot as an effect—letting them affect and resonate with me. The unique interplay of my subjectivity, environment, the movie, and the context of the movie's viewing produced the specific function of aesthetic viewing and affective processing (what resonates with me) (Deleuze, 1995, pp. 8–9). Such a singular function differs from the (pre-)designed purpose of a movie—to be bought, rented, viewed, and discussed—because the function becomes in the spontaneous relating of the movie to unforeseen exterior components—a piece of music sampling a ripped film copy (Smith, 2018, p.99–100).[23] How *Lost Highway* functioned with me absolved me of the need to organize the movie's plot, its suggestions, and my interpretations into a coherent whole. Instead, the movie operated on me. Likewise, the movie didn't need to produce a plot from sequences of actions, situations, the character's perception of the situations, and the character's reaction to that perception; on the contrary, it could reveal how its contingent narrative depends on the intersection of camera movements and cuts. Rather than providing a legible plot according to the audience's clichés, the motion picture could affect me.

How Lost Highway and I Fail

On the one hand, *Lost Highway*'s aesthetic mimesis of a film noir triggers my inner detective. In this apparent formal 'imitation' I'd include the movie's suspenseful atmosphere, the characters of the femme fatale, the gangster, and the mysterious stranger, the contrast between the shadows and stark lighting, the color palate's emphasis on black, yellow, and red, the thrilling but smooth jazzy film score by Angelo Badalamenti, but also the tracing of actions gradually disclosing Fred's double murder of his wife Alice/Renee, Mr. Eddy/Dick Laurent, and Pete's killing of Andy. On top of that, *Lost Highway*, despite its unconventionality, never suggests a complete departure from the medium of a feature film to an art flick. And thus, the movie's narration's constant simulation of an intelligible plot provides my inner detective with clues. On the other hand, the sheer excess of the movie operates directly on me. *Lost Highway's* weird and unexpected but somehow working combination of a soundtrack ranging from haunting ambient, pulsating and feverish free jazz to harsh rock and industrial, fear, over-saturated colors, eccentric characters, goofball humor, and shocking (sexual) violence just runs me right over. The movie's addition of the occasional breakdown and frequent stuttering of the action-situation-new/modified action sequence overwhelms me even more. Since I, the setting of the screening, and *Lost Highway* changed with each viewing (given that contemporary debates reevaluated the movie, didn't talk about it, or somehow related to it or the issues it deals with; other cultural products explicitly or implicitly cited it, etc.), the movie affected me differently and, likewise, created different arrangements between its environment and mine, resulting in different techniques of viewing the movie. As long as I didn't write about *Lost Highway*, I only watched it when I didn't recall it anymore in detail, so once every couple of years. Each time the movie completely overwhelmed me, and, thus, I never lost myself in ruminations about the plot nor pedantically focused just on the cuts between scenes, for instance. The movie carried me away and I rode with it. Despite my discomfort, that was the beauty of my experience. Unsurprisingly, viewing the movie for the purpose of writing this contribution took that away.

My intention to experience the movie aesthetically yet again and process it into resonances in order to write this paper re-ordered the relation between *Lost Highway*, my environment, and the context of the movie's screening into a rigid arrangement. I intentionally decided how to watch the movie and analyzed it accordingly. Hence, my writing process reduced the viewing of the movie to a one-way transfer of its content to me for the purpose of a vaguely Deleuzian analysis. I wanted *Lost Highway* to repeat my viewing experiences exactly to date. I 'produced' the movie "with a certain purpose in mind" (Smith, 2018, p. 99). I desired it to "carry out that purpose in a predictable manner" (ibid.). I didn't want *Lost Highway* and me to create anything new, anything

23 Smith draws on DG's discussion of a knife-rest in *Anti-Oedipus* for the purpose of his elaboration of DG's concept of machines and their functions—and how DG's machines and their function differ from common sense machines: "Given a certain effect, what machine is capable of producing it? And given a certain machine, what can it be used for? Can we possibly guess, for instance, what a knife rest is used for if all we are given is a geometrical description of it?" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1983, p.3)

else anymore (Deleuze, 2006, pp. 218, 220), but to give me that "dead repetition of the same" (Smith, 2018, p. 99) of a commonsense machine.

In the scene of the couple in the house, Fred re-perceives the situation between 35:51 and 35:54, after he comes to his senses again. He reevaluates the situation: Before, he was worried. Fred searched the house. No one was in it except him. Hence, Fred can return to his wife and does so in order to re-enter the house with her. This sequence re-establishes the action-situation-modified action sensory-motor scheme. Even though Fred does that, something seems off with him. Throughout the scene, Fred moves very slowly, aimlessly, and seems absent-minded. Renee also can't read her husband well. After entering the house together, Fred stands in the bedroom. He steps into the doorway of the bathroom, where he looks at Renee removing her makeup. When Renee notices Fred's glance, she pauses and regards Fred somewhat anxiously through the mirror. Fred returns to the bedroom, takes off his jacket and puts it in the wardrobe. Then, he disappears into the darkness of the hallway connecting the bedroom to the house. Still in the bathroom, Renee, hunched over the sink, washes her face. Suddenly, she seems to notice something off and has a disturbed look on her face. Meanwhile, in the darkness, Fred stares at himself in a mirror. When Renee returns to the bedroom, she frightenedly notices that Fred isn't there. Afterwards, she peeks into the darkness of the hallway, yells Fred's name, and later, 'Fred? Fred, where are you?' Renee moves back to the bedroom. Two humanoid shadows traverse the living room. Later, Fred walks through the dark hallway, probably in the direction of the bedroom. With a dark screen, the scene ends at 40:16.

As this summary proves, after the breakdown of the sensory-motor link, the previously smooth succession of actions–fragment of the original situation–new action sequences and the movement of the characters through these sequences still stutters. As for the stutter of the A–S–A', i.e., the sequence of Fred looking at Renee, Renee returning a disturbed glance in the mirror, Fred taking off his jacket and disappearing develops jerkily—despite the long, steady shots with few cuts that mainly switch from Fred to Renee or vice versa—and the actions don't causally build on each other. Concerning the characters' movement, at 37:26, Fred slowly recognizes something outside the frame and then, walks into that direction in a daze. And the narration, likewise, stammers incoherently. I can describe what happens after they enter the house intelligibly but can't explain the point of the scene: It figures as something overly symbolic—the transformation of the husband into a killer—and/or very mundane: A couple that doesn't communicate well, returns after a party, and goes to bed. One can speculate in many directions, but that's all.

From the perspective of a formal analysis, the scene rather generically deploys elements of the psychoanalytic representation of dreams, such as its excessive use of darkness, red, symbolic objects, and ambient drone. However, the scene's stilted and naive delivery doesn't reflect this obvious reference at all. Despite this formal unoriginality, the camera and editing work achieves something in this scene. After the couple enters the house, the camera hardly moves, in contrast to its actant-like devouring and pacing movement that the cuts only support when Fred searches the house. Only once in a while it slowly picks up movement, when it starts following a character as they almost exit the frame—when Fred walks from the bedroom into the adjoining hallway—or slightly traces the movement of a character—Renee washing her face, turning into the direction of the camera, seeming alarmed. Mainly, the characters move through static and long wide-angle shots. The cuts do the real work here: They cut from Renee's to Fred's face, from one room to another, from a headshot of Fred to a wide-angle shot of him in the bedroom. They separate the characters temporally (after each other) and spatially (in different rooms). Thus, in the scene's first part of Fred's searching the residence, the camera moves as a third uncanny force in the house. The camera's motion, again, speaks to the beginning of the movie, when the couple, first, at 10:15 to 12:59, receive a video tape with a shot of their house's facade; later, from 19:18 until 22:28, just before the party scene at Andy's, they get a tape of the inside of their house and, more eerily even, of them asleep in their bedroom, as if the camcorder recorded them from the ceiling. In contrast, in the scene's second part of the couple in the house, the cuts create an uncomfortable length in the absence of camera movement, a drawn-out time, and division between the characters. Even though in both parts a clear situation, fathomable actions, and especially a causal link between them are lacking, the movement's force in

the first part and the heavy duration of the second one affected me differently: My affect changed from terror to anticipating uneasiness. Accordingly, the scene's camera and editing work can operate directly on me, with their by-product of narrative only interfering afterwards.

From another perspective, however, the successive actions—Fred's search of the house, the couple's entering of the house, Renee's getting ready for bed, Fred's disappearance, Renee's call for Fred, and the shadows' crossing of the living room—simply operate elliptical. While they all veil the situation, they, likewise, function as indexes of the original situation with each action disclosing more, something different from the initial situation of Dick Laurent's death (Deleuze, 1982). After Fred disappears into the darkness at the end of the couple in the house scene, in the successive scene, Fred receives another videotape in the morning and watches it alone. At 42:03, he sees himself screaming, covered in blood, and kneeling beside Renee's dead and mutilated body. Even though the shot neither shows the act of murder nor Fred with a weapon, the tape fills the gap between last night and the morning with Fred's killing of Renee. The narration quickly assimilates the temporary breakdown of the sensory-motor schema—Fred's paralysis—and its stuttering—the rendering of the couple in the house—into the larger, overarching plot as a narrative fragment that makes sense later.

When I viewed the movie repeatedly to write this chapter, I already had Fred's murder of Renee/Alice and the Mystery Man and Fred's killing of Mr. Eddy/Dick Laurent in mind. I frantically tried to connect the scene of Fred searching the house and the couple in the house to that. My reconstruction of the events went something like this: Before, Fred was worried. He searched the house. Fine, he then acted a little funny, but eventually returned to Renee and entered the house with her. Again, he acts weird. Renee feels uneasy with him watching her. He disappears. Renee worries. Fred kills her. He understands that he murdered Renee. Much later you understand that Fred killed Mr. Eddy/Dick Laurent beforehand because he hired Alice/Renee for his production of pornographic movies and was her lover. In these viewings of *Lost Highway*, the camera and editing work couldn't affect me anymore, even though this initiated the whole creative process of my first viewing. The scene's (couple in the house) contrived style and excessively symbolic images, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, its incoherent narration of a very simple, (sadly) omnipresent, and well-known story—a domestic femicide committed by a possessive husband—increasingly frustrated me. Especially because I wanted to be affected by *Lost Highway,* and not crack the case of what *really* happens. While my detective enjoyed the pleasure of cracking the case, the simplicity of the revealed content disappointed me: Particularly, viewing the movie like this, *Lost Highway* locks me into Fred's/Pete's mind and I need to follow his/their actions, to understand—from Pete's perspective—why he kills his erotic rival Andy and why Fred murders Dick Laurent, and how each character—Fred/Pete, Renee/Alice, Andy, Mr. Eddy/Dick Laurent—meets their final and inevitable destination of death.

Conclusion

Certainly, *Lost Highway* feeds into our preconceived notions of intellectually challenging movies. Its length, confusing temporality, the double roles of some actors, the recurrence of some figures in Fred's and Pete's life alike, for instance, would not work in a typical Adam Sandler comedy (no judgment intended). However, we framed the movie's overwhelmingness, ambiguous narration, and 'lack' of a central point/message as achievements. But doesn't that simply cherish a postmodern aesthetics now of stale taste? The point of our endeavor was precisely not to celebrate the debatable 'postmodernism' of *Lost Highway* but the effects of this movie on us as viewers:[24] We investigated the way the movie affected us and/or simultaneously generated different plots. On the remaining pages, we redirect the question of the movie's 'success' or 'failure' to these effects. Given the premises we outlined above: Does the movie work and where does it fail? And, building on our different approaches to this question, how do our perceptions of *Lost Highway's* success or failure relate to each other?

24 See Wallace (2013, p. 168–170, 185–186, 200–201) on this in his essay on the making of *Lost Highway*: David Lynch's movies are postmodern, but don't belong to the full-on dry high-brow postmodernism, and, while they use filmic conventions, they are neither family friendly Hollywood movies.

Coming from narrative theory, there's an opportunity for pleasurably watching the movie, but it does not suffice to fall back on its 'aesthetics' in the common sense of the word, i.e., focusing only on its music, colors and atmosphere without trying to make sense of it. Rather, *Lost Highway's* narrative ambiguity still works on us and enables repeated viewings of the movie despite the obsolescence of the excitement of postmodernism.

One way to enjoy the movie is to work through the different ways of reading its plot knowing that none of them is all-encompassing or dominant. You embrace the reading that readily approaches you in one viewing. However, you accept its functionality not as an all-encompassing one. Thus, you try to acknowledge the simultaneous co-existence of other equivalent plots without overwriting the ones already written into your mind. We can thrive in the exhaustion caused by this cognitive challenge, although—or likely because—we have been taught that, if we are indeed searching for a plot, we can expect to be able to put events together into *one* plot; this plot should be ultimately backed up by a story that agrees with the rules of temporal linearity. Instead of feeding into these expectations, *Lost Highway* presents us with its Möbius strip of plots that defies those rules and, ultimately, with its simultaneous plots bring us to our limits of performing the very act of imagining the linear version of events, its story. This is, of course, a facultative approach to watching a movie like *Lost Highway* and tracing its workings and effects; it is not an answer to how Lynch's movies work in general, even though they may often have similar effects.

From a Deleuzian point of view, a movie should affect the viewer, it should build a singular connection between the viewer, the movie, and the viewer's environment that breaks the arrangement between the movie and the viewer who consumes the cultural commodity for the sole purpose of entertainment. If one watches *Lost Highway* seldomly, it operates as a powerful tool in the service of a rearrangement and/or building, precisely because its mimesis of a film noir and its simulation of an intelligible plot lure the viewer in and then, sucker-punch her with an overwhelming ride that increasingly disposes of these crutches of Hollywood conventionality. However, when I watched the movie repeatedly for this contribution, exactly the mimetic form and the plot of *Lost Highway* conjured an annoying inner detective within me who set out to finally crack the case with the *one* all-encompassing, exhaustive interpretation. This triangle of sadness successfully turned the movie into a failure: The affect was transformed into interchangeable interpretations, which managed to reorder *Lost Highway* and my ecology into one of object, world, and interpreting consciousness. Therefore, I could no longer be content with taking in the Mystery Man and Fred as two different characters. The consideration that these two different characters might be one and the same person caused an unpleasant cognitive dissonance. Thus, the movie failed me as a viewer who was looking for an affective viewing. Once the interpretations started, they offered neither closure nor pleasure but only successfully repressed the potential of *Lost Highway* to work as filmic material that needn't be interpreted, that can affect.

Interestingly, Paul ended up in the spot where Saskia started her analysis, that is, no single interpretation could provide closure or satisfaction for his awakened hermeneutic desire. If one remains stuck in an analysis of the movie's affects and production of something 'new', then, *Lost Highway* can only fail. Can Saskia's attempt to accept and embrace the simultaneity of plots provide an exit to this blockage encountered by Paul? Clearly, a focus on interpretations can never satisfy a non-representational inquiry because such an inquiry rejects meaning as a relevant epistemic category. However, interpretations do not only produce meaning but also other a/effects, especially, their simultaneity—as Saskia pointed out. Interestingly, both parts of this contribution addressed the affect of a 'too much', but they framed it differently. The lazy viewer of Paul experienced cognitive dissonance as something unpleasant—that Fred and the Mystery Man might be two different characters and the same person at the same time—whereas Saskia would frame the challenge of this, and the effect of its strain, as engaging (and thus an aesthetic pleasure).

At the same time, the challenge of narrative ambiguity still resides within the realms of interpretational dynamics. One can still interpret, but has to change the practice of interpretation, i.e., absolving the interpreter from the postulate of unequivocality.

There is also a different kind of overload, an excess, that can only be encountered, when one either sees the movie for the first time or one's memories of *Lost Highway* start to blur. Now, the combination of the movie's length, its confusing mix of actors and characters, and its out-of-joint temporality feels excessive, the movie is too much. This excess differs from the unsortable neatness of a cognitive overload. Instead of an emotion that can be traced back to a cause, this excess is an unrecognizable affect: You don't know what the point was, but somehow *Lost Highway* hit you.

Maybe David Foster Wallace was right all along (at least, in this regard):

> This may in fact be Lynch's true and only agenda—just to get inside your head. He seems to care more about penetrating your head than about what he does once he's in there. Is this good art? It's hard to say. It seems—once again—either ingenuous or psychopathic. It sure is different, anyway.[25]

Let us finish by saying: He got in ours, that's for sure.

25 Wallace 2013, 171.

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Seventh Chapter: Short Essay About Birthdays

Felix Berensköttter

Do birthdays matter? The intuitive answer is yes, they do. A birthday reminds us of the inaugural moment of entering the world and of growing up/older. It is an occasion to mark this process by adding another year and, occasionally, pass certain (shared) milestones in our life journey. As such, birthdays are moments of recognition of the Self as a temporal being and seem important events in our calendar year, worthy of celebration. They have an existential dimension. Given that, we might try to glean an answer from one of the key thinkers of existentialist phenomenology, Martin Heidegger. That is not straightforward because, as far as I am aware, Heidegger never explicitly discussed whether and how to value the day of our birth. However, he offers a philosophical terrain within and against which this question can be explored.

In his influential treatise *Being and Time*, Heidegger grapples with the meaning of being by focusing on the temporality of life and the fact that the existence of every human unfolds from birth to death (Heidegger 1953). For Heidegger, our unfolding is not meaningfully measured by counting how many years we spent on this planet. Like Henri Bergson before him (Massey 2014), he rejects the notion of scientific time, a representation of the flow of time as a neat succession of quantitatively measurable units that can be objectively grasped by instruments such as the clock or the calendar. From his existentialist perspective, a date on the calendar that is presented as the same day and month, year on year, has no meaningful relevance for our being in time. A meaningful understanding is generated, rather, through experiences, which are gradually built up as we discover and disclose the world and ourselves within it. In Heidegger's logic, an experience that enables us to grasp our temporality in full and provides a sense of 'authentic' being must bring us to face to face with the possibility of our own death.

The event [*Ereignis*] plays an important role in this regard. From a Heideggerian perspective, the event is a profound intellectual and practical experience that pulls *Dasein* out of the comfort of the everyday and provides a primordial moment clarity of being in time (Heidegger 2013). Crudely put, I see two readings of how an event enables this: One version that leans towards essentialism and tends to be associated with Heidegger sees the event as a grounding experience, both emotionally and the cognitively, that enables Being to 'find itself'. Another version, closer to a Bergsonian reading of how we process experiences, considers the event as a moment of radical openness that allows for transformation and new possibilities of being. While there is a tension between these two accounts, including over whether the event is a moment of discovery and certainty, or an open source of creativity, in both accounts the event gives Being something like an emancipatory moment of enlightenment. Moreover, and importantly, for Heidegger an event that brings us to face the possibility of our own death is a singularising experience that cannot be shared with others.

It is hard to see the birthday – both the actual day of birth and subsequent days marking the occasion – constituting such an event. Of course, the moment of birth is the original primal event that brings us into the world and constitutes *Dasein,* to use Heidegger's terminology. As such, it is profound. Yet, the moment of birth is not an experience we grasp consciously or have a memory of. A newly born has very little capacity to reflect about its being in the world, let alone understand that it now is unfolding towards death. Heidegger describes birth as being 'thrown into the world', an event that happens to us, which we did not ask for or have any control over. It happens *ungefragt*. However, the moment of 'delivery' usually *is* intimately experienced by the mother and, more indirectly, by those who witness and are closely emotionally connected to the born child, such the mother's partner.[1] For them, birth has the status of a significant event that becomes lodged in their memory, and, in that sense, it has an important social dimension from the start.

Heidegger's account of Being's subsequent unfolding – or, we might say, growing up – also cautions against reading annual celebrations of this day as events containing extraordinary experiences. Contrary to Hannah Arendt's reading of natality as a new beginning and of creative possibilities (Arendt 1998), Heidegger sees Be-

1 Of course, there is a big difference between the mother's experience of giving birth, often under significant pain, and the partner who witnesses it as a bystander. Thus, we might argue that their respective experiences constitute different events, or different facets of one event, the arrival of their child in the world.

ing captured in a world dominated by everyday routines and superficial forms of public communication that put being in a mode of "groundless floatation" (Heidegger, 1953: §37, 177). Heidegger speaks of Being "swirled into the un-authenticity [*Uneigentlichkeit*] of the *Man*",[2] moving us away from grasping our very own being in time (Ibid., 179). In this vein, birthday celebrations and associated practices –purchasing presents, messages on social media, spending money on a party – are not events but rituals that satisfy societal and often commercialised expectations. The key issue with such birthday rituals, from a Heideggerian perspective, is also that they are momentarily acts in the present that do not require Being to reflect on its temporality and therefore do not provide a source for meaningful temporal orientation (Heidegger, 1953: 346). Even when celebratory routines are logically linked to an event in the past (birth) and a tradition of marking its occasion, they provide little incentive for engaging historical Being and reflecting on where we come from. Similarly, even as they indicate a step into the future by virtue of 'getting older', birthday celebrations tend not to involve a substantive engagement with the possibility of death. If anything, as routine practices embedded in the *Man*, they are part of a structure designed to avoid deeper reflection about Being's finitude and distract from the anxiety this may cause.

But let us not get caught up in Heideggerian reasoning. Even if birthday celebrations have elements of an annual ritual, I would argue that they are not, at least not necessarily, embedded in the *Man*. Rather, they give us a reason to temporarily suspend the pressures of the everyday. Birthdays matter because they *are* an opportunity to pull back from the everyday and spend the day differently. Granted, not every birthday matters in the same way, and we cannot plan their eventfulness in an existential sense. But they *are* an opportunity to meaningfully engage with our being in time: A birthday invites us to look back at our younger selves and consider how far we travelled, to see the new number representing our age as representing a new stage in our life, or as an indicator of being a step closer to old age, which we may (or may not) associate with fragility and death. In any case, just as our biographies are not formed in isolation, birthdays rarely if ever are singularising events. Instead of expecting birthdays to provide an authentic experience in the Heideggerian sense, we turn them into an intimate space for friends and family, an event that allows us to spend 'quality time' with others we care about and who care about our being in the world. In this reading, birthdays mark Being as a social creature that shares its lifeworld with others – parents who have a memory of our birth as a significant event, friends who entered our lives at different points and experienced important moments with us, partners who make plans with us for the future. And they don't need a formal invitation. Just as birth is a shared event, birthdays are not moments we own in isolation; they are moments when family and friends join us to celebrate being in time together. As such, they are special.

2 Heidegger discusses the *Man*, which can be translated as 'one' or 'they', as the dominant structure of being in the world. Formed through loose communication and everyday routines, it enables us to seemingly obtain knowledge of 'everything' and embedding ourselves in a world where everything appears to be 'in order' (Heidegger 1953: 167–177). The temporal experience of being in the *Man* is the presence, characterised by forgetfulness of what was and a lack of genuine engagement with what could be. As such, Heidegger agues, being in the *Man* is inauthentic.

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Ways of Concluding: Solitary Engagements and Living-Together

Quintus Immisch

1) Social structure

To begin with Proust, the only thing more difficult than adhering to a regime is not to impose it on others: "il y a une chose plus difficile encore que de s'astreindre à un régime, c'est de ne pas l'imposer aux autres."[1] *Régime* here can mean many things, from a medical indication to a diet to a general lifestyle. Proust's aphorism contains a skepticism about being with others. Apparently, the normative coercion of such a régime becomes easier when we can direct it at others. At the very least, Proust makes us think about our desire to impose rules on others. Rules may not be a bad thing at first: We need rules to cross the street safely, not just once, but every day, as often as we want. Rules make life a bit more expectable, they introduce repetition and repeatability, seriality. They are a way for us to structure time, to shape it through specific, perceptible events. A clear disadvantage of rules, on the other hand, can be that they are exhausting or boring to follow; sometimes they seem pointless, meant for other people and situations. Maybe this or that is just not *your* event. This is certainly also the subtext in Proust's skepticism: the *régime* imposed here is above all a temporal one, referring to the novel's central topic: time. The *Lost Time* of the novel's title is, after all, that time which is no longer available because we are too much influenced by modern life and its regulations, its temporalities, its structuring events. One can certainly think about this in a 7-volume work of fiction, which, by the way, is often boring and makes us *lose time*. Since we had less time available, we took other paths. We wanted to explore the concept of the event while considering how the academic norms of thinking and writing, the academic *régime*, could potentially be set aside: We wanted to deal with the event, but without prescribing a way or manner or *régime* (Paul calls this 'undisciplined').

Now, if our premise to this edited volume was to prescribe neither a concept nor a definition of the event from which to explore a thematic field, epistemic constellations, experiences, and practices, then, this anthology could have been, in a sense, a solitary affair. After all, we haven't even determined a 'method' or right way to proceed, and, instead, have embraced the uncertain. A theoretical exploration, an affective protocol, a narrative, something figurative: everyone could do what they wanted, "stumbling among snatches, between the bounds of different fields of knowledge, flavors".[2] Within or between these fields, we would have all gone in different directions, seen different things along the way, we would all have had something different, a different story to tell: as many kinds of events as people. Indeed, if having a method means "to fetishize the goal as a privileged place, to the detriment of other possible places", in our solitary explorations, we all preferred the unmethodical and "eccentric path of possibilities, stumbling among blocks of knowledge."[3]

However, our project turned out a less lonely affair because, as a matter of fact, we did feel something like an epistemic proximity. In fact, during our explorations we all went to similar places, got into areas and fields of 'knowledge' where perhaps one of us had already been or was yet to go. While we might have been in the same places, topoi, ‚fields of knowledge, in some kind of shared space, we certainly visited at different times. That being said, did this topical proximity ultimately lead us all to do the same thing, somehow? Certainly, in our contemporary moment of the post- after postmodernism and poststructuralism (amongst others), we struggled to imagine that we could discover anything 'new' whilst walking on such familiar paths.

"Two roads diverged in a wood, and I,
I took the one less traveled by"?[4]

Alas, today, I must burden Robert Frost's spatial imaginary with the fact that probably both of these roads are suffering from epistemic overtourism: All paths have already been trodden extensively. That one can neither be original in 2023 anymore nor innovative is a given. And so the stories of our 'roads taken' will resemble each

1 Marcel Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu*, vol. V, *Sodome et Gomorrhe II*, Paris: Gallimard 1924, p. 190–191.
2 Roland Barthes, *How to Live Together. Novelistic Simulations of Some Everyday Spaces*, edited by Claude Coste, translated by Kate Briggs, New York: Columbia University Press 2013, p. 4.
3 Barthes, *How to Live Together*, p. 133.
4 Robert Frost, "The Road Not Taken", *The Atlantic Monthly* 116/2 (August 1915), p. 223.

other, the narratives of the paths we have traveled may be similar to each other, just as "any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another".[5] Exploring the same 'fields of knowledge', we will somehow quote each other and everything that has already been written about it, with our contributions establishing a corpus full of similarities.

Similar, yes, but not identical either, that is why, when looking at our panorama of paths taken, we can see some overlaps, while other features may not be shared by all the contributors. It is precisely these 'family resemblances' that I will now focus on. Several of the contributions in this volume have in common that they interrogate the event–albeit on very different levels–from similar directions: In similar ways, these texts only construct the event as an effect of their mode of questioning, uncertainty, and not knowing. This is not simply the modern pose of denial, but these constitute productive approaches to the event as something that may not even exist. While this vagueness might steer us in various directions, we've still forged an important similarity: the social dimension of the event in the epistemic community of this edited volume. I aim to illustrate these twin aspects—the concept's vagueness and its social implications—using the Saskia and Paul's contribution on *Lost Highway*, Mrunmayee's "Penelope Unravelling," and my essay on Proust.

Paul and Saskia provoke a whole set of questions right away in their exploration of *Lost Highway*. They show how unclear an event, that is, in this case the event of a movie and its events of life and murder in a marriage, can be concerning the involved parties: Who is this event for? From whose point of view? What are its consequences, and for whom? And even more generally, who exists at all: Who is there? As if this uncertainty of people involved wasn't enough, they reflect these questions on the level of their writing, offering us two readings of a film whose appeal is to momentarily create an eventful constellation of, indeed, Saskia and Paul: for once, they allow two perhaps disconnected thoughts to make sense to us and become a crystallization of pleasure. And these two are so sneaky in letting us have fun, yet they annoy us with their questions, questions, questions. The ambiguous arrangement of characters in this interpretation of *Lost Highway* confounds our scientific protocols, which typically involve a researching subject studying an object. However, amid the myriad transformations within the film and Saskia and Paul's creative exploration, it becomes challenging to ascertain if we can even continue discussing 'subjects' and 'objects' in this context. Despite all this ambiguity, one thing remains certain: the event brings people together—not just Saskia and Paul but also within the film itself. Let's not forget that in *Lost Highway*, on one hand, the event occurs in the midst of a married life, a paradigmatic form of institutionalized living together. On the other hand, it is linked to an idea of murder, that is, to the elemental 'betrayal' of human community.

In her marvelously open piece, Mrunmayee explores the possibility of events in postcolonial constellations. Following the mythological figure of Penelope, who unravels at night the threads of the fabric she wove during the day, Mrunmayee asks about iterative overwritings of colonialism in a world, in which "even the air you breathe is postcolonial". But just as a cloud of breath quickly evaporates, in this harrowing contribution we need the patience of looking quite slowly in order to be able to accept that just an event, that one event, that *the* event here is apparently not enough. Events would have to happen all the time, with every breath. But if an event is obviously insufficient, can it still be an event? Or is it simply merciless time passing, second by second, breath by breath, a time imposed on us, by subjects, discourses, by society? This ambiguity arises from the fact that the event in "Penelope Unravelling" is completely dissolved by its strongly iterative nature: the frequency blurs it, and along with it, it blurs time. To cope with the postcolonial world, we tend to need permanently events: multiple events in one's biography, but also multiple on a global macroscale. Indeed, we can see here, that emancipation or liberation from coloniality cannot be a single event, but must happen constantly, just as Penelope is unravelling not just one time but every night. This contribution obviously sees the event as a social instance. Penelope (protagonist, by the way, in a myth about 'fidelity' and marriage) asks quite explicitly about identities (and their boxes) and invokes the backdrop of global colonialism as a form of non-coexistence or forbidden coexistence, not without grasping its implications for the precarious present.

In my contribution on Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*, a queer event emerges from the perspective of a minoritarian (i.e., marginalized but holding the potential for emancipation) epistemology and subjectivity,

5 Julia Kristeva, "Word, Dialogue and Novel", in: *The Julia Kristeva Reader*, edited by Toril Moi, New York: Columbia University Press 1986, pp. 34–61, p. 37.

evoking the question of how precarious subjects are endowed with a queer temporality and how they can respond in and to a community that rejects them. However, the queer event is almost invisible, and can be easily overlooked, which makes its relevance questionable. What is such an event supposed to accomplish if it doesn't impose itself? If we must learn how to perceive it? One kind of dissolution here takes place in space: The event is very literally pulled from its spatial margins and extended into its surrounding contexts and infrastructural settings. In fact, this is a question of the agency of 'things', of the material object, that may seem familiar from art theory: Is something 'art', because a special information is 'stored' in this thing, or does it become so only by the context (e.g., us, who consider it as art)? Similarly, things in *In Search of Lost Time* first do nothing, and the event can only unfold in the context of a setting. Besides questioning the event's epistemology, this contribution also explores its social aspect: The contrast between chrononormativity and queer temporality focuses on the question of life in community and its limits. Conflicts are, after all, always forms of contact, and difficult coexistence, in which perhaps only one of the two antagonists 'lives', but both are involved.

These three contributions demonstrate an intriguing interplay, combining a radical questioning of a 'theory' of the event with a firm emphasis on its social aspect: Their different ways of looking at the event are enigmatic, questioning, and they only allow us to approach the event without knowing or knowledge. Rather, the contributions question what we call knowing. Clear contours of events disappear here, overlap in part, but also leave large voids. Are all our contributions enigmatic then? Is there even a reason to publish them side by side or to read them together?

> No tree sees the next one,
> Every one is alone?[6]

Not quite. However solitary the explorations of these events may be: their events are not. In our solitary, rule-free explorations, we have apparently failed to do precisely one thing: to think our epistemic solitude. Instead, the events we engage with take place in joyful togetherness. Our events never happen to one person alone, in an unobserved moment, at an unusual time. Instead, we seem to be dealing here with events that, whether peaceful or conflictual, connect people with one another or, in any case, presuppose or thematize connections between individuals and collectives. In fact, I think that all three contributions postulate a social structure of the event. We do not have the event on one side and the subject on the other; instead, a multiplication of the subject often constitutes the event.

2) Living Together

By understanding the event as decentered and placing it in the context of the question of living together, these three contributions are not without predecessors or conceptual history. In his first lecture at the Collège de France in Paris, literary theorist and semiologist Roland Barthes follows a personal 'phantasm', namely, the idea of an *idiorrhythmic* life in a community, which would offer enough space for individual life rhythms but would still create something like social cohesion. Barthes borrows the concept of *idiorrhythmy* from monastic communities on Mount Athos in Greece, where the monks come together only for prayer and are free to organize their lives independently the rest of the time. The lecture circles the concept in various topics, figures of thought and scenes, one of which is also 'the event'.[7] Barthes observes that groups often are formed when people wait together for an event. Waiting together endows the group with a *telos*; no idiosyncratic togetherness, everything has its purpose.[8] Certainly, for Barthes, these telos-driven groups lack appeal as he favors intrinsic motivation as the basis for being together. Discouraged by such teleological examples of living together, he turns to solitude: "Because Living-Together, especially idiorrhythmic Living-Together, must incorporate the

6 Hermann Hesse, "Im Nebel", quoted from Gunnar Decker, *The Wanderer and his Shadow*, translated by Peter Lewis, Cambridge, Mass/London, England: Harvard University Press 2018, p. 720.

7 Roland Barthes, *How to Live Together. Novelistic Simulations of Some Everyday Spaces*, edited by Claude Coste, translated by Kate Briggs, New York: Columbia University Press 2013, pp. 84–86.

8 Barthes, *How to Live Together*, pp. 46–47.

values of Living-Alone as its paradigmatic opposite."[9] In this exploration of the solitary life, Barthes engages with Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*. This novel tells of Crusoe's shipwreck, and then of his life on an island, where he first lives solitarily and eventually comes into Friday's company. Living alone on an island, Barthes analyzes, means above all uneventfulness. Here, Barthes dismisses a classic, intuitive attribution when he links uneventfulness with pleasure, but event with pure boredom. In fact, the modern novel–let us think of Proust–namely, suggests quite the opposite: the uneventful boredom of the novel contrasts with the exciting and eventful modern world where everything is getting faster. Completely different is Barthes, who discovers pleasure precisely in the absence of events: "Its charm is precisely that of a day-to-day existence with no events."[10] And as soon as the events on the island set in, something is lost for Barthes. "I find I'm no longer able to fantasize about the way Robinson Crusoe organizes his life, his domestic set-up, the hut, the vines, the bucolic."[11] The events distract from the cozy imagination; indeed, for Barthes the events fill up, and quite spatially obstruct the imaginary space that had been opened by the eventlessness. The active subject of a reading *écriture* (that is, a reading that actually 'writes' the text, 'produces' it) becomes a rather passive hermeneutic subject that does not imagine, but only awaits the chronology of events.

> The event turns me into a different kind of subject. I become a subject of suspense, of the murder of the Father-I'm no longer a subject of the nest, of the Mother: the event as Father (Oedipus and the protocol of the event; all events are Oedipal). The charm of Robinson Crusoe = the non-event.[12]

The event mirrors the question of living together on a narrative level. Barthes recurs here to his own theory, set forth in *Le plaisir du texte*, that there are two different kinds of reading, to which also correspond two different kinds of texts. One kind is the text of *plaisir*, which is ultimately boring. It aims only at its end, lives entirely from the plot. Barthes classifies it as Oedipal, just as in the myth of Oedipus, the final revelation shows that Oedipus killed his own father, symbolizing the release of narrative tension. To read such a text would be "an Oedipal pleasure (to denude, to know, to learn the origin and the end)", and "every narrative (every unveiling of the truth) is a staging of the (absent, hidden, or hypostatized) father".[13] Such a reading runs towards the naked truth, and consequently represents a guided, ultimately second-rate pleasure. In contrast, Barthes positions the *jouissance* found in modernity, which focuses not on ultimate, progressive revelation, but momentary flashes; this would be the 'true', genuine desire. Let's go back to Crusoe: While reading Defoe's novel when events are still absent in the plot, there is a whole world to imagine. However, the introduction of the event piques the reader's curiosity, channeling it towards the end of the novel ('what happens next?'). In so doing, the event-plot precludes momentary pleasure and points to a later pleasure to be found at the end of the narrative; the event is thus paradoxically never related to the moment, always to the future. Barthes, on the contrary, desires momentary, present pleasure, which is then to be found in the uneventfulness and the imagination fueled by it.

That being said, Barthes concern in novels we may not know or even want to read, isn't just a literary game. Instead, a social phenomenon is evident here. Barthes prefers uneventfulness not just as a sort of literary taste, but also in society, as his critical analysis reveals: "[O]ur entire civilization is in the Will-to-Act".[14] Against this hostile society, populated by events and fathers to be killed, Barthes thus seeks the uneventful community: "To fantasize Living-Together as an everyday reality: to refuse, repel, violently reject the event. The event is the enemy of Living Together".[15]

And that's why he so fastidiously avoids the event throughout his lectures. He provides no definitions, no spectacular finds. Nothing much happens (we might think of a queer temporality of these lectures). Instead, he declares the lecture a failure and postpones its completion into the future: the event that is to come. This proleptic character of the lectures[16] is connected to the suspension of the event that makes the lecture a space

9 Barthes, *How to Live Together*, p. 84.
10 Barthes, *How to Live Together*, p. 84.
11 Barthes, *How to Live Together*, p. 84.
12 Barthes, *How to Live Together*, p. 84.
13 Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, edited by Richard Howard, translated by Richard Miller, New York: Hill and Wang 1998[23], p. 10.
14 Barthes, *How to Live Together*, p. 85.
15 Barthes, *How to Live Together*, p. 84.
16 Cfr. Patrick ffrench, "How to Live with Roland Barthes", *SubStance* 38/3 (2009), pp. 113–124.

for pleasurable imagining.

Barthes, whose skeptical attitude is certainly also fed by *the* event par excellence, May 1968,[17] thus decenters the event by removing it from our attention and banishing it from utopias; and, at the same time, he ties it to living together. Apparently, as we are Editing, Writing, and Encountering the Event, Barthes is our specter, or perhaps we, too, are Barthes' specters. Stuttering around, do we follow his way, or does he follow ours?

There's something different about Barthes' events, though. By being so afraid of the event, he endows it with a mythology. The event is concrete, it has a face, it is something that can (and must) be feared. The whole discourse on the event, this lecture, is it not ultimately a struggle against the 'absolutism of reality'?[18]

We, in turn, are not that interested in the concept of the event. We break it down into a multiplicity and stretch it into spaces. Our event is not the Other, it loses its contours, its difference. It does not even have to be kept at a distance, but now allows for similarities and proximities. It's not a radical rupture or an *epoche*: Instead, it can be smooth and transient. Now this, now that may be an event; in conjunction with other qualities, with contexts, we may notice an event here and there. Just as in the concept of family resemblance, soon one characteristic joins with others to form a community, then dissolves again, leaving room for new connections: a short handshake, actually like Paul and Saskia meeting briefly in their interpretations of *Lost Highway*; or in "Penelope," where new events are constantly unfolding in the postcolonial contemporary. Everyday life, where nothing special happens, and the event are no longer opposites at all but can temporarily coincide. And perhaps this is precisely what leads nowhere: Just as this conclusion leads nowhere, dissolves. Just as our original travels and our epistemic proximities lead nowhere. And just as our concept of the event leads nowhere. But at least we're not imposing a *régime*, be it dietary or epistemic. Instead, these texts raise questions about how we want to approach 'subjects' of study in the future: with critical distance, devoid of emotion, following a systematic methodology as Felski suggests of Critical Theory, or exploratively, perhaps in an openly subjective way with attachment.[19] Let's see.

17 Roland Barthes, "L'écriture de l'événement", *Communications* 12 (1968), pp. 108–112.

18 Hans Blumenberg, *Work on Myth*, translated by Robert M. Wallace, Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press 1985.

19 Cfr. Rita Felski, *The Limits of Critique*, Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press 2015; Elizabeth S. Anker/Rita Felski (ed.), *Critique and Postcritique,* Durham: Duke University Press 2017; Rita Felski, *Hooked. Art and Attachment*, Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press 2020.

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Afterword

Levi McLaughlin

This exciting birthday volume exemplifies the potential for mutually supportive collaboration to transcend the loneliness of existential terror. It is a multivarious resummoning of ideas and voices that tend to be silenced in formal discourses. It is freeing.

Through their contributions, the participants in this collection urge us to overcome the intimidating task of articulating a coherent thought. Writing, or even speaking, can trigger moments, or weeks or years, of anxiety-driven freezing. An incipient freeze precedes each enunciation. The arresting tyranny of the blank screen is ever-present. The urgency to create intellectual product smacks into the resistance of self-doubt. This resistance is cousin to other existential paralyses: confrontation with the laughably fleeting nature of our time on the planet. Our ludicrous individual irrelevance in the face of the cosmos.

Birthdays can be bleak this way. They reliably occasion outcry at the existential. I am no doubt guilty of this myself, but aging mostly means whining about inevitable metabolic realities that comprise existence for all organisms. Greeting a birthday with dread turns into cliché. But there is maybe an honesty to this process that's worth acknowledging. To feel one's time passing, and to mark it annually, invites a genuinely relatable paralysis. Oh shit. Time is short. Is this it? Will I be remembered? Do I matter to others? This is tough to overcome. Birthdays perennially pull this kind of existential dread to the surface.

To respond to Felix's observation in this collection, really to build on it, I suggest that birthdays indeed occasion a confrontation with being-in-the-world. Take even the most depressingly routinized ritual marker one can imagine, like an office party attended in a desultory fashion by uninterested coworkers who hum through "Happy Birthday" and watch impassively as you blow out a candle on a store-bought muffin. This awful gathering could trigger a dive into a yawning abyss, into an arresting apprehension of Dasein, "there-being," worthy of Heideggerian analysis. Under flickering fluorescent lights lodged in a drop ceiling, one could confront the raw reality that yeah, we're gonna die, and does it matter? Each passing year invites one to tick off passing anniversaries. Every year ratchets up the terror, hardens the freeze.

But buried in the mundanity of ritualized social obligations is immanent relational being, of maybe actually caring about one's relevance to others. Of pushing past self-involved moaning to prioritize the relevance of others. Of understanding oneself as a self necessarily in temporally contingent relationality to others. To affirm that relationality is constituted by exciting frictions that deserve much more passionate engagement than we tend to allow.

I'm not really interested in descrying whether the birthday counts as a Heideggerian event *qua* Heidegger. Nor am I qualified to do so. I'd rather focus on the inspiring camaraderie of the collective that saw this remarkable book come together and what it promises for the reader. I think back on the intensity of the Zoom meeting Paul organized in the morbid depths of the pandemic. In the worst doldrums of the Covid-19 era, when footholds on time slipped, when misreadings of social cues seemed to outnumber instances of mutual recognition, participants in this volume dedicated hours across multiple time zones to just riff. Riffing in the most heartwarming, honestly supportive ways.

The freedom to riff on ideas, to build without constantly tallying how a presentation or essay will "count" toward quantified imperatives: there is a spirit to this engagement that tends to slip into the spectral. Seeking to articulate voices that are conventionally marginalized, to let incomplete ideas play out, on their own terms, or remain frustratingly elusive, is the kind of intellectual work that gets sucked to the bottom of institutionally mandated norms. The birthday Zoom was itself spectral, proceeding over Zoom boxes. We all led spectral lives during lockdown, fractured through screens. It's a time I recall now mostly as jetlag without travel, jangled nerves.

The birthday Zoom combatted this norm. It was a fleeting link across multiple countries and living circumstances in the weirdest of times to collaborate on ideas and share sensations that so often go unvoiced. It was a temporary suspension of normative pressures that cultivate instinctual aversion to all but the most non-threatening, peer-reviewable product. It was a chance to exist outside a routinized timescale. To try shit out without concern about measuring its success against a relentless institutional imperative. To let the spec-

tral remain spectral.

I see specters interpenetrate between the collected pieces. Taylor's riff on Derrida's hauntology, on what she calls the "conjuring of co-conspirators," sang out in our mediated interactions. Taylor starts us off by inviting us to think about the exciting potential to recall subjectivities and perceive them on their own wavelengths, subjectivities that are conventionally reduced to tropes, or simply erased. She does this even as evidence for her object of inquiry, the Haitian Revolution, remains elusive, decays with the passage of time and erasure through imperialist pressures. She lets the people who powered the Haitian revolution and the details of its fifteen years of local and global intricacies demand to be understood via their own legibility, not through summary but as "inexhaustible threads."

Hauntings prevail in the other pieces, refusing to let the reader rest easy. Ideas float up, expressing a yearning that is always-already within each fumbled attempt to connect. Misconnections, or maybe non-connections, underlie agonized interactions in DM Braid's short fiction excerpt. Or maybe they underlie a failure to honestly interact. There is a spectral elusiveness to the quest for social certainties that drives the protagonist. This elusiveness informs the first-person view of most, arguably all, of the writers here. Arnaud's innovative, and jarring, cross-reading of Spengler and Deleuze/Guattari is an imaginative elixir that lets fantasies of civilizations grow and die, even as it invokes inquiry that fundamentally undermines fantastical thinking that propels nationalism. Empirical research is the enemy of nationalist fantasy, and yet these civilizational fantasies haunt us, refusing to die, persisting the face of evidence. Quintus guides us through a queering of temporalities in Proust, refusing to reduce temporal intricacies, choosing instead to let non-hegemonic perceptions of time proceed on their own pace. The queering of time in Quintus's chapter recalls for me the elusive temporality of what I instinctually characterize as the worst of the pandemic, revealing that this arduous period was in fact good in some ways—for those who could afford social distancing, that is. We were allowed to suspend all kinds of everyday routines to question our taken-for-granted measurements. It was a time out of time that permitted the failure, maybe only temporarily, of heteronormative measures of life stages and "responsible" schedules. Where were we supposed to be in our lives? What the fuck was a day, even? The fuck is it now?

Pursuit of unraveling is most fun in Mrunmayee's "Penelope Unraveling." She writes provocatively of loneliness, of rebellion. It's an autotheoretical reflection that is deeply relational, and relatable. Relationality is at its most explicit in Paul and Saskia's deep readings of Lynch's Lost Highway. More than querying narratology, representation, temporalities, and other tactics to deal with cognitive overload, I derived pleasure from their caring interaction.

Theirs is the collaborative spirit of this book's encounter. Encounters require such care, such willingness to give in, to let the elusive remain an unresolved cluster that speaks in its own languages to you. This project lets each participant demand patience from the reader, and from one another. Each piece requires a quick shifting of gears to calibrate engagement following the rhythms of each contributor, and the rhythms of their materials. Constant recalibration is freeing. The willingness to recalibrate, to push beyond existential self-doubt to really try out honest exchange, facilitates connections between the chapters and recalls that wonderful day in the midst of the pandemic.

This volume is a wonderful tribute to a landmark celebration that was an inspired, and inspiring, rejection of dread.

Biography

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