

Works Cited

- Carlotto, M.J. *The Marian Enigmas: A Closer Look*. Berkeley: North Atlantic, 1992.
- . "Face on Mars." Internet. 1996. <http://www.psrw.com/mark/Other/mars/mars.html>.
- Daniken, Eric Von. *Chariots of the Gods? Unsolved Mysteries of the Past*. Trans. M. Heron. London: Souvenir, 1969.
- Deleuze, Gilles. *Foucault*. Paris: Minuit, 1986. Trans. as *Foucault*. Trans. Sean Hand. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1988.
- Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari. *Mille Plateaux: Capitalisme et schizophrénie*. Paris: Minuit, 1980. Trans. as *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism & Schizophrenia*. Trans. Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1987.
- DesCartes, René. *Descartes: Philosophical Writings*. Ed. and trans. E. Anscombe and P.T. Geach. London: Nelson's U Paperbacks, 1972.
- Foucault, Michel. *Les Mots et les choses: Une archéologie des sciences*. Paris: Gallimard, 1966. Trans. as *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of The Human Sciences*. Trans. A.M. Sheridan. London: Tavistock, 1970.
- Haraway, Donna. *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. New York: Routledge, 1991.
- Heidegger, Martin. *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*. Trans. W. Lovitt. New York: Harper Torchbooks/Harper and Row, 1977.
- Hoagland, R. *The Monuments of Mars: A City on the Edge of Forever*. Berkeley: North Atlantic, 1987.
- Massumi, Brian. *A User's Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Deviations from Deleuze and Guattari*. Cambridge, MA: MIT P, 1992.
- McDaniel, S.V. *The McDaniel Report*. Berkeley: North Atlantic, 1994.
- Petranovic, Michelle. "Ancient Egypt — Behind the Veil!" *Exposure: The Magazine of Future Developments* 3.1 (1996): 53–55.
- Pimentel, Ken and Kevin Teixeira. *Virtual Reality: Through the New Looking Glass*. New York: Windcrest, 1993.
- Poulet, Georges. "Criticism and the Experience of Interiority." *Authorship: From Plato To the Postmodern*. Ed. S. Burke. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1995. 101–07.
- Pozos, R. *The Face on Mars: Evidence for a Lost Civilization?* Chicago: Chicago Review, 1987.
- Radford, Tim. "Why Mars-bound Dream Machine is Heavenly Clean." *The Sydney Morning Herald* December 2, 1996: 8.
- Sofia, Zoe. "Exterminating Fetuses: Abortion, Disarmament, and the Sexo-Semiotics of Extra-Terrestrialism." *Diacritics* 14 (1984): 47–59.
- Snyder, Ilana. *Hypertext: The Electronic Labyrinth*. Carlton South: Melbourne UP, 1996.
- Virilio, Paul. *Esthétique de la disparition*. Paris: Balland, 1980. Trans. as *The Aesthetics of Disappearance*. Trans. P. Beitchman. New York: Semiotext(e), 1991a.
- . *L'Espace critique*. Paris: Christian Bourgois, 1984. Trans. as *The Lost Dimension*. Trans. D. Moshenberg. New York: Semiotext(e), 1991b.

Literature, Language, and the Nonhuman

"In literature the human reveals itself through language."

"Or rather, in literature, language creates the human."

"Literature is the intersection of language and the human."

"The human, which has its possibility in language, extracts from the possibilities of language to create literature."

"Literature extracts the human from language to give the human its own voice."

"The subtraction of literature from language, leaves us with all that is non-human."

"Language, literature, and the human fight pitched battles of mutual capture, shifting alliances and attrition, punctuated by periods of peace or uneasy truce."

Nowhere does the human seem more the cornerstone of literature than in the novel. If the novel is an escape, it is an escape *into*: meaning, sense, the human. Madame Bovary. Isabel Archer. Ahab. Hester Prynne. It is the great characters of the novel that we remember, and the emotions that spring from the human encounter with all that is outside of it. Greed, obsession, sin, regret, and pride assign a value to the humanity of fictional characters. Their triumphs are the human triumphs of understanding, reconciliation, creation; their defeats are equally human: despair, loneliness, loss.

In these terms the relationship between the human and literature is almost one of identity. The literary is that which shows forth the humanness of the human; it is the human activity *par excellence*. And the human is but the creation of a system of meanings and values that must in large part be called literary. The human takes shape among an endless proliferation of stories, characters, mythologies. There is no story without the human, no human without stories: one reality with two modalities.

But how much more complicated the picture becomes when the human-literary becomes the triad of language-literature-human.

Language shatters the easy equivalence of literary and human by opening up a dimension of the non-literary in literature (that is, everything that lies outside of the scope of the literary but on which the literary depends) and of the non-human in the human (that is, all that lies outside of the scope of the human, but nonetheless makes it up).

The question of the non-human is central here. It is a question posed by language itself, and one that can be phrased in terms of language. What is the non-human, and why must it be invoked by the question of 'language'? If we insist on phrasing the question of the non-human in affirmative terms (that is, if we insist on seeing in the "non" of "non-human" negativity rather than difference) we will find ourselves back at the three great figures of the non-human: the animal, the machine, and the divinity. These three figures are not, of course, *essentially* non-human. They are not, in other words, defined by their deviation from the human. They are, at best *accidentally* non-human. The non-human, as something that can be spoken of, that can act and appear, is caught within the disjunction of the three, the empty space created and enclosed (but not occupied) by their imperfect overlap.

And these three figures of the non-human are paralleled by three kinds of language, three powers that can be assigned to language and between which our own thinking about language negotiates its uneasy path: semiotics, information, and revelation.

The animal: pure semiotics. Language as a system of recognizable signs. As Agamben tells us, "Animals do not enter language. They are already inside of it" (52). Semiotics is grounded in recognition rather than understanding. The animal recognizes a certain sign — the beaver's tail-slap on the water, the honeybee's signal indicating the presence of pollen — because the sign is repeated, either genetically in the animal's innate responses or experientially in its ability to learn. Our own response to language, our ability to make sense of it, depends upon our semantic skills, the ability to figure meanings in sentences we have never encountered. You can understand the sentence "My daughter repaired the refrigerator although she was sick with the palsy" even though it is unlikely that you have encountered this sentence in the past. But this semantic competence rests on a certain level of semiotic efficiency, recognizing certain letters as signifiers for certain sounds and recognizing words as distinct signs. This is the first language we encounter.

The machine is language as information. Information differs from simple signification in that it relies upon a kind of coding that can intensify the signifying function of language. Félix Guattari uses the example of the bank card: "Les figures sémiotiques à-signifiantes ne secrètent pas que des significations. Elles profitent des ordres de marche et arrêt et, surtout, elles déclenchent la 'mise à l'être' d'univers ontologiques" ("The assignifying semiotic figures don't simply secrete significations." They give out stop and start orders, but above all activate the 'bringing into being' of ontological Universes") (75/49). There is something immediately physical about this kind of coding, the most privileged example of which is the DNA double helix, information as chemical bonds. There is also something brutal about this kind of language, its atheistic immediacy, its relentless attachment to the actual. Information is a step up from the

pure sign, calling on higher levels of organization and memory, but neither form of language can justify a claim to truth. Semiotics deals only with recognition and misrecognition, information only with correctness.

It is only a divine language (whether that divinity is God, the Idea, or transcendence itself) that can begin to make a claim to truth. This our third language, the language of revelation. In his essay "On Language as Such and the Language of Man," Walter Benjamin traces a line that runs through knowledge, language and divinity: "God rested when he had left his creative power to itself in man. This creativity, relieved of its divine actuality, became knowledge. Man is the knower in the same language in which God is creator" (1986, 323). This language, in its myriad forms, is the language of creativity and truth. It snatches the human up from above. It grounds the human in that which infinitely surpasses it: "*Language as such* is the mental being of man; and only for this reason is the mental being of man, alone among all mental entities, communicable without residue" (318).

We open our mouths to speak and what issues forth? Signs? Information? Names that are grounded in our privilege as humans, our hegemony over a nature that communicates itself to us in order to be named? When we write, where do we locate ourselves? In the position of masters who control a circus of unruly signs, or as bodies through which something is written or writes itself? This is the paradox of language. It is what we control — and there is no doubt that skill does tame the flux of language, makes it into an instrument — but it is the very same language that can suddenly show itself forth to us as a relentless revelation, a lighting that withdraws from understanding as it finds the very possibility of understanding.

Human or non-human? Our own creation or a gift that obsesses us? We might think of language as we would think of an apparition out of the darkness of an empty road. Is it a fellow wanderer? Does it share my nature and is it haunted by the silence and mystery of the darkness? Does it fear and ward off the imminent reality of the outside? Is it powerless to fight the spirit that possesses it? And can I speak to it? Gain comfort in a shared humanness? Or is this figure itself a secret of the darkness? A ghost sent to haunt and possess me? Even if it shows compassion for my plight, will its infinite power over me always make it a stranger?

The question in short, is this: is language itself a force or is it taken up by forces? It is well to remember that Derrida's "la force est l'autre du langage" ("force is the other of language") comes in an essay entitled "Force et signification" ("Force and Signification") (Derrida 1978). When language signifies, that is, when it assumes its role as producer of signs and information, it will be open to questions of the other, it will be material haunted by the mystery of its own life, its own animation. But if language is itself a force, if it is language that opens a space of being, or language in which all of nature rests, then it is far

more than instrument, but carries with it, in mediating immediately the communication of mental being, what Benjamin has boldly called its magic.

Although the hard and fast distinction between these three types of language breaks down almost as quickly as it is proposed, it still leaves us with a new perspective on literature. Information carries semiotics along with it, depends upon it, and, by the same token, the language of revelation takes up signification. No discourse, no matter how factual, how technical or how prosaic can escape being taken up by the revelatory power of language. And it is this taking up of everyday language that is the language of revelation. Benjamin speaks of mental being communicated *in* and not *through* language. Language as such, the language of revelation, is language *in which* mental being is communicated, but which is not separate from that which fills it up. Language, as Benjamin reminds us, communicates itself. Our third kind of language, then, is a kind of operation upon the first two, a modification of them, an intensive occupation. In a sense this was Benjamin's great project. In his attempt to imbue historical materialism with the power of messianic cessation of happening, he was forced away from speaking in conventionally religious terms, even though in the *Language* essay he gives religion pride of place in the communication of the highest mental being. His attempt in "On the Mimetic Faculty" to trace a line from occult practices to language through mimesis, suggests that Benjamin was searching for ways to speak of the revelatory and creative power of language without having to resort always to the language of theology (1985). It is this ambivalence that gives so much uneasy energy to Benjamin's thinking, and gives so much compressed power to his political and aesthetic writing.

Intensive language, language possessed by a power from which it cannot divide itself, gives us, finally, a way to talk about literature. Literature is nothing but this intensity. It is never to be found without it. And more important than establishing the difference between literature and other uses of language is the naming of the intensities that are put into play in literature. And if literature is about the human, if it is always speaking in the voice of the personal, the subjective, the psychological, the moral — all the crowning achievements of the human — then the movement whereby language is taken up by what is other is paralleled by a movement in which the human is taken up by all that is non-human. And just as the language of revelation is a kind of possession of utilitarian language, a possession that is more a mutual capture than a domination, so the non-human is a possessing of the human by something that nonetheless retains the deepest intimacy with it. It is in this sense that we can say the human is created and sustained by the non-human, and that literature is maintained by a language that overflows and escapes it.

This possession of language by its other takes on many forms. We can speak of it in terms that may seem to belong more to physics or in terms that evoke a transcendence far beyond the traditional western conception of Being.

I. AFFECT

For Deleuze, what possesses language is sensation and affect, which cannot be far from what Derrida means when he says that *force* is the other of language.

L'écrivain se sert de mots, mais en créant une syntaxe qui les fait passer dans la sensation, et qui fait bégayer la langue courante, ou trembler, ou crier, ou écrire, ou même chanter: c'est le style, le "ton," le langage des sensations.... L'écrivain tord le langage, le fait vibrer, l'étreint, le fend, pour arracher le percept aux perceptions, l'affect aux affections, la sensation de l'opinion. (Deleuze and Guattari 166-67)

The writer uses words, but by creating a syntax that makes them pass into sensation that makes the standard language stammer, tremble, cry, or even sing: this is the style, the "tone," the language of sensation.... The writer twists language, makes it vibrate, seizes hold of it, and rends it in order to wrest the percepts from perceptions, the affect from affections, the sensation from opinion. (176)

"Les sensations, percepts et affects," Deleuze is careful to explain, "sont des êtres qui valent par eux-mêmes.... Ils sont en l'absence de l'homme, peut-on dire, parce-que l'homme, tel qu'il est pris dans la pierre, sur la toile ou le long des mots, est lui-même un composite de percepts et d'affects" ("Sensations, percepts, and affects are *beings* whose validity lies in themselves.... They could be said to exist in the absence of man, as he is caught in stone, on the canvas, or by words, is himself a compound of percepts and affects") (Deleuze and Guattari 154-55/164). In other words, in order to form language, the human must already be constituted by affects and percepts. And although the language of revelation (which we have said is language caught up by what is in excess of it) can be argued to be coterminous with affect (the language in which Agamben's animals are caught up is certainly nothing but relations of affecting and being affected) it is equally true that language as information and language as sign *becomes* more than itself when we consider it from the point of view of the force that takes it up. It is only because signification is exceeded by affect that we can make the same words the basis for different speech acts. "I shall return" might be a promise, a threat or a citation, but it is only in abstracting it from a context — that is, a set of affects — that we can consider it "purely" as signification.

Derrida, in his critique of Austin in "Signature événement contexte" ("Signature, Event, Context") correctly notes that Austin has managed to overlook the iteration of the signifier, a repetition upon which the speech act is based. What is most interesting about this critique is that, in taking Austin to task for attempting to bypass the problem of signification, Derrida is forced to hand signification over to a power that exceeds it far more than any idea of speech act ever could, the power of repetition. For there to be signification, there must be an affect — repetition — that already holds sway over the signifier, indeed, that defines the signifier as signifier. There is no signifier that is spoken only once.

To signify is, in a sense, to repeat, to be caught up in cycles of repetition whose power extends beyond signification.

Repetition, sensation, action can all be the basis of affect, and affect, as Deleuze has described it, is whatever comes into being when something is affected or affects something else. More than that, it is the determination (which must always be actual) that founds all potentiality. Language is filled with affects, and indeed, would have no existence without them. But this also means that language is not a homogeneous and empty space in which various affects can be displayed like paintings on a wall. Language-as-affect (which we will see later is the same thing as Language-taken-up-by-affect) is so various that it begins to seem more and more misguided to see language as a genus (or a system, a *langue*) into which individual events (or speech acts, or *parole*) are gathered. A love sonnet, a battle cry, a judgment from the bench, a Mass, do not seem to be convincingly related by tarring them with a brush called "language."

But if affect is an affecting or a being-affected, then all that makes language possible, all those forces that link up with it, become part of it. Emotion, sensation, possibility, material, force, all have their place in language. And though we may argue along with Benjamin that it is only in the human that the most perfect language takes place, we must also argue (and not against Benjamin) that human language has nothing to communicate of the non-human world without that non-human world communicating itself to the human. What, for example, is less human than light? Less removed from the fleshy weight of the body, the torpidity of muscle? And yet what is more the basis of human knowledge and understanding, Heidegger's *Dasein* standing in the lighted clearing of Being? How much is clarity, uncovering, dispelling of darkness the proudest achievement of the human mind? This is what I mean when I say that affect is non-human, yet, far from being hostile to the human, gives it the gift of possibility.

With "affect" we have the first of what I will call the six modalities of the non-human. "Affect" allows us to think of the human in terms of what surpasses it, undermines it, fragments it, but also in terms of what simultaneously supports its, energizes it and holds it together.

Each of the modalities of the non-human cover the entire field of the human/non-human relation. In other words, each modality can work independently of the others and can lay claim to giving a perspective on the human that needs no supplementation. But at the same time each modality allows for others. It is, for example, not a contradiction to say that the human exists and is constituted within a plane of affect and to say that the human is constituted by the events that make it up. Event and affect are two modalities of the non-human, but taken together they do not give us a more "complete" view of the human or non-human. The modalities of the non-human do not "add up," one might say. They are not meant to be a cumulative taxonomy of the non-human,

but rather exist in relations of resonance with each other, of differential repetition, of imperfect overlap, of mutual intensification, and, at times, of mutual capture.

II. THE EVENT

Events, much like affects, are difficult to define according to the traditional formula of "It is an A, which has the differentiating attributes of X,Y,Z", but the event, as it has been described by Deleuze in *La Logique du sens* (*The Logic of Sense*) does have an intimate relationship with language, even though it is difficult to speak of it in terms of being, in terms of any actually existing state of affairs. Defining the event, Deleuze tells us, is much like hunting Lewis Carroll's Snark. Events are both real and non-existent, both realizable and unfulfilled in their realization.

It is important not to confuse the event with a state of things, with bodies and materials that come together to produce results. Rather than being a set of bodies and things, rather than being the mingling and colliding of these bodies, the event is the *effect* of their mingling and colliding. Events are what Deleuze, after the Stoics, calls "des incorporels" ("incorporeal entities") which are not "des qualités et propriétés physiques, mais à proprement parler des attributs logiques ou dialectiques" ("physical qualities and properties, but rather logical or dialectical attributes") (1969, 13/1990, 4-5). Existing and not existing, non-corporeal, yet the effect of bodies, neither active nor passive, yet the result of action and passion, the event is always paradoxical. And its greatest paradox is its relation to language. Deleuze takes us through a description of the event that makes of the event a kind of complex: event-sense. Sense is what is expressed in a proposition. So we are faced with a kind of becoming of the event. We have the event, which is sense, which is the expressed (or expressible) of a proposition. If we ask what independence the event then has from the proposition that expresses it, we will be on the right track and will be prepared for Deleuze's paradoxical response.

L'exprimé n'existe pas hors de son expression. C'est pourquoi le sens ne peut pas être dit exister, mais seulement insister ou subsister. Mais d'autre part il ne se confond nullement avec la proposition, il a une "objectivité" tout à fait distincte. L'exprimé ne ressemble pas du tout à l'expression. (33)

What is expressed does not exist outside its expression. This is why we cannot say that sense exists, but rather that it inheres or subsists. On the other hand, it does not merge at all with the proposition, for it has an objective which is quite distinct. What is expressed has no resemblance whatever to the expression. (21)

To call the event ideal is not at all to call it unreal. It may not exist, it may not act or suffer action, it may not even be found to exist outside of a proposition. But if the event teaches us anything, it is that existence itself is a narrow slice of the real. The event does not exist, it does not act, but it does "make possible," it does have force. In fact, for Deleuze, it is the sense-event that makes language itself possible. How, Deleuze asks, does sound, which issues from bodies, become separated enough from those bodies to be organized into propositions and expressions? How, in other words, do the body's sounds cross the threshold from grunts of pleasure or pain, from the tearing and chewing of food, to the relative autonomy required for language? Something must separate the proposition-sound of language from the corporeal-sound of the body. Something must separate the proposition from the state of affairs. And this something must turn one face toward language and one toward states of things. It must use this double aspect to organize the relationship between language and the state of affairs, but be neither one nor the other (for if it were one or the other it could not separate and organize the two series language and states of affairs; it would merely homogenize them so that we would be left with the need to say that all states of affairs are language, or that language is simply another state of affairs, both of which beliefs have been followed fruitlessly for decades). Deleuze tells us, "elle opère d'un côté et de l'autre par une seule et même puissance incorporelle" ("It operates on both sides by means of one and the same incorporeal power") (1969, 213/1990, 183).

From Blanchot to Delenzé to Foucault, the perfect model of the event has always been death.

La mort est à la fois ce qui est dans un rapport extrême ou définitif avec moi et avec mon corps, ce qui est fondé en moi, mais aussi ce qui est sans rapport avec moi, l'incorporel et l'infini, l'impersonnel, ce qui n'est fondé qu'en soi-même. D'un côté, la part de l'événement qui se réalise et s'accomplit; de l'autre côté, "la part de l'événement que son accomplissement ne peut pas réaliser." (Deleuze 1969, 178)

Death has an extreme and definite relation to me and my body and is grounded in me, but it also has no relation to me at all — it is incorporeal and infinitive, impersonal, grounded only in itself. On one side, there is a part of the event which is realized and accomplished; on the other there is that "part of the event that cannot realize its accomplishment." (1990, 151-52)

It is no wonder that the event is so often spoken of in terms of its imminent terror. It is ghostly, crossing the threshold from the non-existent to the existing world, making possible and exerting force while powerless to act. Finding its way into the world through the walls and traps of existence. It is the ideal model of the relationship of human and non-human. The objection that the non-human does not exist must be met head on with a claim that renders the objection irrelevant. The non-human does not exist, does not act, but, like the sense-event,

makes possible the human. It has force that is not of existence, and it holds together the human and the non-human in two resonating series that make the human possible. And if the human (in its guise as the psychological, the personal, the ego) finds this relationship disconcerting, it is the understandable fear that comes from the encounter with the overwhelming force of the real that exceeds existence.

III. FORCE

Force is our third of the six modalities of the non-human. I have chosen the term "modality" because, as shall become apparent, the six modalities are different perspectives, or perhaps different realizations of one diagram, one event. Already we can begin to ask questions about the relation between affects and events, and now between affect-event-force.

We can begin with a kind of approximate commonsensical description of force, if only to bring to the surface some of the prejudices of the everyday understanding. We tend to see force as the most actual of things, the most unproblematically real. We speak of the transfer of force in physics as something that happens at the level of actual bodies; the gathering of forces in a political or military sense, which again has to do with actual bodies in the world; or the force of compulsion taking place on existing bodies and psyches.

But force, much like the event, is more of a real non-existence at the heart of power and of formations of power. In *Foucault*, Deleuze says again and again that force comes from the outside (1986,108/1988, 101). This is not simply to say that the force of one entity may impinge on the force of another entity exterior to it, but rather that force lies outside of (and not merely exterior to) that in which it inheres.

Le pouvoir d'être affecté est comme une matière de la force, et le pouvoir d'affecter est comme une fonction de la force. Seulement, il s'agit d'une pure fonction, c'est-à-dire d'une fonction non-formalisée, saisie indépendamment des formes concrètes où elle s'incarne, des buts qu'elle sert et des moyens qu'elle emploie.... Et il s'agit d'une pure matière, non-formée, prise indépendamment des substances formées, des êtres ou des objets qualifiés dans lesquels elle entrera: c'est une physique de la matière première ou nue. (78-79)

The power to be affected is like a *matter* of force, and the power to affect is like a *function* of force. But it is a pure function, that is to say a non-formalized function, independent of the concrete forms it assumes, the aims it serves and the means it employs.... And it is also a pure unformed matter independent of the formed substances, qualified objects or beings which it enters: it is a physics of primary or bare matter. (71-72)

If there are echoes of Aristotle's Prime Matter here it should not be surprising. Like prime matter, force is a reality whose freedom from form puts it

below the threshold of existence, but which nonetheless cannot be simply called nothing, or unreal. Structures, institutions, stratified relations do indeed capture and shape forces (and indeed could not exist without force), and forces can only ever be seen within stratified formations, but, as with the event and the state of affairs, force subsists and insists. Language, literature, and the human are clearly such stratified formations. And just as "on peut déjà prévoir que les forces dans l'homme n'entrent pas nécessairement dans la composition d'une forme-Homme, mais peuvent s'investir autrement, dans une autre forme" ("we can already foresee that the forces within man do not necessarily contribute to the composition of a Man-form, but may be otherwise invested in another concept of form") (Deleuze 1986, 131/1988, 124), so we may say that literature and language are also possessed of these forces that may enter into relations with other forces of the outside. Literature and language envelop unformed matters and non-formalized functions.

As a means of naming these unformed forces Deleuze gives us the concept of the diagram. And as his example of a functioning diagram, Deleuze gives us Foucault's Panopticon, a "pure function" of imposing behaviors or taste upon an enclosed and limited group. It matters little how and when this diagram is realized (like the event and force it is never exhausted by particular actualizations), in a prison, in school, in advertising, or in an office. The diagram, then, can be defined in several ways: "c'est la présentation des rapports de forces propres à une formation; c'est la répartition des pouvoirs d'affecter et des pouvoirs d'être affecté; c'est le brassage des pure fonctions non-formalisées et des pure matières non-formées" ("it is the presentation of the relations between forces unique to a particular formation; it is the distribution of the power to be affected; it is the mixture of non-formalized pure functions and unformed pure matter") (Deleuze 1986, 79/1988, 72-73). Of course the question for the human becomes, into what diagram does it enter, what non-localized, infinitive relation of forces does it depend upon? And for literature the question is, what diagrams are enclosed by and enclose the text? And can the text itself be a diagram, a distribution of powers to be affected, of singularities, of unformed matters? Apart from the ideological presumptions that literary theory often loves to tease out of texts, apart from the reflected images of the human, apart from the recognizable complexes of the unconscious, what else subsists in and with the text, the story, the poem, and the novel? The concept of the diagram makes one suspect that there is much that has been overlooked.

IV. SINGULARITY

The novel encloses singularities, singular points. This seems a truism if, by "singularity," we understand "individual" defined psychologically. The individual never accounts for all the singularities she encloses. Much that goes to make up the human is lost in the human's account of itself. It is for this reason that

singularity is defined as "pré-individuelle, non personnelle, a-conceptuelle" ("pre-individual, non-personal, and a-conceptual") (Deleuze 1969, 67/1990, 52): "il faut se rappeler plutôt que les personnes psychologiques et morales sont elles aussi faites de singularités prépersonnelles, et que leurs sentiments, leur pathos se constituent au voisinage de ces singularités" ("one must remember that the psychological and moral characters are also made of pre-personal singularities, and that their feelings or pathos are constituted in the vicinity of these singularities") (71/55).

As with our other modalities of the non-human, the singularity is caught up in paradox. On the side of the individual we must say that it is not that particular quality that makes something belong to a class (we might ask what, in other words, makes any particular human belong to "humanity"). But neither is it simply an entity that is absolutely unique, so unique that it does not belong to any class. What would this even mean? To the extent that we consider a thing as actually existing we cannot help but at the very least categorize it as a "thing." So the singularity does not belong to the individual in which it is held any more than the event belongs to the proposition that expresses it.

But, on the other hand, the singular is not the universal, even though the singular does have a kind of generality about it, the same generality of the event: "Les singularités sont les vrais événements transcendantaux" ("Singularities are the true transcendental events") (Deleuze 1969, 125/1990, 102-03). Pre-personal, and pre-individual, the singularity can burst from the individual that contains it; singularities, or singular points, make up individuals, but they also communicate, at another level, with other singularities outside of the individual:

les singularités-événements correspondent à des séries hétérogènes qui s'organisent en un système ni stable ni instable, mais "métastable," pourvu d'une énergie potentielle où se distribuent les différences entre séries. (L'énergie potentielle est l'énergie de l'événement pur, tandis que les formes d'actualisation correspondent aux effectualisations de l'événement.) (125)

If we wish to describe the singularity in terms of existence we might say, with Deleuze, that they are "des points de rebroussement, d'inflexion, etc.; des cols, des noeuds, des foyers, des centres; des points de fusion, de condensation, d'ébullition, etc.; des points de pleurs et de joie, de maladie et de santé, d'espoir et d'angoisse, points dits sensibles" ("turning points and points of inflection; bottlenecks, knots, foyers, and centers; points of fusion, condensation and

boiling, points of tears and joy, sickness and health, hope and anxiety, 'sensitive' points" (67/52). There is a near infinity of ways in which these modes of singularity can be translated into the language of the personal — "I have my limits," "this is a sensitive area for me," "I just can't get past this," "I'm reaching my breaking point." But there is also a near infinity of ways that the language of the personal fails to give a name to the singularities it encloses. When there are unrecognized or barely recognized perceptions, when there is language that only gestures to something that it cannot name, when there are effects that seem unrelated to any discernible causes — there the force of the singularity is at work.

The problem of the singularity is to give it a name. The human, language and literature all enclose singularities, all are partial realizations of singularity-events. But it is not as identity that the human breaks open to let loose its singularities; it is not as ideological manipulation that the novel resonates with singularity-events. And it is not as a mechanism of subjectification that language reveals the pre-individual and apersonal forces that give it life. It is for these reasons that we must avoid reading novels in terms of identity, ideology or subjectivity. The novel does not represent the human, it does not trace itself back to an ideology that places the human at the center of society and the universe, but it is clearly concerned with the human. But this is because both the human and the novel are constituted in the vicinity of the same sets or series of singularities. Needless to say, in crossing over from the human to the literary to the outside of both, these singularities reveal themselves as non-personal, non-subjective, and non-human.

V. THE OUTSIDE

Just as the event is not to be confused with a state of affairs, or a singularity with an individual, so the outside must be distinguished from a simple exteriority. A body can be said to have an inside and an outside which meet at the surface of the skin. In a field of interacting bodies, then, each body will encounter others that are outside of it, exterior to it. This is not, however, the exteriority, or the outside to which I am referring. The sense in which one body is outside another, or one is outside of an institution, or the unconscious contents are outside of consciousness, are what we might call relative exteriority. But there is another outside, another exteriority that is at once farther away and more intimately close. Deleuze does not often speak of it in his work, though so many of his concepts — the virtual, singularity, the event — rely on it, and in some books (*Différence et répétition* [Difference and Repetition], *Foucault*) he has acknowledged the importance of Blanchot for a thinking of the outside.

Not surprisingly, it is impossible to say what exteriority *is*. Nor is it surprising that Deleuze, Blanchot and Lévinas make different uses of the concept, uses that overlap but are far from identical. When Deleuze says that "c'est toujours du dehors qu'une force confère à d'autres, ou reçoit des autres, l'affection variable

qui n'existe qu'à telle distance ou sous tel rapport" ("it is always from the outside that a force confers on others or receives from others the variable position to be found only at a particular distance or in a particular relation") (1986, 92/1988, 86) we see an exteriority which is, more than anything else, the outside of particular determinations. There are, as we have seen, formed matters and formalized functions that make up not only particular institutions, but even what is recognizable to us as actuality. We do not *see* uniformed matters, or forces directly. They are outside not only of institutions and formations, but outside of actuality as well. It is, however, an outside that forms the interiority of thought:

Si la pensée vient du dehors, et ne cesse de tenir au dehors, comment celui-ci ne surgirait-il pas au dedans, comme ce qu'elle ne pense pas et ne peut pas penser? Aussi l'impensé n'est-il pas à l'extérieur, mais au cœur de la pensée, comme l'impossibilité de penser qui double ou creuse le dehors. (104)

If thought comes from the outside and remains attached to the outside, how come the outside does not flood into the inside, as the element that thought does not and cannot think of? The unthought is therefore not external to thought, but lies at its very heart, as that impossibility of thinking which doubles or hollows out the outside. (97)

For Blanchot, this outside takes on a more haunting aspect, which is that of death. Death haunts Blanchot's work, not as the final possibility toward which we move, not as an imminent necessity to which we must surrender, but as the ultimate *impossibility*, indeed as the very model of impossibility. Death is both the most certain and uncertain of all things. It is true that it will come, but doubtful that I will be there to greet it, to grasp it and make it my own death. Since dying is the very non-being of the "I" that it takes away, it is not the "I" that dies. There is not a trace of action in dying. It is pure passion, pure passivity, and hence, radically separated from any subjectivity. And this relationship (or non-relationship) to death is paralleled in the subject's relation to language. As Foucault tells us in "Maurice Blanchot: The Thought from the Outside," "The being of language only appears for itself with the disappearance of the subject" (15). The writer is caught up by language. Her writing is in no way an act of mastery or control, but rather a kind of deathlike passivity, a contention with impossibility. This is why Blanchot can draw his rather disturbing comparison between the artist and the suicide. Both the artist and the suicide "projettent ce qui se dérobe à tout projet, et s'ils ont un chemin, ils n'ont pas de but, ils ne savent pas ce qu'ils font. Tous deux veulent fermement, mais, à ce qu'ils veulent, ils sont unis par une exigence qui ignore leur volonté" ("plan something that eludes all plans and if they do have a path, they have no goal; they do not know what they are doing. Both exert a resolute will, but both are linked to what they want to achieve by a demand that knows nothing of their

will") (106/106). Clearly, the writer's great disturbance is not the facing down of the dreaded dragon called death. Death is not to be feared as the relentless enemy; rather, it refuses to engage in battle. It slips away, but in slipping away draws one after it. It is the impossibility, yet the reality, of that which lies beyond the actual. And we have seen, in so many modalities of the non-human (the event, singularity, force) the same kind of disjunction between the actual and a non-existence that is nonetheless real. The writer's relation with force, the singularity-event, takes on the same impossibility as his relationship with death. It is for this reason that death, the event, exteriority, force, are modalities or aspects of the non-human: "Dans l'œuvre l'homme parle, mais l'œuvre donne la voix, en l'homme, à ce que ne parle pas, à l'innommable, à l'inhumain, à ce qui est sans vérité, sans justice, sans droit..." ("In the work man speaks, but the work gives voice in man to what does not speak: to the unnameable, the inhuman, to what is devoid of truth, bereft of justice, without rights...") (Blanchot 242/232). Lévinas expresses, in a more "properly" philosophical discourse, the same concern with what lies on the outside of the actual. But the "beyond" of which he speaks is the beyond of Being itself, if Being is totality:

La face de l'être qui se montre dans la guerre, se fixe dans le concept de totalité qui domine la philosophie occidentale. Les individus s'y réduisent à des porteurs de forces qui les commandent à leur insu. Les individus empruntent à cette totalité leur sens (invisible en dehors de cette totalité). (1961, 6)

The visage of being that shows itself in war is fixed in the concept of totality, which dominates western philosophy. Individuals are reduced to being bearers of forces that command them unknown to themselves. The meaning of individuals (invisible outside of this totality) is derived from the totality. (1969, 21-22)

There are, of course, many totalities that dominate western thought. Almost every system tries to impose coordinates that totalize the field of existence: the unconscious, history, even capital have taken on the role of totalizing forces that cover the entire field of nature/culture. But, for Lévinas, Being is the grandfather of them all. But there is a beyond of this totalized and totalizing Being,

un surplus toujours extérieur à la totalité comme si la totalité objective ne remplissait pas la vraie mesure de l'être, comme si un autre concept — le concept de l'infini — devait exprimer cette transcendance par rapport à la totalité non-englobable dans une totalité et aussi originelle que la totalité.... Il se reflète à l'intérieur de la totalité et de l'histoire, à l'intérieur de l'expérience. (7)

a surplus always exterior to the totality, as though the objective totality did not fit out the true measure of being, as though another concept, the concept of *infinity*, were needed to express the transcendence with regard to totality, non-encompassable within a totality and as primordial as totality.... It is reflected *within* the totality and history, *within* experience. (22-23)

This "beyond," this "otherwise than being," takes on the form not of Blanchot's Outside, but of alterity, the otherness of ethical face-to-face encounter. The issue of language, then, becomes largely the issue of speech and communication. All language is taken up by the ethical relationship with the Other: "Le langage ne se joue pas à l'intérieur d'une conscience, il me vient d'autrui et se répercute dans la conscience en la mettant en question, ce qui constitue un événement irreductible à la conscience" ("Language is not enacted within a consciousness; it comes to me from the Other and reverberates in consciousness by putting it in question. This event is irreducible to consciousness") (224/204). In *Autrement qu'il être (Otherwise than Being)*, Lévinas introduces the distinction between the Said and the Saying, and explains that, while the Said can always be assimilated to being, can always be taken up in a theme, the saying escapes the said at every point. "Le Dire signifie autrement qu'en apparaître présentant essence et étants" ("Saying signifies otherwise than as an apparitor presenting essence and entities") (1974, 59/1981, 46).

Of course we already understand the infinite modalities of the said. They are called themes, subjects, contents. But we have little sense of the modalities of saying.

Lévinas leaves us with several problems, some concerning literature, others concerning the human: to what extent does literature embody the face-to-face of the ethical relationship, to what extent is it an address to the transcendence of the other, and to what extent can literary criticism see literature as a saying rather than a said? And if it can address itself to the saying of literature, what tools does it have at its disposal? And does it need to create new tools that will at least take some trace of the saying of literature? And if literature is indeed, as I have said, about the human, how does Lévinas's human intersect with the novel? For although Lévinas is by no means an anti-humanist — and in fact he might be said to be the twentieth-century philosopher most firmly committed to humanism — his human is certainly not a human-*being*. The human face encountered in the face-to-face of the ethical relationship is taken up by the transcendence of the otherwise-than-being. If we are to define the human as the personal, the psychological, the social, then this transcendent human that overlaps it can only appear in the world as the non-human, that which is not personal, not psychological, not a subject in society, but rather a kind of virtual human that can only actualize itself in the human-being by differing from itself.

VI. THE VIRTUAL

Our sixth, and last, modality of the non-human is the virtual. As we have seen most of the modalities of the non-human are related to approximate everyday definitions from which they must be distinguished: affect is not emotion; an event is not a state of things; force is not physical; the singular is not the individual; and exteriority is not merely the space outside of a delimited body.

In the same way, we must understand the difference between the virtual and the term with which it is too easily confused, the possible. The virtual in many ways has a wider scope than the possible because it can cross the space of difference. Perhaps the best elaboration of the limitation of the possible is Aristotle's in *Metaphysics*. His two great examples of the limitations of the possible are the transformation of wine into vinegar and of the human seed into a human being. Aristotle tells us, first of all, that wine is not potentially vinegar. Wine as a substance, as a *this*, does not *become* vinegar. Wine may become many things — hot, cold, sour, agitated, mobile, and all the while remain wine. So this is the first condition of possibility: a thing may manifest as many possibilities as it will, so long as it remains itself. Consequently, wine does not have the potentiality to cross the threshold that makes wine wine. But we know that wine does in fact turn into vinegar, it does in fact cross the threshold, but only by differing from itself. So we might say as a first rule that the limits of substance are the limits of possibility, whereas the virtual proceeds by differentiation. Aristotle also tells us that the seed is not potentially a human until it has been fertilized, indeed it is not potentially human until it has started irrevocably (except by external accident) on the process of becoming human. It is almost as if Aristotle is saying that the seed is not potentially human until it is actually human. This is overstating the case, but it does point to our second rule, which is that potentiality becomes real by a process of resemblance. The actuality is essentially the same as its possibility. My actual ability to speak French is almost identical to my potentiality to speak French. This resemblance is the source of Bergson's critique of possibility as merely a retroactive projection of the present moment into the past. Only when I can actually speak French, in short, do I project backward into the past and say "there must have been a potentiality to speak French present all along!"

The virtual contrasts with the possible on these two main points — sameness/difference and resemblance/disjunction. The virtual is not, like the possible, contrasted with the real, but with the actual (Lévy 13-17). The virtual is perfectly real *qua* virtual, but as it begins to actualize it differs from itself. The actualization of the virtual does not resemble the actuality from which it springs because, in actualizing, it crosses the threshold within which it is identical to itself. It therefore becomes *problematic* to understand the relation of the actual to its particular virtuality, and indeed, the *problematic* is the form of the virtual. "Contrairement au possible, statique et déjà constitué, le virtuel est comme le complexe problématique, le noeud de tendances ou de forces qui accompagnent une situation, un événement, un objet ou n'importe quelle entité et qui appelle un processus de résolution: l'actualisation" ("The virtual, as opposed to the possible, is perfectly real *qua* virtual, but as it begins to actualize it differs from itself. The knot which is static and already constituted, is like the problematic complex, the knot of tendencies or forces which accompanies a situation, event, object, or whatever the entity may be, and triggers a process of resolution: actualization") (Lévy 14).

The real, Lévy tells us, *resembles* the possible, but the actual *responds to* the virtual (15). Certainly, the process of actualization of the virtual is far more unpredictable than the movement from possible to real. One name for this unpredictability is *creation*: "Le virtuel ... n'a pas à se réaliser mais à s'actualiser, et l'actualisation a pour règles, non plus la ressemblance et la limitation, mais la différence ou la divergence, et la création" ("The virtual ... does not have to be realized, but rather actualized; and the rules of actualization are not those of resemblance and limitation, but those of difference and divergence and of creation") (Deleuze 1986, 99-100/1988, 97). Creative, mobile and non-actual, the virtual presents a new set of problems for the human, language and literature, or rather it turns these three into problems rather than simply facts. If the human is an actuality springing from virtuality, if, as Deleuze says "l'organisme ne serait rien s'il n'était la solution d'un problème" ("an organism is nothing if not the solution to a problem") (1968, 272/1994, 21), then we must trace back the human to the non-human forces that have followed a ramifying line of differentiation to cross, perhaps only for a moment, the threshold of humanity (on their way who knows where). If language is caught up by virtuality it may be that we must also follow the line of actualization back across the threshold of language, to the non-linguistic or pre-linguistic forces that are contained in it. And perhaps most importantly, virtuality brings the truism of the novel — that it must begin with and elaborate a problem — to a new level. If the novel is a problem then just as "le virtuel à la réalité d'une tâche à remplir, comme d'un problème à résoudre" ("the virtual possesses the reality of a task to be performed or a problem to be solved") (274/212), so the novel becomes a great virtuality and criticism becomes the problem of differentiating the virtualities contained in the novel, of bringing the novel beyond its own thresholds, of making the novel into the most perfect diagram of the forces and events that intersect with it. No longer caught in a linear relation that forces us to ask fruitless questions of order (which came first, which is the cause of the other), the human, language, and literature are all taken up into that timeless time, that abstract yet real time between a past that has just disappeared and a future that will just begin. All three are caught up at once in the modalities of the non-human, and to properly understand any of them, and especially their relationship, we must be prepared to let them unfold, unmake themselves as they will.

VII. LITERATURE/LANGUAGE/HUMAN

I have said that the language of revelation is the taking up of semiotics and signification by a force that it outside of it. When it is caught up by a modality of the non-human, a force, and event, language is not other than that force, that event. It maintains no autonomy. And indeed, if we ask whether there is a "pure" language, a language free of the intensive possession by the non-human, we must answer that such a language could neither refer, express or in fact even appear.

Although, as we have seen, the modalities of the non-human possess a paradoxical reality that is not of existence, the existence of language would vanish into nothingness if it were cut off from what lies beyond it.

There is no reason the triumvirate of literature, language and the human need be the only constellation with which we are concerned. Certainly language and the human have their roles in many formations — plastic arts, war, nature. But surely literature most directly takes language as both its medium and its matrix. And it can be argued that it is in the novel that language and the human form their strongest alliance (since poetry so often concerns itself with the other-than-human, and film has made its mark by raising physical objects to a new level of expressiveness).

The question that remains for us is not whether or not the modalities of the non-human have something to contribute to criticism but what new affects can we find mapped out in our most familiar masterpieces, what new forces will we finally see shooting across the whiteness of the page, what great and singular events will be hovering in the infinitive spaces of the most classic stories, what free-floating crystals of exteriority shall we find in the characters whose worlds seem so closed, what virtualities await us, unactualized and, even so, haunting the familiar forest paths, the elegant parlors, the dark mansions that we dream of together?

Vanderbilt University

Works Cited

- Agamben, Giorgio. *Infancy and History*. Trans. L. Heron. New York: Verso, 1993.
- Benjamin, Walter. "On the Mimetic Faculty." *One Way Street and Other Writings*. Trans. Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter. London: Verso, 1985. 160-63.
- . "On Language as Such and the Language of Man." *Reflections*. Ed. P. Demetz. New York: Schocken, 1986. 314-32.
- Blanchot, Maurice. *L'Espace littéraire*. Paris: Gallimard, 1955. Trans. as *The Space of Literature*. Trans. A. Smock. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1982.
- Deleuze, Gilles. *Le Bergsonisme*. Paris: PUF, 1966. Trans. as *Bergsonism*. Trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam. New York: Zone, 1988.
- . *Différence et répétition*. Paris: PUF, 1968. Trans. as *Difference and Repetition*. Trans. Paul Patton. New York: Columbia UP, 1994.
- . *La Logique du sens*. Paris: Minuit, 1969. Trans. as *The Logic of Sense*. Trans. M. Lester. New York: Columbia UP, 1990.
- . *Foucault*. Paris: Minuit, 1986. Trans. as *Foucault*. Trans. S. Hand. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1988.
- Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari. *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie?* Paris: Minuit, 1991. Trans. as *What is Philosophy?* Trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell. New York: Columbia UP, 1994.
- Derrida, Jacques. *L'Écriture et la différence*. Paris: Seuil, 1967. Trans. as *Difference and Writing*. Trans. Alan Bass. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1978.
- . "Signature événement contexte." *Marges de la philosophie*. Paris: Minuit, 1980. 365-93. Trans. as "Signature, Event, Context." Trans. Alan Bass. *Limited Inc.* Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1988. 1-25.
- Foucault, Michel. "Maurice Blanchot: The Thought from Outside." Trans. Jeffrey Mehlman. *Foucault/Blanchot*. New York: Zone Books, 1987. 9-58.
- Guattari, Félix. *Chaosmose*. Paris: Galilée, 1992. Trans. as *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm*. Trans. Paul Bains and Julian Pefanis. Sydney/Indianapolis: Power Publications/Indiana UP, 1995.
- Levinas, Emmanuel. *Totalité et infini: essai sur l'exteriorité*. La Haye: Nijhoff, 1961. Trans. as *Totality and Infinity*. Trans. Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh: U of Duquesne P, 1969.
- . *Autrement qu'être; ou, Au-delà de l'essence*. La Haye: Nijhoff, 1974. Trans. as *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*. Trans. Alphonso Lingis. Boston: Martinus Nijhoff, 1981.
- Lévy, Pierre. *Qu'est-ce que le virtuel?* Paris: La Découverte, 1995.

La crocifissione

Crucifixion

Ma noi predichiamo Cristo crocifisso:
scandalo pe' Giudei, stoltezza
pe' Gentili.

Paolo, *Lettura ai Corinti*

But we preach Christ crucified:
scandal for the Jews, folly
for the Gentiles.

Paul, *Letter to the Corinthians*

Tutte le piaghe sono al sole
ed Egli muore sotto gli occhi
di tutti: perfino la madre
sotto il petto, il ventre, i ginocchi,
guarda il Suo corpo patire.
L'alba e il vespro Gli fanno luce
sulle braccia aperte e l'Aprile
intenerisce il Suo esibire
la morte a sguardi che Lo bruciano

Perché Cristo fu ESPOSTO in Croce?
Oh scossa del cuore al nudo
corpo del giovinetto ... atroce
offesa al suo pudore crudo...
Il sole e gli sguardi! La voce
estrema chiese a Dio perdono
con un singhiozzo di vergogna
rossa nel cielo senza suono,
tra pupille fresche e annoiate
di Lui: morte, sesso e gogna.

All His wounds are open to the sun
and He dies under the eyes
of everyone: even His mother
under His breast, belly, and knees,
watches His body suffer.
Dawn and dusk cast light
on His open arms and April
softens His exhibition of death
to gazes that burn Him.

Why was Christ EXPOSED on the Cross?
Oh, the heart shudders at the naked
body of the youth ... atrocious
offense to its raw modesty...
The sun and the gazes! The ultimate
voice asked God forgiveness
with a sob of red shame
in a sky without sound,
between His fresh and weary
pupils: death, sex, and pillory.

Bisogna esporsi (questo insegna il povero Cristo inchiodato?), la chiarezza del cuore è degna di ogni scherno, di ogni peccato... di ogni più nuda passione... (questo vuol dire il Crocifisso? sacrificare ogni giorno il dono rinunciare ogni giorno al perdono sporgersi ingenui sull'abisso).

You must expose yourself (is this what the poor nailed-up Christ teaches?), the clarity of the heart is worthy of every sneer, every sin, every more naked passion... (is this what the Crucifix means? sacrifice every day the gift renounce every day forgiveness cast yourself ingenuous over the abyss).

Noi staremo offerti sulla croce, alla gogna, tra le pupille limpide di gioia feroce, scoprendo all'ironia le stille del sangue dal petto ai ginocchi, miti, ridicoli, tremando d'intelletto e passione nel gioco del cuore arso dal suo fuoco, per testimoniare lo scandolo.

We will be offered on the cross, on the pillory, between the pupils limpid with ferocious joy, leaving open to irony the drops of blood from the breast to the knees, gentle and ridiculous, trembling with intellect and passion in the play of the heart burning from its fire, testifying to the scandal.

I. INCARNATION

Paul wrote from his prison cell to the Philippians:

Adopt towards one another, in your mutual relations, the same attitude that was found in Christ. Although he was in the form of God, he did not regard this divine equality as a precious thing to be exploited. Instead, he *emptied himself*/by taking the form of a slave and being born like other human beings. And being in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death, even death on the cross.

Pier Paolo Pasolini 376-77*

Exposure: Pasolini in the Flesh

For Giorgio Agamben

Abandon me! Incarnation is all about abandonment — abandonment to the flesh. Paul writes that in becoming flesh Christ abandoned the form of God; he emptied himself by taking on a limited materiality. This self-emptying is the exposure of the flesh. It is a kind of slavery that appeared to Paul in prison as liberation. What exactly did Christ abandon when he emptied himself? Certainly he did not abandon divinity as such; rather, he emptied the transcendental *form* and carried divinity into the material. From one perspective this abandoned being might seem precarious, foundationless, cast over the abyss, but really this abandonment testifies instead to the fullness of the surfaces of being. The self-emptying or *kēnōsis* of Christ, the evacuation of the transcendental, is the affirmation of the plenitude of the material, the fullness of the flesh.

Incarnation is first of all a metaphysical thesis that the essence and existence of being are one and the same. There is no ontological essence that resides beyond the world. None of being or God or nature remains outside of existence, but rather all is fully realized, fully expressed, without remainder, in the flesh. Incarnation means that the absolute oneness of all being, infinite and eternal, coincides completely with the constant becoming-different of the modalities of existence. The figure of Christ has often been understood as a point of mediation of the external relationship between divine essence and worldly existence. But the incarnation, the self-emptying of Christ, denies any possible exteriority and hence any need for mediation. Any imagined transcendent substance, separated from the world, is merely a hollow husk, a form emptied of all being. Or better, the transcendent is more properly understood as residing within the material,

* I would like to thank Gail Hamner, Frank Lentricchia, Michael Moon, Karen Ocaña, Karen Pinkus, and Steve Shaviro for their comments on earlier drafts of this essay. All translations of Pasolini's texts are my own.